



The wounds that would not heal

Enquiry into child sexual abuse

Anna Pha

The terms of reference and selection of Commissioners for the Royal Commission (RC) into institutional responses to allegations and incidents of child sexual abuse have been widely welcomed. The terms of reference reflect the sensitive nature of the issues and the difficulties many will have in recounting their experiences. They also give the RC considerable flexibility in how it conducts the inquiry.

For years calls by victims' support and advocacy groups for a national inquiry have fallen on deaf ears as the cover-ups and atrocities continued. No government had the courage to stand up to the powerful church forces that stood in the way of justice. But the pain did not go away; the wounds could not even begin to heal without acknowledgement and justice. Lives continued to be destroyed. At last there is hope that their voices will be heard and appropriate action taken.

The trigger for the inquiry was the strength of public opinion following the ABC's *Lateline* TV program on November 8, 2012 in which detective chief inspector Peter Fox put his life and job on the line in an interview with Tony Jones.

"I can testify from my own experience the Church covers up, silences victims, hinders police investigations, alerts offenders, destroys evidence and moves priests to protect the good name of the Church," Fox said in a letter to the NSW Premier. (*The Guardian* 21 -11-12)

Prime Minister Julia Gillard was forced to act, but not before consulting Cardinal George Pell, and agreeing to include other religions, groups and state institutions and so take the heat off the Catholic Church.

The response to the government's call for submissions on drawing up the terms of reference and the conduct of the RC was overwhelming. Over 300 organisations responded within the seven days given. The government appears to have taken many of their proposals on board.

Broad scope

The RC will investigate past and current child sexual abuse in organisations with responsibility for children and may make findings and recommendations on such matters as how organisations have managed and responded to claims of sexual abuse and what they have done to identify or prevent it.

They will also recommend what organisations can do to identify, prevent and address sexual abuse of children and the failures to report it.

They will also look at what organisations should do to support survivors, to ensure victims receive justice and the question of investigation and prosecution of perpetrators.

The RC is directed to have regard to the evidence of people directly and indirectly affected by child sexual abuse and related matters. This should enable families and others close to victims and as well as victims and their advocates to be heard.

The RC will set up special units to assist with the investigation of specific cases and work closely with the police and public prosecutors so that prosecutions can be made as the inquiry continues. The RC itself will not prosecute alleged offenders.

On the question of compensation, it can make general recommendations but not decisions regarding individual cases.

Any organisation, public or private, with an involvement with children in the past or present, can be investigated. The inquiry does not extend to sexual abuse of children outside of organisations such as in the family, nor does it cover other forms of abuse of children.

The terms of reference give the Commission considerable leeway to determine its own path, using such expressions as "without limiting the scope of your inquiry", when listing areas to be covered.

The needs of witnesses who may not wish to go public are provided for. It will be possible for material from other inquiries to be included to avoid the need for victims or their families to go through the trauma of recounting their experiences a second time.

The RC will provide an interim report by June 30, 2014 and run for three years, longer if so requested by the RC. The aim is to both give enough time for voices to be heard and at the same time enable prompt action around its early findings and recommendations.

The government has promised financial help to organisations supporting those giving evidence.

Commissioners

The six Commissioners bring a range of experience:

The chair, Justice Peter McClellan, is a senior judge in the NSW Supreme Court. He



headed the Maralinga Royal Commission which investigated British nuclear testing in South Australia and has worked at the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

Justice McClellan addressing the media sounded determined: "We wish to emphasise that under the Royal Commission Act, the commission has powers to compel the production of evidence including documentation and we will not hesitate in appropriate circumstances to exercise those powers."

He said the RC "expects that those institutions which have entered into confidentiality agreements with individuals will co-operate with the commission in relation to the discovery of those materials."

Andrew Murray, former Democrat Senator, brings direct experience of institutional care to the commission. At the age of four he was sent

from England as a child migrant to Zimbabwe. He has a strong record as an advocate for the rights of institutionalised children. He was the driving force behind two Senate inquiries into the experiences of children in institutionalised "care" and of child migrants, which led to a formal government apology to the Forgotten Australians and former child migrants in 2009. He has strong views on the subject.

"There are thousands of criminals, accomplices and accessories after the fact who neglected, abused and assaulted hundreds of thousands of children, killed scores of children, and caused the suicide of many tens of thousands all over the world," Murray said in an address to the AGM of Barnardos Australia in November 2010.

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Guardian

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BHP Billiton's colonial mentality

BHP Billiton and the Australian federal government have come out swinging in response to suggestions that control of a fund – set up to save face over the Ok Tedi mine environmental disaster – should be put in the hands of the Papua New Guinea government. The story hit the front pages when it was announced outgoing Ok Tedi chairman, the multi-functional Ross Garnault, had been banned from entering PNG after comments he made in a newspaper interview cast doubt on the trustworthiness of PNG authorities to carry out such a function.

The name Ok Tedi would be familiar to many Australians. BHP took over control of the copper mine in PNG's Western Province in the 1980s. Reports of major pollution from the mine had been hitting the media for some time before a report in 1999 finally spilled all the beans. Chemicals from the tailings had contaminated fish and poisoned the water source for 50,000 Indigenous people living in the villages downstream from the mine. Food crops were also contaminated.

BHP wanted out. World copper prices were low and the Ok Tedi operation was a public relations disaster. The "Big Australian" (as BHP was known at the time) set up the PNG Sustainable Development Program (PNGSDP) in 2002 to collect income from the ongoing mining operation and hold it in trust for remediation and further investment in PNG. The public conscience