



Grocon dispute highlights growing war on workers

Bob Briton

“Building union’s workplace war goes national.” That’s how a report in *The Australian Financial Review* described the industrial dispute focussed on Grocon’s \$1.2 Emporium project in Melbourne. The day before, the public had been bombarded with stories about the police operation against unionists protesting outside the site. But viewers of the telecasts weren’t left to draw their own conclusions. The voice-overs alleged that union members “kicked and punched” police horses. Later reports claimed capsicum spray was used in order to protect police officers who had been dragged to the ground. Bikies and underworld figures were supposedly being brought to the protest to do their worst. A frenzy was being whipped up but far from being a union “war”, the incident marks a disturbing new stage in a war on workers’ rights in Australia and the corporate media is playing its part.

Victorian Police later admitted the protest had been one of the most disciplined they had attended and now consider the dispute to be a “civil matter”. Unionists had shown magnificent commitment, assembling in the rain at 5am to defend rights vital to worker safety in an industry that still claims a worker’s life every week. The protesters had exercised great restraint in the face of a frightening display of brute force. The ETU is reported to be considering legal action against police for capsicum spraying a member. Despite company and media claims to the contrary, only a handful of non-union workers had subsequently got into the site. The union-busting exercise that had been planned for days had ended in humiliating failure.

Fair Work Australia agreed to a request from federal Workplace Relations Minister Bill Shorten to host talks between the parties last Friday. Company chief Daniel Grollo complained that he was unhappy about attending while the “illegal blockades” on his sites continued. Mr Grollo had appeared often in the media to put his position on the dispute in the most inflammatory terms possible. “The blockades are more than illegal. They are unprovoked, based on lies, and involve a systematic campaign of long-term physical threats to individuals, their careers and in some cases their families.”

Getting facts straight

What is truth and what are “lies” concerning the Grocon dispute is becoming clearer as workers speak out. The “blockades” are actually peaceful protest. Threats and real violence have been inflicted on the unionists taking part by riot police. The intimidation on the Grocon site that helped trigger the response from workers includes the employment of a night club bouncer and a former state heavy-weight boxing champion to back up the anti-union message of the employer. Despite claims of “world’s best” standards, safety at the site is not satisfactory. The Construction Division of the CFMEU website carries several photos of serious breaches.

Safety is at the core of the dispute and part of a nationwide push by bosses to cut costs by lowering the standards defended by industry unions. At Grocon the workers are demanding:

- The right to be represented by recognised safety and union reps
- The right to talk to their union organiser without interference

In spite of a previous agreement between Daniel Grollo and the CFMEU, the current, company-appointed safety officer is the son of the human resources manager. The company will not allow union posters in the lunch sheds and has sought to ban the wearing of union logos and clothing. Grocon has snubbed an offer by unions for a 14-day cooling down period made at the Fair Work Australia discussions.

“Unions are willing and able to sit down with Grocon management at any time to talk through these issues,” as ACTU President Ged Kearney said recently. “But Grocon management needs to drop its hardline approach and show respect for its workforce to negotiate a speedy and peaceful resolution to this dispute so that the employees of Grocon can get back to work.”

Forces at play

It appears Grocon has taken it upon itself to be in the vanguard of a renewed anti-union push. “If the CFMEU is given the space and the oxygen to continue to run this illegal blockade and the fear campaign that goes with it, then it will demonstrate the system really is not working,” Daniel Grollo told *The Australian Financial Review* recently.

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The undefeated protestors soon after the failed union-busting attack by police.

Photo: Corey Oakley

Dental alert

The government has announced the closure of the Chronic Diseases Dental Scheme from November 30, 2012. Anyone currently receiving treatment under the scheme has until that date to conclude a course of treatment. The scheme closes to new entrants on September 8. The Chronic Diseases Dental Scheme provided for up to \$4,250 over two years in Medicare rebates or bulkbilling by participating dentists.

It is not being replaced by another scheme under Medicare. Instead, the government will increase funding to states and territories to expand their public dental services for people on low incomes. The funding will commence in July 2014. It is contingent on the cooperation of states and territories which cannot be guaranteed.

Patients with chronic illness, such as HIV-AIDS or diabetics-related oral health problems, whose income is low enough to qualify for public dental treatment can join the long waiting list in their state or territory’s public system. Those on higher incomes will have to pay the full amount at a private dentist or go without treatment if they cannot afford it. See Editorial page 2 for more information.

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The Guardian

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Universal access to dental care needed

Last week Greens Senator Richard Di Natale and Labor Health Minister Tanya Plibersek announced a \$4.1 billion dental package for children – set to begin in January 2014 – and low income Australians, raising a great deal of optimism that dental care might come within the reach of the 30 percent of Australians who presently cannot afford it. The package is a result of the agreement reached with the Greens following the 2007 elections to gain their support for Labor to govern. “It’s one of the most significant reforms to the health sector since the introduction of Medicare. It’s a huge reform and such an important reform because for a very, very wealthy country we have very poor oral health,” Di Natale said. A former GP, the Greens Senator gave a firsthand account of the impact poor dental health can have on people’s general health and wellbeing, and on the health system itself.

The package allocates \$1.3 billion to be paid to states and territories over four years from July 2014 to expand public dental services for an estimated five million low income adults who are eligible for treatment in the public system. This is in addition to \$345 million in the last budget to reduce public waiting lists. Plibersek said it is contingent on the state governments “continuing to invest as they have been, at least to the level that they have been, in public dental” services. This is by no means guaranteed, especially by budget-slashing Coalition governments who are not wedded to public dental services. Whether it is enough to clear the 400,000 plus on waiting lists and enable people to access timely treatment or prevention before complications develop is questionable.

The package replaces the existing Medicare Teen Dental Scheme for check-ups with a \$2.7 billion (over four years) program for children whose parents are eligible for the means tested Family Tax Benefit Part A. An estimated 3.4 million children will be entitled to dental services (not just check-ups) of up to \$1,000 over two years under Medicare. “So kids will be able to get the check ups they need, they’ll be able to get fillings and sealing of fissures, fluoride treatment – all of the basics. ... it can be used in the public or the private system.” Details such as scheduled fees and level of rebates, extent of copayments where dentists do not bulk bill, have still to be revealed. Answers to these questions will determine the success of the program.

The package also includes a welcome \$225 million for regional and rural staffing and infrastructure. Including the allocation in the 2012-13 budget, it comes to \$4.6 billion over six years. A government inquiry last year found that \$10 billion was needed over the next four years. It is a start as the Greens point out. They hope we will see Medicare coverage extended to other age groups over time. The government see it politically, along with the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the Gonski reforms, as a key policy for electioneering purposes.

Apart from the shortfall in required funding, the package creates dangerous precedents. It introduces the concept of means testing (the children’s scheme) for eligibility to Medicare rebates and bulkbilling which is in breach of one of Medicare’s most important principles – universal access. Likewise, it limits Medicare dental coverage to “basics”; it does not provide comprehensive coverage for more expensive services. The idea of restricting access to Medicare and limiting the range of services has previously been raised in both Liberal and Labor circles. It could well appear on the agenda following the 2013 elections in the name of “fairness” and achieving a budget surplus. It still leaves pensioners, the unemployed and other low income adults without any guarantee of affordable treatment, in particular during the period up to July 2014.

The Greens remain fully committed to universal access to dental care under Medicare and have extracted what they can at this stage from the government. Despite its dangers and shortcomings, the package announced last week is a modest step in that direction but pressure will have to be maintained if it is to be delivered, let alone extended and improved. Most importantly, it is a step towards the acceptance of the mouth as part of the body and requiring Medicare coverage.

PRESS FUND

Less than three weeks after Julia Gillard announced her government’s return to the infamous “Pacific solution” (which was supposed to prevent asylum seekers from drowning in leaky boats), approximately 100 died trying to reach our shores. That tragedy hasn’t convinced the government to dump its off-shore processing policy. However, on a different subject (and a more cheerful note), the Press Fund is just over half way towards its annual target of \$14,000. Mind you, we’re still a long way behind, because two thirds of the year are over, so please send us something for the next issue, and if possible make it a regular contribution. Many thanks to this week’s supporters, as follows:

Mark Mannion \$5, Charlie Maarbani \$50, “Round Figure” \$15
This week’s total: \$70 Progressive total: \$7,040.

Disabling justice

Justice for people with disability and mental health problems are about to get much rougher. Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS) is a disability legal advocacy service and community legal centre. We provide a support person to be with a person with intellectual disability at the police station if they have been arrested. Most of our support persons are volunteers. We will go to the police station any time of the day or night.

We have a great deal of experience being with people with intellectual disability at the police station when they have been arrested. We know what happens.

IDRS is dismayed at the proposed change to the police caution and the further disadvantage it will bring on the many people with intellectual and other disabilities who find themselves under arrest.

A person with intellectual disability is extremely vulnerable if they submit to a police interview at the time of arrest. They are usually anxious and often keen to cooperate with the police. They are suggestible and vulnerable to leading questions. They are often confused in the face of police questioning but usually will

not say so. They are likely to simply agree with whatever police put to them to the point of agreeing to facts or admitting to offences that they may not even have committed.

They will answer the police’s questions but may not put forward their own information to assist their case because they don’t realise its relevance. Most police simply do not have the necessary communication skills to conduct a fair and balanced interview with a person who has an intellectual or other cognitive disability under arrest. We know this because we are there at the police station with them.

In our experience most people with intellectual disability are more than willing to participate in a police interview but it is almost always to their detriment to do so because of their vulnerability.

Most people with intellectual disability are alone and unassisted at the police station. Police usually do not recognise that the person has a disability and do not call a support person to assist as they are meant to do. In 2011-12, IDRS was called upon to provide support people at court for over 800 defendants with intellectual disability in NSW. Very few of these people had had a support person at the

police station when arrested. A person with intellectual disability has little chance of understanding their rights when arrested if there is no trained support person present.

The proposed change to the caution means that the question of whether to participate in an interview becomes much more complex. Legal advice at the time of arrest becomes even more crucial to justice. While a person under arrest has the right to call a lawyer, adults in police custody do not have access to funded legal advice after hours when most people are arrested. Our service has established a pool of volunteer solicitors to fill this void for people with intellectual disability but this will only help if the police call. Most often the police do not call and the person with intellectual disability may not know who to contact.

This change to the police caution may not impact as heavily on the government’s target group as it will impact on the vulnerable – those who have disability and mental illness. We doubt this is an intended consequence on the part of the government but we know it is an inevitable consequence.

**Janene Cootes
Executive Officer
IDRS**

An independent voice

There are relatively few independent sources of news and analysis. The mass media is owned and controlled by big business interests and serves those interests. The Murdoch media carries a range of views, but these are always within “safe” limits and rarely pose any challenge to the business class. There might be a debate such as over how to privatise Telstra or electricity, but how often do you see the question raised of whether they should be privatised at all? When they talk about “the economy” they mean private profits, not secure well paid jobs, health services or education for the people.

Just a few months ago Murdoch’s Australian claimed that the Communist Party had gone out of existence! Well it is still here, still taking the same principled stand in defence of working class interests.

And *The Guardian* is still here

and here to stay. But to do this we need your help.

Recently we increased the price of the paper, while leaving the concessional price for subscriptions untouched. We are very conscious of the difficulties many readers have in meeting their own bills. The price still does not meet the full cost of production, despite the fact our staff are low paid and we rely on many volunteers. The Press Fund is one means by which we attempt to meet that gap.

We are in the process of redesigning the appearance of the paper and would like to go to full colour on some pages. To do this we have launched a special appeal to raise \$10,000 during the month of September.

Content, ideology and politics are not the only differences between *The Guardian* and the corporate mass media. The likes of Murdoch have billions of dollars behind them, vast resources at their

disposal and hundreds of staff to draw on. We are not beholden to corporate advertisers, rather advertising is one of the means by which we give support to the struggles of trade unions, peace, environmental, women’s, community and other political groups. *The Guardian* is the voice of the working people.

We are producing a special *Guardian* bookmark for anyone who makes a contribution to the Appeal as a measure of appreciation. Any individual or organisation who contributes \$500 or more will receive a free 12 months subscription to *The Guardian*. This could be a new subscription or an extension of an existing one.

All contributions will be acknowledged unless otherwise requested. We urge you do dig deep. This is your paper, the paper that puts people before profits. Please give us your support.

**Tom Pearson
Editor**

I would like to contribute \$_____ to the Special *Guardian* Appeal

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Racist Facebook page condemned

Rudi Maxwell

A racist and offensive Facebook page has been widely condemned by business leaders, human rights advocates, members of the public and the Australian Race Discrimination Commissioner Dr Helen Szoke.

The "Aboriginal Memes" page contained images and slogans depicting Aboriginal people as petrol-sniffing, drunk, violent, bludging welfare cheats.

After a huge public outcry, Facebook blurred some of the words but allowed the images to remain. However, after complaints by Dr Szoke and many others, the social media company eventually took down the page. At that time it had more than 2,000 likes.

Alice Springs youth worker Sarsha Pichugin, a Narunga Ngarrindjeri woman, said it was important to speak out about online racism because it continued to marginalise Aboriginal people. "It just needs to stop," she said.

"We're all human, we might have cultural differences but we have the same needs and we feel the same pain. These types of things make young Aboriginal people racist against white mob and that's not what we should be about.

"We have a lot of service providers who are non-Indigenous and these sorts of things make some young Aboriginal people not trust them – and that's a terrible thing when good work is being done, and trust is lost, because of something someone has done."

Facebook sent the *Koori Mail* a statement saying it recognised the public concern the pages had caused.

"We recognise that some content that is shared may be controversial, offensive, or even illegal in some countries. While we do not remove this type of content from the site entirely unless it violates our Statement of Rights and Responsibilities, out of respect for local laws, we may restrict access to content that violates local laws," the statement said.

Memes are a new trend in the world of social media. According to Wikipedia a meme is "an idea, behaviour or style that spreads from person to person within a culture" while an internet meme is "used to explain a concept via the internet".

It can take the form of hyperlinks, pictures, videos, websites or hashtags, or just a word or phrase. At the moment, the most common source for memes are pictures.

Last week Dr Szoke met with Facebook representatives to discuss cyber-racism and alert the company that it may be in breach of the Racial Discrimination Act, which can only be tested if someone brings a complaint.

"They needed to recognise the incredible damage that has been done by these Aboriginal Memes pages, but we also need to be able to move on from this issue," she said.

"We're trying to work together with regulators and social media representatives to deal with the issues of social media in Australia, recognising that sites are often hosted overseas.

"The much bigger issue we have to look at is how to regulate that area, how to balance freedom of expression and the right to equality. While the Aboriginal Memes pages have been taken down they were generated on another internet tool that's still on the internet.

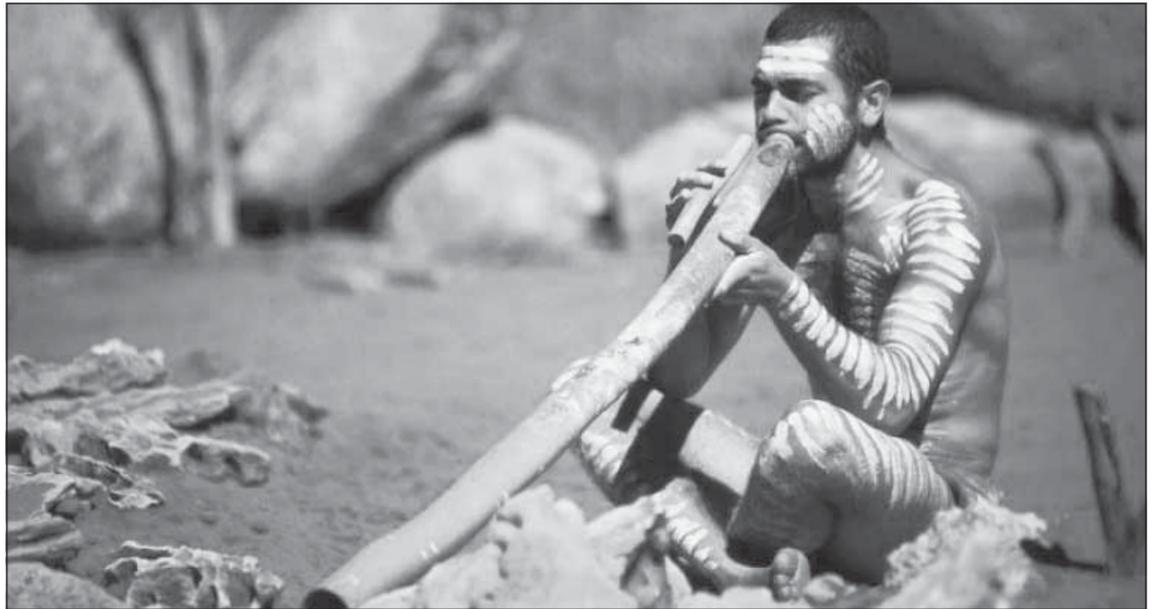
"We need to look at the human rights perspective, to determine whether the current regulatory framework has any gaps. We need to encourage the host organisations to engage with us about what obligations and responsibilities they have under domestic laws, and we need to look at empowering and educating people to use media appropriately and responsibly."

Dr Szoke said one method of combating cyber-racism and cyber-bullying was to empower witnesses and bystanders to stand up and voice their opposition.

Director of the Board of the Australian Indigenous Chamber of Commerce (AICC) Matthew Tukaki said Facebook should immediately review its policies.

"I find it completely abhorrent that on the very day that we celebrate World Indigenous Peoples Day, which has a focus on enabling Aboriginal and Indigenous people to be more engaged in platforms such as this, we find an act of absurdity being perpetrated by nothing more than a pack of redneck twits," he said

"The imagery and the comments are more than just offensive and it begs the question that if we don't demand this page be removed, then what next? Who next? Is it acceptable



just to set up a Facebook page and demonise everyone?

"The response from Facebook is one of the biggest cop-outs I have seen to date.

"It is more than about time Facebook reviewed its policies and grew up – they're not a child any more, they're a listed company with responsibilities and accountabilities. I suggest that they sit down and take a long, hard, cold look at themselves.

"These scumbags who hide themselves behind anonymity should step out into the light so we can see just exactly who you are as you have so unjustly put pictures of others up."

After attention was brought to the initial page, Facebook and Twitter was awash with people opposing it, including the page "Make Facebook shut down Aboriginal Memes".

Once the original page was removed, the author set up a couple of others but many fewer people joined and they too were shut down.

The *Koori Mail* posted a question on one of the racist pages asking the authors of the page if they really believed what they were doing was funny and acceptable why didn't they use their real names, but the page was removed before the response could be verified.

The *Koori Mail* emailed questions to the site on which the racist material was generated – www.memegenerator.net – but did not receive a response. *Koori Mail* ★

Melbourne Commemorative Event
Saturday 8th September, 2012 from 7.00pm
11 September 1973

**Workers of my country, I have faith in Chile and its destiny
Other men will overcome this dark and bitter moment...**

11 September 2012

MUA
46 - 54 Ireland St. West Melbourne
Presented by: **COLECTIVO MEMORIA Y REBELDIA**

Pete's Corner



MARIELA CASTRO in SYDNEY

Sexual, gender and women's rights in CUBA today

6:15pm to 8:30pm Tuesday, October 16
Eastern Avenue Auditorium, University of Sydney

Mariela Castro Espín, director of Cuba's National Centre for Sex Education (CENESEX), will give a public lecture on sexual, gender and women's rights in Cuba today.

A well-known activist for LGBT rights and a strong defender of Cuba's socialist system, Mariela will be visiting Australia in October 2012 as an invited guest of the Australian Government, to participate in two sexual health conferences to be held in Melbourne. In addition to delivering a guest lecture at the University of Sydney, she will also travel to Canberra.

The daughter of Cuban President Raúl Castro and the late Vilma Espín, founder of the Federation of Cuban Women (which set up CENESEX), Mariela has led campaigns against homophobia and for the acceptance of homosexuality, bisexuality, trans-vestism, and trans-sexualism. She helped push through a 2008 law which gives transgendered persons access to free sex change operations and campaigns for same sex unions and same sex marriage.

NSW government attack on public sector

NSW public sector employees stand to lose or have reduced a range of long-standing benefits, including shift penalties, annual leave loading and leave entitlements, under an O'Farrell government application before the NSW Industrial Relations Commission (IRC).

The state's Minister for Finance, Greg Pearce, has, however, defended the move as part of the public sector wage negotiation process – despite Premier Barry O'Farrell saying that public sector cuts were necessary because the state was in a “dire” financial position.

The government's public sector wages policy allows for pay increases above a 2.5 percent cap only if funded by employee-related savings, and according to Pearce, the application proposes such measures.

“Where these reforms result in real savings, the IRC will then be able to pass that on to employees as additional salary increases,” he said. “However, at this stage they are simply proposals from the government in an ongoing negotiation.”

He said nothing would happen unless employees or the IRC agreed.

The government's application seeks variations to the Crown Employees (Public Service Conditions of Employment) Award 2009 – a parent award. It has told the tribunal it will follow that up with mirror applications for a further 98 public sector awards covering some 80,000 workers.

According to the Public Service Association's (PSA) principal industrial officer, Aysha Lewis, members affected by the initial application

include clerical workers, disability support employees, those in residential child protection, national parks employees, and legal aid lawyers. It also covers nurses in aged-care, disability and homecare who fall under the Crown Employees award.

Lewis said the government had not yet given it the list of the other awards it will seek to have varied.

The NSW PSA is opposing the government's move in its entirety and its executive has authorised a stop work on October 8 in response to the application and other recent measures the union maintains are hostile to public sector employees.

These include its 2.5 percent salary cap legislation, which the PSA is challenging in the High Court and its June Budget announcement that it was cutting 10,000 public service jobs over four years – on top of the 5,000 voluntary redundancies announced last year.

According to the PSA, the government's application seeks to:

- **abolish** the 17.5% loading on annual leave;
- **tighten** the definition of a shift worker to someone who works outside 7.30am and 6pm, plus change weekday shift loadings;
- **cut** shift-workers' recreation leave entitlement from six and seven weeks for some to a maximum of five weeks for all;
- **narrow** the definition of parental and adoption leave, which Lewis says will exclude long-term foster parents plus kinship and surrogacy arrangements;
- **abolish** Family and Community Service Leave (FACS) leave by

combining it with sick leave in a new personal/carer's leave clause;

- **remove** the ability of employees on workers' compensation to use any accrued and untaken sick leave to make up the difference between the amount of compensation payable under the Act and their ordinary rate of pay;
- **replace** “special leave”, which is paid leave, with a new, tighter “miscellaneous leave” provision, which “may be granted with or without pay”;
- **move** employees experiencing domestic violence onto miscellaneous leave rather than special leave when their other leave is exhausted;
- **axe** benefits for remote workers, including their remote allowance; additional five days recreation leave; and travel assistance;
- **end** some travel provisions; and
- **scrap** a range of allowances, including for home offices, semi-official telephones, and garaging of department cars.

The PSA's Lewis told *Workplace Express* she expected the matter, which is currently before the IRC's president, Justice Roger Boland, would be arbitrated in about March next year. ☘



A public sector rally in Macquarie Street Sydney last year.

Photo: Anna Pha

Qld govt on the attack

Queensland's Newman government has passed legislation to void public sector agreement clauses that provide for job security and regulate contracting-out, give greater scope for lawyers to appear in the state Industrial Relations Commission and remove administrative duties from Commission President David Hall.

The *Public Sector and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012*, which was passed last month, nullifies provisions in industrial instruments covering government employers that deal with contracting-out, employment security and organisational change.

The amendment cites clause 7.3 (organisational change and restructuring) of the *State Government*

Departments Certified Agreement 2009 as an example of a “contracting out” provision that will now have no effect, while clauses 7.1 and 7.2 are employment security clauses that have been voided along with the organisational change clause (7.3).

It also returns the Commission's administrative functions to Vice President Di Linnane, who had those responsibilities from 2002 until 2009, when the role was handed back to the President, David Hall. The President will now focus on hearing appeals in the Industrial Court.

The bill also broadens the right to legal representation in the IRC. Representation will continue to be available as a matter of right for

freedom of association matters, but it will now extend to s149 agreement arbitrations and cases under sections 230, 274A, and 277.

Representation will also be allowed in other cases where both sides consent, or with leave of the Commission, which must be satisfied by the demonstration of sufficient grounds.

The legislation follows another bill that passed mid-year that requires the IRC to take prevailing economic conditions into account when determining wage rises and gives the Attorney-General power to terminate industrial action if it is considered a “threat to the community or the economy”. ☘

“Yes, I Can”

Six adults graduated on August 31 from a revolutionary new Indigenous literacy program in Wilcannia, NSW. The first ten students in the project graduated in May this year.

The pilot program, based on a revolutionary Cuban education method called “Yes I Can”, has been highly successful in countries such as Nicaragua, East Timor and the Dominican Republic.

It is now run in almost 30 countries and is reported to have taught nearly six million people to read and write.

Jack Beetson from the Wilcannia Aboriginal Land Council is the Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign Project Leader.

He says the program is having life-changing results.

“I consider literacy is probably the most key human right that any

person can have and for people to be denied that right to become literate is a terrible situation, in fact it's an abuse of people's very basic human rights.

“Short of restoring the sight of a blind person, literacy is about the next best thing you can do for somebody,” he said.

After the successful trial of the program in Wilcannia, Mr Beetson would like to see “Yes, I Can” rolled out across the country.

“For us, this program is very important,” the Cuban Ambassador to Australia, Pedro Monzon, said.

“It's important to give our help to the Aboriginal communities and we began with Wilcannia.

“For us, this program is a way of helping people, an obligation we have with society and with human beings, and at the same time it's an opportunity to learn.” ☘

Grocon dispute highlights growing war on workers

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It is clear that, in reality, he and like-minded employers have launched a campaign to deny the CFMEU the “space” and “oxygen” required to represent workers and defend their interests.

Grollo wants to demonstrate that the present system is “not working” and needs to be replaced with something that does. Industrial action and protest would be dealt with swiftly. “I think the construction industry needs a very speedy regime to help get those efficiencies,” he commented elsewhere.

The Grocon dispute takes place against the backdrop of a new anti-union construction industry code imposed by silver-tail premier Ted

Baillieu who has put considerable police resources at Grocon's disposal. Federal opposition leader Tony Abbott is threatening to restore the Australian Building and Construction Commission even though most of its functions and powers continue to exist in the Fair Work Australia Building and Construction agency. Abbott is also being egged on by commentators like former Prime Minister Howard to be up front and say that he will re-introduce individual workplace agreements. The big end of town is baying for blood.

Solidarity the answer

The response from workers across the country to the challenge has been outstanding. Work on a major site in

Sydney stalled on the news of the attack on the Melbourne workers. A Brisbane site was affected. The Building Industry Group of unions is considering its options. “One of the options is to call a state-wide stoppage in support if the issue, but it's not the only option that was discussed today,” Victorian Trades Hall Council secretary Brian Boyd said last week.

The Grocon dispute was to be considered by the Victorian Supreme Court again as *The Guardian* went to press. But the workers involved have already demonstrated the sort of unity and discipline required to head off the latest attacks from the bosses in the building and construction industry. They will need our support in their ongoing struggle. ☘

YES, I CAN!

Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign at Wilcannia, NSW

José Manuel Leblanch (‘Chala’)

Cuban technical advisor to the project will speak

Saturday 22 September 6:00 - 8:30 pm

First Floor, CFMEU Building 12 Railway Street, Lidcombe (Sydney)

Tea & coffee provided Entry \$20/\$10

Enquiries: Hannah on 0418 668 098

Protest at Northam Immigration Detention Centre

Richard Titelius

On Sunday August 26, 2012, the Refugee Rights Action Network (RRAN) held its Convergence at the recently completed Yongah Hill Immigration Detention Centre situated on the outskirts of Northam, about 100 kilometres east of Perth. It was attended by over 180 people, most who came by bus from Perth but also some people from Northam itself.

Australians in recent times have become accustomed to the institutions where refugees are kept being called "detention centres". However, the detention centres today look and feel more like prisons and in the case of Yongah Hill it looks much like the medium security Acacia Prison at nearby Wooroloo – ironically also run by the English security corporation SERCO.

The timing of the convergence was perfect as it happened within days of the federal Labor government and the Coalition joining forces to legislate for the indefinite, mandatory detention of people seeking refuge on our shores – mostly in ill-equipped boats. Since the days when the Coalition government of John Howard started to detain refugees, mainly offshore, thousands of refugees have experienced the dehumanising and traumatic practice of being locked up for the "crime" of fleeing war and persecution in their homelands.

There were a large number of state police on hand, a few Federal Police as well as SERCO's own security staff to make sure the demonstration did not transgress specified terms and conditions. These were handed out on small flyers as people passed through the security gate to the car park of the detention centre. No one present could have missed the severe character of the centre's security arrangements including the twin

high wire fencing, security cameras and isolation of the location.

Greens Senator Scott Ludlam addressed the protest. He asked, "What must it be like to be locked up in one of these institutions?" Ludlam also noted that, "Many of us would be related to people who had fled war and persecution", especially from conflicts following World War 2. Senator Ludlam concluded, "Only the Greens and a few of the independents will stand up for refugees and resist the policy of mandatory detention ... which had become warped and degraded." The protest had also brought many new faces, a fact not lost on Senator Ludlam who humorously noted, had joined the usual ratbags who thankfully organise and attend these protests.

The next speaker was Colin Penter of SERCO Watch who for the last few years has been monitoring and reporting on the insidious build up and reliance of state and federal governments on SERCO to run detention facilities.

He noted that in an era of increased government austerity, "The federal government can still come up with the \$1.25-1.5 billion required to run these gulags."

But as Penter asked, are the taxpayers of Australia receiving value for money. The profits SERCO made are often expatriated to Britain. SERCO is also hoping to wring more money from governments by offering privatised police, security and intelligence services. It is a lucrative contract which SERCO has for these detention centres as evidenced by the 40 percent mark-up which the corporation makes on the provision of services for the contract.

Penter also spoke about the hype concerning the perceived benefit to a rural community such as Northam by employing local people. The truth is that people who work there for SERCO become psychologically



The protest outside of Yongah Hill Immigration Detention Centre.

scarred as they are often ill-trained and ill-prepared for what they would see and hear in the private detention centres.

Colin Penter also reflected, "How appalling it was to have a private corporation inflicting misery on refugees ... when most of these people who have been kept in detention centres end up in the community, thereby relegating most of the detention centre experience as a waste of money and life."

The trauma experienced by detainees in SERCO detention institutions is backed up by research reported in the *Journal of the Australian Institute of Criminology* which reported an almost threefold incidence of deaths in SERCO-run prisons – 4.5 deaths per thousand compared to the national average of 1.3 percent deaths.

The next speaker was Jacob Kazal a stateless refugee from Kuwait – of which a separate report could easily

be written on the plight of these people many who have lived in Kuwait their whole lives and are not able to have a Kuwaiti birth certificate and sometimes even a death certificate to enable them to access the services of the Kuwaiti state.

Kazal found himself locked up for more than a year including in the notorious detention facility at Christmas Island "when he hadn't done anything wrong ... only to escape from the horrors of war and repression." He found it difficult to sleep as people were often being moved from one institution to another at odd hours and almost every day there are reports of self-harm – including three suicides of people he knew in the 12 months he had been at Christmas Island.

Of racism in detention centres he said that often the guards were racist and that one of the first English words he learnt was "racist". He said that when he had seen and heard protests like the one we were having here at

Yongah Hill, on their behalf, it gave them hope and inspiration.

The protest later moved from the car park to a hill overlooking the detention centre where RRAN organisers assured the protesters that the detainees could see and hear what was happening on their behalf from the back of the compound where most of them were kept.

More likely officials that run the detention centre wanted to make sure that the almost capacity number of 600 refugees would be out of sight and the protest would not be able to be seen by the refugees.

However, refugees, the detention centres and what happens in them can no longer be ignored or hidden from the Australian public. The organisers have vowed to return again and again until the detention centre is closed and all the refugees are allowed to live within the community while their cases are being decided and beyond. ✪

Call to end the detention of society's most vulnerable

Leading paediatricians and child mental health experts are calling for an immediate end to the detention of children seeking asylum, in Australia and in offshore centres.

The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) Paediatrics & Child Health Division and The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) Faculty of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry have voiced their concern for the health, emotional wellbeing and development of children who are seeking asylum.

Following the release of the Houston Report recommendations into asylum seeker policy and the passing of The Migration Legislation Amendment (Offshore Processing and Other Measures) Bill 2011 in both houses of parliament, the RACP and RANZCP urge a review of the policy in the treatment of one of society's most vulnerable groups.

"We strongly oppose the mandatory detention of children

and unaccompanied children and adolescents in Australia and in offshore centres," Associate Professor Susan Moloney, RACP Paediatrics & Child Health Division President, said.

"There is now a large body of evidence to suggest that prolonged detention, particularly in isolated locations, with poor access to health and social services and uncertainty of asylum seeker claims, can have severe and detrimental effects."

These long-term effects include damage to social and emotional functioning, especially in children who have experienced torture or trauma, and worsening of existing mental health problems.

"Many asylum seekers are vulnerable to mental ill health due to their experience of poverty, persecution, torture and war in their countries of origin," Dr Nick Kowalenko, Chair of the RANZCP Faculty of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry said.

"We remain concerned that

highly vulnerable children are living in conditions known to be damaging to their social and emotional wellbeing, growth and development."

According to Associate Professor Moloney, the best interests of the child must be upheld. All asylum seeker arrangements and humanitarian solutions must be considered, including community residence with appropriate health and social supports over that of community detention.

Both the RANZCP and the RACP ask for the immediate placement of detained children in the community and that this be the default option, unless there are special circumstances preventing this that are in the best interests of the child.

"Citizenship status must not be a barrier to early childhood education, acceptable living conditions and appropriate means of support.

"The most urgent priority is to see that these children are provided access to appropriate healthcare,"

Associate Professor Moloney said. The detention of children should be seen only as a last resort and for the shortest possible time to ensure only the most essential health and safety checks are done, he said.

"Australia must do everything to provide supportive, caring and non-traumatising early experiences for refugee children and adolescents on their way through to joining our community."

The RACP and the RANZCP acknowledge the Houston Report's recommendation that adherence to international obligations should be one of the factors which shapes Australian policymaking on asylum seeker issues. Clause 2 of The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child states: "The child shall enjoy special protection ... to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity. In the enactment of laws for this purpose,

the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration".

As at June 30, 2012, 1,080 children were recorded as currently being detained in immigration detention in Australia, with 45 percent in the community under residence determination. This is currently below the 50 percent target announced by the Minister of Immigration for June 2011.

Through its Refugee Child Health Policy, the RACP calls for the relocation of detained children and their families into the community as a matter of urgency.

About the RACP: The RACP trains, educates and advocates on behalf of more than 13,500 physicians – often referred to as medical specialists – and 5,000 trainees, across Australia and New Zealand. Beyond the drive for medical excellence, the RACP is committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients. www.racp.edu.au ✪

Why you're a lot poorer than you thought you were

Mike Whitney

According to a report by Sentier Research "real median annual household income [in the US] ... has fallen by 4.8 percent since the 'economic recovery' began in June 2009." That's worse than the 2.6 percent decline that took place during the recession itself (between July 2007 to June 2009). All told – from the beginning of the slump in 2007 until today – median household income has dropped an eye-watering 7.2 percent. ("Changes in Household Income During the Economic Recovery: June 2009 to June 2012", Sentier Research)

You're a lot poorer than you thought you were.

The Sentier Research report comes on the heels of a similar report from the Fed which was released in June showing that middle [working] class families saw a nearly 40 percent decline in their net worth between the years 2007 to 2010. The Fed's 80-page tri-annual Survey of Consumer Finances, points to the Great Recession as the putative cause of the overall decline in wealth, but the Fed's lopsided policies could be as easily blamed. Low interest rates, lax lending standards and outright fraud generated asset-price bubbles that wiped out two decades of economic gains for working people in the US.

The Fed's survey found that the median net worth of families in the US fell by 38.9 percent between 2007 and 2010, from US\$126,400 to US\$77,300. Also, the median value of a US home dropped by 42 percent, from US\$95,300 to US\$55,000 in the same period. Plunging housing prices have increased the burden of mortgage debt leaving more than 20 percent of all homeowners with negative equity which greatly increases the probability of default.

Is it any wonder why consumer confidence is at its lowest point since November 2011? Or why mom and pop investors are still fleeing the stock market in record numbers four years after Lehman Brothers failed? Or why the yields on 10-year Treasuries are still hovering below two percent? Or why bank deposits now vastly exceed loans?

All of these are signs of extreme distress, which is why working people have grown so gloomy about the future. Did you know that (According to the Pew Research Centre) 61 percent of all Americans were "middle income" back in 1971, while, today, the number has been shaved to 51 percent? That explains why 85 percent of the people surveyed said "that it is harder to maintain a middle class standard of living today compared with 10 years ago." The majority of the people also admitted that they've had to reduce their spending in the past year.

The Fed's survey found that the median net worth of families in the US fell by 38.9 percent between 2007 and 2010.

What all of these reports indicate is that the US middle class is being drawn-and-quartered by economic policies which serve to enrich the few at the cost of the many.

Of course, Fed chairman Ben Bernanke is going to "put things right" by launching another round of quantitative easing (QE) which is supposed to boost growth and lower unemployment. Unfortunately, QE doesn't really work like that; in fact, the Bank of England just released a report that proves that central bank asset purchases disproportionately benefit the rich. Here's a clip from an article in the *Washington Post*:

"The richest 10 percent of households in Britain have seen the value of their assets increase by up to £322,000 [US\$510,000] as a

result of the Bank of England's attempts to use electronic money creation to lift the economy out of its deepest post-war slump. ...

"The Bank of England calculated that the value of shares and bonds had risen by 26 percent – or £600bn – as a result of the policy, equivalent to £10,000 for each household in the UK. It added, however, that 40 percent of the gains went to the richest five percent of households."

It's not hard to see why this happens. One way the bank's quantitative easing program works, in theory, by pushing up asset prices in order to support the broader economy. And, according to the Bank of England, the median British household only holds about US\$2,370 in financial assets. So the direct benefits largely accrue to wealthier households.

"What about the United States? Much like in Britain, the distribution of financial assets are also heavily skewed. So any move by the Fed to push up asset prices is likely to increase wealth inequality in the short term." ("Will the Fed's efforts to boost the economy only benefit the wealthiest?", *Washington Post*)

So QE is just a scam to line the pockets of the investor class. Imagine that! It took four years and a research team of financial geniuses from the BOE to figure that out.

Still, Federal reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke and his fellow doves at the Fed aren't going to be deterred by something as inconsequential as the travails of working people. Oh no. After all, he has his real constituents to consider, the parasitic Wall Street robber barons. Their needs come first, and what they want is another round of funny-money so they refill the larder at the Hamptons with Beluga and bubbly. That's why members of the Fed have already started chirping for more "more accommodation". Here's what Chicago Fed President Charles Evans had to say last week in his ominous-sounding bulletin titled "Some Thoughts on Global Risks and Monetary Policy":

"Finding a way to deliver more accommodation ... is particularly important now because delays in reducing unemployment are costly. An unusually large percentage of the unemployed have been without work for quite an extended period of time; their skills can become less current or even deteriorate, leaving affected workers with permanent scars on their lifetime earnings. And any resulting lower aggregate productivity also weighs on potential output, wages and profits for the economy as a whole. The damage intensifies the longer that unemployment remains high. Failure to act aggressively now could lower the capacity of the economy for many years to come ...

"Given the risks we face, I think it is vital

that we make such moves today. I don't think we should be in a mode where we are waiting to see what the next few data releases bring. We are well past the threshold for additional action; we should take that action now."

What gall! Does anyone really believe that a Fed president gives a rat's ass about lower unemployment? It's a joke.

And where's the proof that QE lowers unemployment, increases wages or benefits the economy as a whole? Nowhere. Evans idea of "accommodation" is just another way of shoveling money to his rich friends.

Now get a load of this in the *Wall Street Journal*:

"During the recession, people who lost



long-held jobs struggled to find new employment and often took substantial pay cuts if they did find new work. Little appears to have changed after the recession ended, a new Labor Department report shows.

"From 2009 to 2011, 6.1 million workers lost jobs they had held for at least three years. Just over half – 56 percent – of them were reemployed by this January, the department found in its latest survey of displaced workers. Two years ago, the survey found that 49 percent of people who lost such jobs from 2007 to 2009 were reemployed.

"People lucky enough to find new work are often taking steep wage cuts. Of the displaced workers who lost full-time wage and salary jobs from 2009-2011 and were reemployed by January, just 46 percent were earning as much or more than they did in their lost job. A third of them reported earnings losses of 20 percent or

"Over 500,000 people have lost extended unemployment benefits since the start of the year, and two million more are scheduled to lose their benefits on January 1, 2013.... Emergency Unemployment Compensation (EUC) is scheduled to end completely on January 1, ending unemployment payments for two million more people overnight.

"With the start of the new year, there will be no part of the country that offers more than 26 weeks of unemployment benefits. This is far less than the average duration of unemployment, which has hovered near 40 weeks for over a year ...

"Despite the disastrous impact of the cuts, it has been largely ignored both by the major media and in the US elections. Moreover, the Obama administration has already let it be known that it will not seek a renewal of extended jobless benefits." ("Extended jobless benefits end for 500,000 US workers", *World Socialist website*.)

Can you see how nicely this segues with Michelle's anti-obesity campaign? The administration plans to increase worker "flexibility", by putting millions of jobless people on a crash diet.

And, don't kid yourself, unemployment is just one of the many programs that Obama plans to eviscerate following the vote-count. He's also going to zero-in on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. They're all on the chopping block, every last one of them. That's what the so called Fiscal Cliff is all about; it's a public relations hoax to conceal Obama's plan to dismantle the vital programs that provide medicine, shelter and a meagre retirement for the sick, the needy and the elderly, you know, the folks the Republicans refer to as "useless eaters".

All of these reports (Sentier, Pew, the Fed's Survey of Consumer Finances) underline the same point, that the middle class is embroiled in a war-to-the-death with carpetbagging vermin who plan to deprive them of work, strip their assets, foreclose their homes, and leave them penniless to face old age. It's just good old class warfare – and as Warren Buffett opined – his class is winning.

Information Clearing House ✪

The Syrian conflict must be resolved by the Syrian people themselves

Statement, Central Executive Committee, Communist Party of Canada

The crisis in Syria continues to deepen with every passing day. Thousands have been killed or injured, including countless civilians caught in the cross-fire between armed opposition groups and government forces. Thousands more have been displaced from their towns and villages and forced into internal or foreign exile by the fighting. In this very real sense, the situation has become a human and social tragedy of the first order.

But what is actually taking place in Syria? Who is really provoking the violence and prolonging the agony of the Syrian people?

The Western corporate-controlled media would have us believe that the root cause of the conflict is the “tyrannical” government of President Bashar El-Assad which clings to power at any price, willing to sacrifice the health and security of its own people. This “big lie” is central to the intensifying propaganda campaign to vilify El-Assad in order to conceal the role of reactionary and clerical forces bent on destabilising and ultimately overthrowing the current government and seizing power for themselves. And if necessary, this demonisation campaign will be used as a pretext for imperialist military intervention and occupation to directly impose “regime change”, as was done in Iraq and most recently in Libya.

The global media offensive against Syria is only one aspect of a multifaceted imperialist strategy to crush (and possibly dismember) the Syrian state. The broader objective is to fashion a “New Middle East” of weak and pliant Arab states under the domination of US and European imperialist powers and their local gendarme in the region, the expansionist state of Israel. This would guarantee unfettered access to the petroleum and other natural resources of the region, and extend imperialist geopolitical hegemony into the “underbelly” of Asia, further encircling both the Russian Federation and China.

Undermining the Syrian state is pivotal in achieving this imperialist ambition. Due to its central location in the region, its secular character and socially progressive policy orientation, and its firm solidarity with the just struggle of the Palestinian people and its opposition to the expansionist policies of Zionist Israel, Syria has long been in the crosshairs of US imperialism. For their own reasons, reactionary Arab regimes - especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar - as well as Turkey are also anxious to weaken and crush Syria.

“Regime change” in Damascus and its replacement with a more pliant, pro-imperialist regime would compound this catastrophe for the Syrian people. It would also dramatically alter the regional balance of forces, weakening the anti-imperialist forces, and serving as a prelude - and launching pad - for NATO/Israeli aggression against neighbouring Iran, the most powerful state in the region.

When anti-government protests erupted in Syria last year, US imperialism and its local and regional backers seized the opportunity to launch its “tried and true” destabilisation campaign, using popular discontent (and the at times crude methods used by local Syrian officials to quell the protests) as a cover to move into action.

Many Syrians were justifiably angry at the impact of neoliberal “reforms” which weakened national production, increased unemployment, and widened social and economic disparities between the mass of working people and national and foreign capitalists, aided by weak, misguided and sometimes corrupt government officials.

But legitimate opposition voices were quickly either co-opted or shunted aside by hardcore, heavily foreign-financed and armed gangs determined to make Syria ungovernable. Terrorist attacks to spur further government crackdowns, sectarian violence to incite distrust and enmity between the Sunni majority and the Alawite and other minorities and the smuggling of heavy weapons and even mercenaries from abroad. Finally open calls for direct foreign intervention in violation of Syria’s national sovereignty - this has been the orchestrated game plan carried out by the “internal opposition”. The extent of foreign covert intervention already evident in the conflict proves that this is not a “civil war” but rather a highly coordinated imperialist conspiracy against Syria.

The misnamed “Friends of Syria” - the cabal of US and other imperialist powers, the reactionary and despotic Arab regimes, and the counterrevolutionary Syrian National Council - have dismissed every attempt of the Assad government to dialogue with the “opposition”, to achieve a ceasefire under the Kofi Annan peace plan, or to introduce constitutional reforms ending the state of emergency and opening the way for more open parliamentary elections. Instead, they have forced through several rounds of anti-Syrian sanctions at the UN Security Council, and have denounced Russia and China for vetoing strident and dangerous resolutions which would have given a green light for foreign imperialist aggression under the sanction of the United Nations, as was done in March 2011 against Libya.

The Harper [Canadian] government has played a particularly despicable role in this sordid affair, beating the drums for sanctions and war on Syria. Unfortunately, the main opposition parties in Canada’s parliament - the Liberals and NDP - have done little better. Indeed, all three parties have thrown in their lot with the imperialist conspiracy against Syria, arguing in favour of “humanitarian interventionism” and the “responsibility to protect” (R2P) as a justification for yet another aggression.

The Communist Party of Canada fundamentally rejects the building war frenzy over Syria and Iran, and warns that such military adventurism could well lead to a dangerous conflagration throughout the Middle East region, and beyond. We call for:

- full respect of Syrian national sovereignty and independence;
- the removal of sanctions; an immediate halt to all covert financial and military support to the Free Syrian Army and other armed groups inside Syria; and
- the renunciation of a military “solution” in favour of a ceasefire by all combatants and a comprehensive national dialogue to restore peace to that troubled country.

August 20, 2012.



Arms sales triple

“US weapons sales triple to hit record high, thanks to worried Gulf allies”
Thom Shanker, republished from the *New York Times* in Brisbane Times,
August 28, 2012. www.brisbanetimes.com.au/world/us-weapons-sales-triple-to-hit-record-high-thanks-to-worried-gulf-allies-20120827-24wf7.html

WASHINGTON: Weapons sales by the United States tripled in 2011 to a record high, driven by arms sales to Persian Gulf allies concerned about Iran’s regional ambitions, according to a new study for Congress.

Overseas weapons sales by the US totalled \$US66.3 billion last year, or nearly 78 percent of the global arms market, valued at US\$85.3 billion in 2011. Russia was a distant second, with \$4.8 billion in deals.

The American weapons sales total was an “extraordinary increase” over the US\$21.4 billion in deals for 2010, the study found, and was the largest single-year sales total in the history of US arms exports.

The previous high was in fiscal year 2009, when American weapons sales overseas totalled nearly US\$31 billion.

A worldwide economic decline had suppressed arms sales over recent years. But increasing tensions with Iran drove a set of Persian Gulf nations - Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Oman - to purchase American weapons at record levels.

The gulf states’ arms purchases focused on expensive warplanes and complex missile defence systems.

The report was prepared by the non-partisan Congressional Research Service, a division of the Library of Congress. The annual study, written

by Richard Grimmett and Paul Kerr and delivered to Congress, is considered the most detailed collection of unclassified arms sales data available to the public.

The agreements with Saudi Arabia included the purchase of 84 advanced F-15 fighters, a variety of ammunition, missiles and logistics support and upgrades of 70 of the F-15 fighters in the fleet.

Sales to Saudi Arabia last year also included dozens of Apache and Black Hawk helicopters, all contributing to a total Saudi weapons deal from the US of \$33.4 billion, according to the study.

The UAE purchased a Terminal High Altitude Area Defence, an advanced anti-missile shield that includes radars and is valued at US\$3.49 billion, as well as 16 Chinook helicopters for \$939 million.

Oman bought 18 F-16 fighter aircraft for US\$1.4 billion.

To compare weapons sales over various years, the study used figures in 2011 dollars, with amounts for previous years adjusted for inflation.

A policy goal of the US has been to work with Arab allies in the Persian Gulf to knit together a regional missile defence system to protect cities, oil refineries, pipelines and military bases from an Iranian attack. ★

Peace talks begin in Colombia

Daniel Kovalik

According to Colombia's *El Tiempo*, 75 percent of Colombians want a dialogue between the Colombian government and the guerrillas. And, this stands to reason, for Colombia has been devastated by over 50 years of armed conflict which has cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians (between 50 and 250 thousand of whom were "disappeared"); left over five million persons internally displaced (the largest IDP population in the world); and given a pretext for the Colombian government, with the aid of its paramilitary allies, to wipe out progressive organisations, including trade unions, working for social change.

On a grander scale, the Colombian conflict has provided a convenient pretext for US military intervention in that country and the entire region and has been the biggest hurdle to the dream of Latin American integration.

It is therefore welcome and monumental news that the Colombian government has confirmed rumours that it has signed an agreement with the largest guerrilla group, the FARC, to commence peace talks, and that it shall include the ELN guerrillas in this peace process as well.

Experience has shown that such peace talks are fragile. Colombia has gone through a number of peace processes, but they have all ended badly thus far. The most notable failed peace process took place in the 1980s when the FARC agreed to end the armed insurgency in return for being able to participate in Colombian political life through the Patriotic Union party (UP). In a great act of treachery, the Colombian military and paramilitary death squads responded to this deal by murdering around 5,000 UP leaders and activists, and the FARC commenced hostilities anew.

Meanwhile, as *The Miami Herald* reported, both sides of the conflict have made it clear that they will not cease armed conflict during the peace talks; on the contrary, battles between the guerrillas and the Colombian military and police have increased in recent months. More troubling, the main non-violent group calling for peace talks – the Patriotic March – has been increasingly vilified by the Colombian government (quite untruthfully) as FARC supporters, and a number of Patriotic March leaders have been threatened, jailed, killed or disappeared with increasing frequency.

And, just as these peace talks have commenced, and as such attacks against peace activists have escalated, the Colombian government has cut in half the support for the beneficiaries of its government protection program – a program which purports to protect peace and social activists from these very attacks. In short, there are many reasons to be very cautious in our optimism for these talks.

At the same time, there are reasons for hope. For its part, the FARC took an important step in the direction of peace earlier this year by renouncing its long-time practice of kidnapping (a tactic of raising money through ransom). As for the Colombian government, President Santos has exhibited much more openness to peace talks than his predecessor, Alvaro Uribe, and has been much more moderate in his rhetoric about the guerrillas and about the Colombian non-violent left as well. Santos has even begun a land reform program which purports to give back land to Colombians (particularly those of the Indigenous and Afro-Colombian community) whose land was seized unlawfully during the conflict.

While it remains to be seen how successful this program will be, and while the program itself has inspired



This is a momentous opportunity for President Obama to finally earn his Nobel Peace Prize and we must encourage him to seize upon this opportunity.

paramilitary groups to violently attack those standing to take back land that the paramilitaries wrongfully seized during the conflict, the overture is an important one for the guerrillas whose primary demand over the decades has been meaningful land reform. Finally, the accelerated growth of the peace movement in Colombia, most notably through the establishment of the Patriotic March, will add critical support to these talks.

As usual, the important wild card is the United States – the financial backer of the Colombian military

and the author of Colombia's anti-insurgency program beginning in 1962. The only way that the peace process will be successful is for the US to support the process, or, at the very least, get out of the way to allow it to go forward and prosper.

So far, the US has shown no willingness to support peace in Colombia, instead opting to exploit the conflict to retain its last military beachhead in the Latin American region – a region which, much to the chagrin of the US, is increasingly radicalising and turning leftward. A key factor in the peace process, then, is a strong movement of citizens in the US who will support peaceful actors, such as the Patriotic March, in Colombia, and put political pressure on the US government to allow peace to flourish in Colombia. This is a momentous opportunity for

President Obama to finally earn his Nobel Peace Prize (three years after the fact) and we must encourage him to seize upon this opportunity.

As a final note, the Cuban government must again be applauded for playing its positive role in this process. As it has in the past, Cuba hosted the initial talks which led to the commencement of this peace process, and, along with Norway, will continue to host such talks throughout the process. This tiny island, much vilified by our government, continues to play its positive role in our hemisphere for peace, regional stability and public health. The shameful of the US's continued blockade of that country grows each day as Cuba outshines the US in terms of its contributions to the world.

Counterpunch ☘

Vote in solidarity with Congress Hotel strikers

Joelle Fishman

Listening to candidates Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan is hard to take when you think of what their agenda means for real working people. They are truly the voice of big capital. While they claim the opposite, every plank of their program is harmful to the working families who keep our country going.

While watching Romney's speech at the Republican National Convention, I couldn't help but think of the courageous members of UNITE HERE Local 1. For nine years these hotel workers have maintained their strike at the Congress Hotel on Michigan Avenue in Chicago. It is the longest hotel strike in our country's history.

Romney bragged about founding Bain Capital as a young man, which he said has done so much for the economy. It turns out that the family that owns the Congress Hotel also controls Gilmart Industries, a textile producer for Kmart, one of the companies connected to Bain Capital.

The owners' other investments have allowed them to subsidise the Congress Hotel during the strike in hopes of breaking the union.

But the housekeepers and other staff will not be broken.

They continue to stand firm in order to uphold the wages and benefits of all hotel workers. They continue to strike even while holding other jobs so that every hotel owner will know that if they refuse to bargain in good faith they, too, could face a strike.

The common values of America are not, as Romney says, tied up with big business. It is the strikers at the Congress Hotel who are upholding the common values of equality and fairness upon which our nation was founded.

What a contrast with Barack Obama who walked the picket line with the Congress Hotel workers when he was a US senator.

I had the honour of walking on that picket line one evening a few weeks ago while attending a conference in Chicago. Each worker told a story. One woman who had worked as a housekeeper remembered how her son was a small boy when the strike began, and now "he is all grown up."

We chanted, "Don't check in - check out!". In an effort to alert travellers around the country to boycott the hotel while a strike is under way, supporters

are asked to circulate the website hotelworkersrising.org and spread the word about how the workers went out on strike on June 15, 2003, because the owners decided to freeze wages and slash benefits.

The best way to honour America's ideals, as Romney claims he would do, is to insure that workers have a voice on the job with decent wages, benefits, dignity and respect. Somehow that didn't make it into the Romney-Ryan five-point plan.

"The sacrifice the strikers have made to go out on the line daily speaks to not only their dedication, but to the intense belief these individuals have for what they're doing," said Henry Tamarin, UNITE HERE Local 1 president, on the nine-year anniversary. "The strikers know their dedication to the boycott will help working families now and in the future."

One more reason to make sure and vote this year, and get family, friends, co-workers and neighbours to make it a record-breaking turnout, is to show solidarity with the Congress Hotel strikers and working people who are standing up for what truly makes our nation great.

People's World ☘

Generation Emigration

Ireland's economic crisis: alternatives to austerity



2012 AUSTRALIAN VISIT BY
Pearse Doherty
Sinn Féin TD

PERTH - SAT SEPT 8
2.30pm at UWA
(Murdoch LT, Arts Bldg)

SYDNEY - Sun Sept 9
5.30pm Gaelic Club

Followed by function with
live music at 7.30pm
(Gaelic Club) Entry \$10

Find 'Friends of Sinn Féin Australia' on Facebook



Trans-Pacific trade pact would kill jobs

Bill Knight

You don't have to blame mainstream media or be outright paranoid to think there must be a news blackout about the newest scheme by corporations trying to grease another way to move jobs overseas and move money around the world.

The lack of coverage of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), or "the NAFTA of the Pacific," as activists call it, is more because of the secrecy in which it has been written. Of course, that is not an excuse, but an explanation.

The possible results of another "free trade agreement" – as opposed to a "fair" trade deal accommodating labour rights, environmental protections and national sovereignty – could range from more closed factories like Maytag in Galesburg, Illinois, to more despoiled lands and lives. That's just like NAFTA, the controversial US-Canada-Mexico "free trade deal" which took effect in 1994.

Since President George W Bush signed it and Democratic President Bill Clinton jammed it through Congress over labour's strong opposition, NAFTA produced these effects in Mexico alone, along with the "giant sucking sound" of lost US jobs:

- Significantly lower birth weights.
- The impact on reproductive health is significant because there are over 350,000 women working in the maquiladoras, factories along the US-Mexico border, who are of reproductive age.
- Weakened food safety inspections. Mexican-grown strawberries, head lettuce, and carrots sold in Illinois groceries have violation rates of 18.4, 15.6, and 12.3 percent, respectively, for illegal pesticide residues.
- Ozone depletion has increased steadily since NAFTA opened US borders to Mexican trucks that don't meet US safety standards. Fewer than one percent of the 3.3 million trucks entering the US each year are inspected and 50 percent of those inspected are rejected for major safety violations. The Teamsters waged a long campaign to keep those dangerous Mexican trucks off US roads.
- The emergence of rural slums in an "American Calcutta" that stretches for kilometres along the US-Mexico border, housing families whose members toil in maquiladoras.
- Text of some of the TPP proposal recently leaked, released by the

Citizens Trade Campaign. It shows the free trade proposal would ensure strong rights for investors but weak protections for labour, the environment, and national sovereignty.

The TPP is being drafted to include the US and Australia, Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam. In July, the 13th round of TPP talks were at the Hilton San Diego Bayfront Hotel, where suggestions of also including Canada, Japan, and Mexico were made, sparking demonstrations there.

The next TPP negotiating round is scheduled for Leesburg, Virginia, on September 6-15. Of the 28 chapters of the leaked TPP draft, 26 have nothing to do with trade.

As drafted, TPP would limit regulation of foreign corporations operating within US boundaries, giving them more rights than US firms.

It also would extend incentives for US firms to move investments and jobs to lower-wage countries, and set up an alternative legal system giving foreign corporations new rights to circumvent US courts and laws, including letting them sue the US government before foreign tribunals and demand compensation for lost revenue due to US laws they claim undermine their TPP privileges or even investment "expectations."

"While the public has no access to the full text, 600 representatives from lobby groups like the American Petroleum Institute and corporations like Johnson & Johnson do, and negotiators seek those representatives' advice," writes *Labour Notes* reporter Cynthia Phinney, an Electrical Worker (IBEW) and the labour representative on Maine's Citizen Trade Policy Commission from 2003-2010.

There have been few protests in the US, probably due to the secrecy around planning of the TPP. One was in July outside the Cargill headquarters in the Twin Cities suburbs, organised by Minnesota's chapter of the Citizens Trade Campaign. Cargill, the big agribusiness giant, was one of the corporations whose reps were inside the negotiations room in San Diego, while labour and citizens were kept out.

Because NAFTA-like trade pacts make it easier to offshore jobs to low-wage countries, they have profoundly hurt American workers. Elsewhere, "provisions promoting competition in agriculture have driven many subsistence farmers off their land and into cities to seek work, creating a downward wage spiral for workers in other countries as well," Phinney wrote.

Both consequences contribute to



Leaked documents show the free trade proposal would ensure strong rights for investors but weak protections for labour, the environment, and national sovereignty.

the "giant sucking sound," as 1992 independent presidential candidate Ross Perot put it, in describing one negative effect of NAFTA, which he opposed. Coined during that year's campaign, Perot's phrase referred to the sound of US jobs heading overseas if NAFTA took effect, as it did in 1994.

Estimates of US jobs lost to NAFTA range from 700,000 to nine million. TPP, like other trade pacts in intervening years, is modelled on NAFTA.

Such trade deals also have troubling language that limits democratically elected governments' power to act in the public interest, if that interest can be interpreted as impeding competition and profits.

Most importantly, in Article 12 – TPP's chapter on Investments – the texts show negotiators are considering a dispute resolution process that would grant transnational corporations special authority to challenge countries' own laws, regulations, and court decisions in international tribunals that circumvent domestic judicial systems.

"We are just beginning to analyse the new texts now, but they clearly contain proposals designed to give transnational corporations special rights that go far beyond those possessed by domestic businesses and American citizens," said Arthur Stamoulis, executive director of Citizens Trade Campaign.

"A proposal that could have such broad effects on environmental,

consumer safety and other public interest regulations deserves public scrutiny and thorough public debate. It shouldn't be crafted behind closed doors."

If corporate investors or financial interests feel that laws or other regulations interfere with profitability, they may sue the government responsible for the regulation, but the case is decided by a trade tribunal instead of a court accountable to citizens.

President Obama unfortunately is acting more like the corporate-cozy Clinton than a progressive. In 2008, candidate Obama often criticised NAFTA and similar deals, but his administration has made trade deals with Colombia and South Korea, over strong objections by many unions and allied groups.

"Our hope is the US Trade Representative (Ron Kirk) will answer the growing calls for transparency

in the TPP," said Stamoulis. "If not, the time has come for members of Congress to intervene." Some 132 lawmakers have already written to Kirk demanding full release of the TPP drafts and explanation of his negotiating priorities. "Americans deserve the right to know what US negotiators are proposing in our names," Stamoulis says.

Adds Dr Brian Moench, a physician and member of the Union of Concerned Scientists: "This sellout to foreign corporations is not just a rogue brain cramp of President Obama. Mitt Romney demanded this agreement be signed months ago, and called Obama's 'the most hostile administration to business in recent history.' If the TPP trade agreement is 'hostile' to business, God help us if we have an administration, presumably Romney's, 'friendly' to business."

People's World ☘

Sydney District Committee – Communist Party of Australia
Invites you to a talk by Iranian writer

Bahram Rahmani
on
IRAN TODAY

2 – 4 pm Sunday, 16 September 74 Buckingham St Surry Hills

Bahram Ramani was born in Azerbaijan province of Iran. He became active on political and social issues when he was a teenager. He left home for Tehran to study medicine but left university at the time of the 1979 revolution. He became an active supporter of Komeleh in Kurdistan and joined the Communist Party of Iran after its foundation in 1983. Bahram was arrested and jailed in Kurdistan in late 1980. He escaped and went underground, then fled to Turkey. As a refugee he worked and studied political science at Istanbul University for five years. In 1985 he was arrested and tortured, remaining in jail for one month until he was released after United Nations mediation. He was granted political asylum in Sweden in 1996. Today Bahram Rahmani lives in Stockholm where he works as a journalist. He has published 12 books and hundreds of articles on political and social issues. He is a board member of the Iranian Writers Association (in exile) and a member of Swedish Journalists Union and the Swedish Writers Association. He is also editor in chief of Baang (Voice), the monthly journal of the Iranian Writers Association in exile. This public meeting is held in connection with the commemoration of the 24th anniversary of the execution of political prisoners by the Islamic regime in Iran, in memory of thousands of political prisoners and militants who died for social justice and freedom.

For further information, please contact Brian on 0468 417 414



The Australia-Cuba Friendship Society (Brisbane)
Invites you to a very special event

Using the Cuban Literacy Program "Yo, Si Puedo" in an Indigenous community at Wilcannia.

Come and hear the results of this remarkable pilot project conducted earlier this year by a visiting Cuban literacy advisor, Associate Professor José Chala Leblanch.

"The most striking achievement to date has been the extent to which members of the Wilcannia community have taken ownership of the campaign."

José Chala is a lecturer at Cuba's largest teacher training university, the University of Pedagogical Sciences 'Enrique José Varona'.

6:30 pm Monday September 10
Room C level 2 Old Council of Unions 16 Peel St, South Brisbane

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Brutality in West Papua

It was incredibly heart wrenching to watch the 7.30 Report and see the terribly oppressive situation the Indigenous people are suffering in West Papua. I knew the plight of West Papuans was not good under Indonesian rule, but was shocked at the level of brutality. I hope others who witnessed this film and report will act and urge fellow Australians and the Australian government to condemn these atrocities taking place there. Australia is supporting and training sections of the Indonesian Army and has a duty to make sure Australia is not aiding this repression.

Australia should not cover up, excuse, condone or abet human rights violations in West Papua. For too long Australia pursued similar policies over East Timor, until forced to do something. Don't let it happen again. The Indonesian army has a long, sordid history of abuses and other appalling actions. Since the 1960s over 100,000 West Papuans have been killed. West

Papuans are being arrested, beaten, imprisoned and killed for expressing their opinions or for taking part in peaceful protests.

The region is rich in resources of timber and minerals which are being plundered, but West Papuans are not getting the benefits. Indonesia wants the resources, but can do without the people. In fact the West Papuan people and their culture are being swamped by Indonesian settlers and the Papuans are being further pushed aside. It is imperative that concerned people raise their voices for these neglected people who have already suffered so much. They desperately need help.

Steven Katsineris
Vic

Seabed mining may destroy our livelihood

I have been following the development of seabed mining, the latest form of mining, in our country by Nautilus Minerals. Papua New Guineans should be rightly concerned as we do not know what impacts it will have on our environment and the people living in the area.

The coastal communities of New Ireland, New Britain, Manus, Bougainville and the PNG mainland will be affected one way or another once Nautilus begins extraction and the disposing of waste. It could mean losing our dependence on the sea for our livelihood if the effects are detrimental.

From a human welfare and

environmental perspective, we can expect this project to create problems in the following areas:

- Health and safety issues caused by toxic chemicals used in the extraction process and from the disposal of waste materials into the sea, which may lead to unknown chemical reactions when they come into contact with natural existing chemicals of the sea;
- Negative effects on onshore and offshore environment caused by the depletion of naturally occurring life-sustaining organisms;
- Depletion of marine life and fish species that have sustained the livelihood and economies of coastal communities for generations;
- Pollution of seas and rivers by toxic chemicals spread by sea movement to other areas;
- Negative health effects on people consuming fish or other marine products contaminated by chemicals used in the mining process.

These are not the only concerns caused by seabed mining. It has widespread effects in other areas of our lives too. The question that we need to ask our government is, whose interests is it serving and who are they protecting when they allowed a foreign company with no experience in undersea mining to come and exploit our sea.

If this government is a people's government, it should stand firm in protecting the well-being of our people. Many people are contemplating

taking court action against the government and Nautilus Minerals.

This could lead to a class action instigated by PNG communities against the parties of this project.

I, for one, would support this move and I am sure other concerned citizens will as well. We must stop this form of mining activity and similar operations in the future.

We must all take a proactive approach to stop this type of activity from destroying our environment so we can continue to enjoy a life of natural beauty, fresh air, pristine waters and a green environment.

Jimmy L
PNG

Meltdown in Victoria

In the lead up to the last state election in Victoria the conservative party which came to power presented as one of its policies a train line to Avalon airport. This seemed a bit confusing to most voters because there has never been a public demand for a train line which is to a virtually unused airport. There have however been demands for years for a train line to Victoria's major airport Tullamarine as well as Eastern suburbs all of which have never been met, so why Avalon?

The politicians when queried answer that Avalon will one day be Victoria's second airport but why use Avalon as a second airport when the logical place to build Melbourne's second airport would be on the very

outer eastern side of Melbourne where most of the population lives. This would reduce the need for the public to cross the already grid locked city. So why Avalon as a second airport?

Another curious planning project by the government is to build a second shipping port at Hastings (south east of Melbourne) and which is isolated from most infrastructures like the standard train line, rather than Wilsons Point which has all the external infrastructure such as a Freeway next to it and is not a long distance from the CBD and is right next to most industries in the West of Melbourne. The Port Authority notes most of the containers from a proposed Hastings Port would have to travel through the CBD to get to the western suburbs where most deliveries will end up, so why create even worse traffic gridlocks than already exists when clearly Wilson Point is a better location?

To find the answers to these puzzling questions we have to look past the illusion of democracy which is the job of politicians and the media to portray, and it turns out to be the hidden capitalist dictatorship which is doing the planning in Victoria. In this case one person has all to gain from these terrible planning decisions, one of Victoria's richest – Lindsey Fox who will be even richer once the illusion of democracy implements them at his holdings. To allow development and planning based on the greed of a few individual dictators is why the planet is already in meltdown.

Helen Brown
Vic

Culture & Life

by

Rob Gowland

The religious – and nutty – Right

The attitude of the religious Right towards women is much in the news as I write this. In the USA, Mitt Romney's campaign for pre-selection as the Republican candidate against Obama for US President had to go into urgent damage control after one of his highly placed supporters expounded the pseudo-scientific notion of "legitimate rape".

Todd Akin, Republican candidate in Missouri for the Senate, asserted that a woman who became pregnant after being raped could not have really been raped because "raped women don't get pregnant". Commenting on this astonishing piece of biological news, US radio commentator Jim Hightower noted that the reason Akin gave is "because – according to his grasp of reproductive science – the female body has ways 'to shut that whole thing down'."

Romney and the rest of the Republican hierarchy rushed to distance themselves from Akin. But as Hightower points out, "Guess who's presently cosponsoring legislation with Akin to impose this theological witchcraft on America's women? Why it's Romney's choice to hold the second-highest office in our nation, Vice-Presidential nominee Paul Ryan. Like his

buddy Todd, Ryan has sponsored many bills to deny abortion to victims of rape.

"Now, guess which party has just fully embraced Akin's nuttiness by including his absolutist 'no-abortion-even-in-the-case-of-rape' provision in its national platform? Yes, the Romney-Ryan Republicans."

Meanwhile, back home in Oz, the Sydney diocese of the Anglican Church has flagged that in October it will change its marriage service so that in future brides will vow to "love and submit" to their husbands.

Speaking in defence of this retrograde terminology, ordained Anglican minister Caroline Spencer said "while male headship might not be extended into the corporate workplace, it should be respected. Male headship is part of God's good ordering of all society – not just His church."

Ms Spencer recently presented a paper on this topic at the Anglican Church's Sydney think-tank Moore Theological College. As *Herald* journalist and former member of the Sydney Anglican Synod, Julia Baird commented, "this paper is hugely significant because it reveals what is being taught at Australia's most powerful Anglican theological college: that male dominance should define relations between all women and all men. In other words, women must respect the headship of men everywhere. This is the first time I am aware of that this has been stated so baldly and so publicly."

Fortunately, if the letters columns of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the chatter on the city's talk-back radio are any guide, the mass of Anglicans in Sydney do not agree with the sexism of the Diocesan decision. Anglican women in particular are understandably dismayed and outraged.

Of course, no one should be dismayed, let alone surprised, when the Religious Right comes up with concepts either dotty or dangerous, or both. Nor does it matter where that Right is, be it in the USA, Australia, Israel or almost anywhere. Nutters are drawn to those who espouse fundamentalist views like moths to a flame. But there is no denying that they seem to positively swarm in the USA.

In Texas, for example, you will find Ted Cruz, presently running as Republican candidate for the US Senate. Ted is deeply concerned that the United Nations is plotting to take over America's golf courses. (Most of the members of the militia movement that thrives in rural sectors of the US believe that the UN is up to all manner of evil doings across the USA, from kidnapping people in black helicopters



Vice-Presidential nominee Paul Ryan.

to beaming mind-control rays at them from space. And what else should you expect: when a government sets out to make its populace paranoid, they are liable to become paranoid.)

Another Texas official, County Judge Tom Head, has unearthed a conspiracy involving the religious Right's favourite *bête noire* President Obama and the dreaded UN (again). For most of these American nut jobs, Obama is a triple threat: a Black, a Red, and a Muslim. They don't even believe he's an American. He was born in Hawaii, but they like to assert that he's actually from Kenya (as though that is a bad thing, in a country with a huge minority descended from African slaves!).

Jim Hightower quotes Judge Head as follows: "In this political climate, what is the worst thing that could happen? Obama gets back in the White House," he [Head] answered to his own question. "No. God forbid," he added. Why? Plunging deeper into paranoid darkness, Head announced that a re-elected Obama is "going to try to hand over the sovereignty of the United States to the UN." And that, warned Head, will lead to the worst: "Civil unrest, civil disobedience, civil war, maybe. We're talking Lexington, Concord, take up arms and get rid

of the guy. Now what's going to happen if we do that?" asked Head as he built to his logical conclusion: "[Obama's] going to send in UN troops."

Did I mention the prevalence of paranoia in the US? And of course, this sort of fantasy raises delightful paradoxes, such as whether NATO would provide the UN troops to occupy the USA?

The answer of course is that it's nonsense, the ravings of a nut-job with no idea how the world works. The problem confronting the rest of us, however, is that the people in the US with the power seem to be flawed politicians like Obama, über rich patricians like Mitt Romney, loons like Todd Akin who think they are actually scientific, and militarists of every stripe. The not so numerous people of reason like Jim Hightower are too often voices crying in the wilderness.

Hightower describes himself thus: Jim Hightower has spent three decades battling the Powers That Be on behalf of the Powers That Ought To Be – consumers, working families, environmentalists, small businesses, and just-plain-folks. ☺



Sun 9 September –
Sat 15 September

I used to know an American film buff who taught school here in Australia. A product of the highly-regarded Northwestern University in the States, he had in his youth served a stint in the American army. He had been stationed in Germany, ready to protect Western Europe from being overrun by the dreaded Red Army.

Then as now, the USA was the most belligerent nation on Earth, with an insatiable appetite for recruits. Curiously, relatively few chose to make the Army their career. The better educated got out as quickly as they could. One result of this was that – as my friend put – the US army was “full of hillbillies”, the uneducated rural poor from the South of the USA.

He told tales of how the German troops serving behind the counter in the military base supply shop – the “PX” – clearly understood hillbilly drawl but could not understand the well-spoken educated English spoken by officers from the North, especially from the East Coast of the USA.

However, even the supply of hillbillies was not limitless, and a reluctant Pentagon eventually opened up the ranks of their armed forces to women. That increased the pool of potential recruits, but introduced a new series of problems to do with the sexist macho culture so diligently fostered in the US, a culture that sees women as objects first and people later.

The result is that an estimated 30 percent of US servicewomen and at least one percent of servicemen are sexually assaulted during their enlistment - not by the enemy, but at the hands of fellow soldiers. In fact, US military women are more likely to be raped by a fellow soldier than killed by enemy fire.

The Invisible War, screening in the *Cutting Edge* timeslot (SBS ONE Wednesday September 12 at 9.30pm), exposes a rape epidemic in the US armed forces, with chilling stories of violent sexual assault that are compounded as the victims seek justice in a Kafkaesque military legal system, where officers collude, cases are routinely swept under the rug, and few perpetrators are ever tried. In fact, only eight percent of sexual assault cases are prosecuted, and only two percent result in convictions.

And, of course, as recent incidents in Australia have shown, this culture of sexual assault is not confined to the US military.

The Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – were a pawn in the anti-Soviet campaigns of imperialism (British imperialism in particular) from the moment of the Revolution onwards. Churchill intervened in the Russian Civil War to detach them from the USSR and turn them into what he called a *cordon sanitaire* around the Bolshevik contagion, in other words, buffer states against Red revolution.

And so they remained for two decades until Nazi Germany sought to gain control over them as a useful base from which to attack Leningrad and gain control of the Baltic. Pro-business elements, as elsewhere in Europe, favoured accommodation with the Nazis, who would surely protect them from the danger of Revolution. Like right-wingers in France, Britain, Spain, Norway and indeed all over Europe, the Nazis were seen as the protectors of “Christian civilisation” from Russian barbarism.

Working class people on the other



Rewriting History (SBS ONE Friday September 14 at 9.30pm).

hand, saw little difference between their own right-wing and the Nazis, and like workers elsewhere in Europe they supported the USSR and its efforts to stop the Nazi drive to war and then, when that failed, to prevent the war from spreading to the Soviet Union for as long as possible.

The Left in the Baltic states eventually revolted against the pro-Nazi regimes that were lining them up as part of a war against the USSR, and asked to finally become part of the USSR. Germany could not object: she was preparing to attack France and the rest of western Europe and needed her rear secure.

When, in mid 1941, Hitler finally invaded the USSR, the right-wingers in the Baltic states eagerly supported him. They killed Communists, rounded up Jews, established and staffed concentration camps, and cruelly suppressed partisan detachments formed of their own people. Small wonder that they became hated for their atrocities, their treachery against their own countrymen and women, their intense

hatred of anything that could be deemed “left wing”.

After the overthrow of socialism during the time of Gorbachev, right-wing parties claiming to be “pro-democracy” won power in the Baltic states, and set about seeking revenge. Even the word Communist is banned in Lithuania (the Communist Party there can only call itself the “Socialist Party”). Soviet war memorials have been smashed down by government decision, and Lithuanian fascists who fought alongside the Nazis are exalted as “heroes”.

As the program *Rewriting History* (SBS ONE Friday September 14 at 9.30pm) shows, Lithuanians (including Jews) who joined the anti-Nazi partisans are now being investigated by Lithuanian prosecutors for war crimes! And as the economic situation in Europe declines there is a rise in anti-Semitism (and anti-Communism) that echoes the pre-war situation. The European Parliament, not noted for being at all progressive, has passed a notorious resolution equating Nazism with

Socialism and calling for a single day on which to commemorate “the victims of Nazism and Stalinism as equal crimes”, which would have the curious effect of basically removing Holocaust Remembrance Day from the European calendar.

The program is focused on the efforts of two Jewish academics to prevent the Lithuanian authorities from obliterating an inconvenient truth: that Jews were killed in Lithuania independent of the Nazis. This is supported, if support was needed, by the accounts of the thousands of Jews who had been sheltered in Eastern Siberia during the war. When the trains bringing them back arrived in Poland or the Baltic states, anti-Semitic crowds threw stones and spat on the carriages, and had to be chased away by Soviet soldiers.

The actions of the fascists who now run the Baltic states confirms the position of the Left at the time: anti-Communism and Fascism are inseparably linked. ☹

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12:15 for 12:30 (finishing 1:30)
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accountable government
Building a better State
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Queensland's children counting on us
Union and community sectors unite
secure jobs
protecting workers comp
SAFETY
COFFEEHOUR SECTOR
nurses
firefighters
Jobs for our Regions

POLITICS
in the pub

September 7
THE O'FARRELL STATE GOVERNMENT – THE BARBARIANS HAVE ARRIVED: SAVAGE CUTS TO PUBLIC SECTOR, SOCIAL WELFARE; OUTSOURCING, SHOOTERS IN NATIONAL PARKS
Steve Turner, Assistant Secretary, Public Service Association;
John Kaye, MLC, NSW Greens;

September 14
EUROPE: INTEGRATION OR COLLAPSE?
Bill Dunn, Dr, Political Economy, Sydney University;
Steven Keen, Professor, University of Western Sydney;

September 21
JULIAN ASSANGE, BRADLEY MANNING & WIKILEAKS – CAN THE GLOBAL SUPPORT MOVEMENT HOLD THE LINE?
Cassie Findlay, Digital Archivist, member Support Assange / Wikileaks Coalition;
Kellie Tranter, Lawyer, Human Rights Activist;

September 28
No Meeting – Public holiday

Special Event
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Sydney Park (meet in front of the smoke stacks)
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Venezuela today – great achievements, grave threats

Part 2

Carolus Wimmer is a Deputy in the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino), the editor of a discussion journal called *Debate Abierto* (*Open Debate*), host of a weekly current affairs radio program, a member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of Venezuela and the Party's secretary for international relations.

Carolus recently completed a tour of Australia as guest of the Communist Party of Australia. In Adelaide he spoke with Bob Briton from *The Guardian* about the great changes taking place in his country and the many challenges ahead. The following is the second part of this interview (slightly abridged). He begins with the subject of the threats to the Bolivarian Revolution from inside and outside the country if, as is expected, Hugo Chávez wins the presidential elections due to be held next month.

Carolus Wimmer: On October 7 there is a revolutionary candidate with Hugo Chávez and a candidate of the counter-revolution and the bourgeoisie. We fear there is a possibility that the opposition will not recognise the victory of President Chávez. That plan would get the immediate support of the imperialist mass media. It could get support of international imperialist institutions, organisations and of governments.

We can say there are very few options available to the opposition to win. All the polls give a lead of 10 to 20 percent to Chávez. Most of them are conducted by the opposition but there are such great differences that it's impossible to hide. For that reason it's been very difficult to promote the opposition candidate.

[Henrique] Capriles comes directly from the high bourgeoisie of Venezuela. They present him as a young man, as a new man but we must point out that in his youth he was a member of the international fascist movement Tradición, Familia y Propiedad [Tradition, Family and Property]. He was then a member of the Christian Democratic Party, a conservative party. In the 1990s he was president of the Venezuelan parliament. In that role he has guilt for all the privatisations carried out in those days and it is an indication that he is not new.

He is older than Chávez. He was in power before Chávez, and represented the interests of the bourgeoisie and imperialism. It appears to our Party that those forces will not accept defeat. For example, President Chávez signed an official commitment in the National Electoral Council to accept the result of the election, to accept the will of the people. The candidate of the right refused to sign it. It's a message. So what is the plan?

BB: Are there others dangers facing the Bolivarian Revolution? Does it have support internationally?

CW: The dangers for the Bolivarian Revolution continue inside and outside. Of course, for the US on the one hand will continue with its efforts to recover its "backyard" in Latin America. They have lost influence in the region but they will do everything possible to regain that influence. There's an economic blockade against Venezuela, especially in the scientific and technology sector. Countries and companies are forbidden from selling high technologies to Venezuela.

They can create more military bases. At the moment we can count 47 bases from the US in the region. In Colombia it is well known they are building seven military bases. Now the US is building 11 military bases in Panama – six on the Pacific side and five on the Caribbean side. There are NATO bases in front of Venezuela in Aruba and Curaçao controlled by The Netherlands. For those reasons there continues great dangers for the revolution but there exists a high political consciousness among the

Venezuelan working class, among the people to continue fighting for national independence and sovereignty, for more and more integration of Latin America.

The proof of the dangers posed to Latin America can be seen in what happened in Honduras and Paraguay. Against great illusions in Latin America that President Obama would represent change we now know that he is carrying on with the same imperialist policies that the US used to carry on in our countries. They don't accept the results of democratic elections if they are against the interests of the US.

They intervene militarily or with military support as in Honduras. They interfered directly through the US embassy in Paraguay against elected President Lugo and we have to be very cautious that what has happened in some countries in Europe they now do in Latin America. There you see presidents who are not elected by the people in Greece and Italy and now in Honduras and Paraguay we have two presidents who came to office without elections.

We have to underscore this because normally the US government is very vigilant about democracy in other countries. But we can see they don't respect it if the presidents or the government don't express the politics of the US – they are not willing to accept the democratic will of the people.

There are the highest relations between Cuba and Venezuela. We say that in general in Latin America we are dealing with a new concept of international relationships not based on competition but on solidarity, cooperation and complementation. A very good example is Cuba and Venezuela. Another example is the ALBA countries [Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas] where there is a great relationship of solidarity and cooperation. In Venezuela we support socialist Cuba and its great solidarity, especially in the areas of education and health-care that we receive from Cuba.

We are continuing to advance Latin American integration. It's another reason the US is very angry with us. There are different types of integration. On the one hand there is UNASUR [Union of South American Nations] of the countries of South America. There are the ALBA countries, which have the highest level of consciousness of the aspect of solidarity and cooperation.

Last year the Community of Latin American and Caribbean Countries [CELAC] was created. This is the integration of 33 Latin American and Caribbean countries without the US and Canada. It's very interesting that, despite the very well known political and ideological differences among the countries of Latin America, there is the will for integration because even the right-wing governments of the region are being pressured and excluded by imperialism. It is also an expression of the higher consciousness

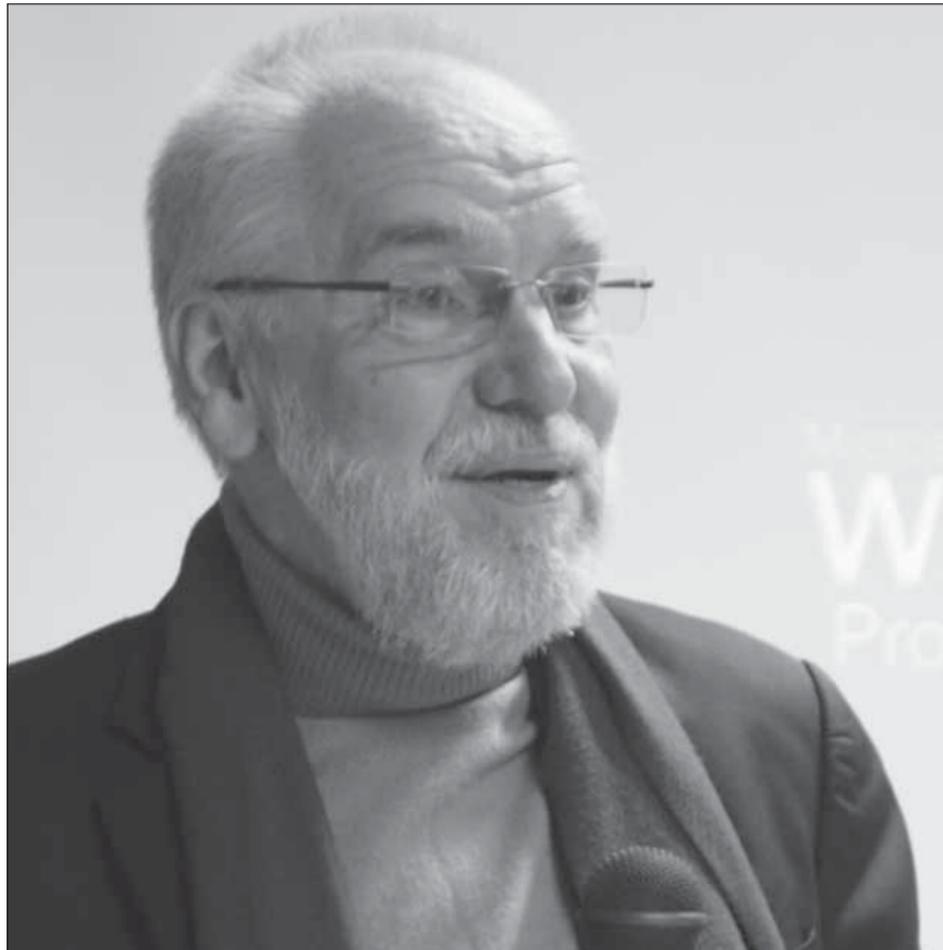


Photo: Alex Bainbridge of Socialist Alliance

Carolus Wimmer.

of the people and the working class who push their governments to fight and work for further integration in Latin America.

Of course, one of the responsibilities of the Communist Party is to work for the integration of Latin America. We must underline that the struggles and experiences of the different Communist parties are very important; that all the parties of the different governments, such as in Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia receive the solidarity of the Communist parties. In Venezuela, the Communist Party and the Socialist Party work together. In Bolivia, MAS [the Movement Towards Socialism] and the Communist Party work together. In Ecuador, Alianza PAIS [Proud and Sovereign Fatherland Alliance] and the Communist Party of Ecuador work together. It is a wonderful step forward that the Communist parties support progressive governments but at the same time maintain their independence as parties of the working class. In this way the Communist Parties in general participate in the deepening of this process.

Our Party, the PCV, sees the great dangers globally. There's more and more confrontation by the imperialist countries against the independent countries. We in Latin America remember that there are many peoples who are not independent. We remember Puerto Rico and that part of Cuba – Guantánamo – are under the imperialist control of the US. Martinique, Guadalupe and French Guyana are still colonies of France. Britain still controls some islands in the Caribbean and the Malvinas Argentinas [the Falkland Islands]. The Netherlands control some Caribbean islands, for example Aruba and Curaçao.

For this reason the people in Australia must

understand why the struggle for national independence is so important for us. It may not be part of the reality for many people here but we need solidarity. We also thank the Australian working class, the unions and progressive parties, especially the Communist Party of Australia, for their solidarity with the struggle of our people.

Of course, we have a very optimistic view of this struggle for the future. We are sure the international working class will win this struggle but we also recognise they could be very hard struggles because imperialism and worldwide capitalism will not surrender without this hard class struggle as in the examples of Syria, Afghanistan, the Middle East – Iraq, Iran and Libya. The imperialist, criminal actions could also take place against Latin America, not only because they don't agree with the politics of some government or other.

Normally they say that the national interests of the US are threatened, that their national interests are in danger when there is a progressive government in Argentina or in Uruguay or in Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Nicaragua or in Venezuela or when there's success in building socialism as in Cuba.

Because of this great crisis of capitalism in the northern countries they need to gain control quickly of natural resources – energy resources, mineral resources, water resources. If you look at a map of the world you will notice that these resources are mostly to be found in the south. For that reason we are thinking not only about integration of the Latin American countries. We are working towards the integration of the south which includes southern Africa and also the southern part of Asia. ✚



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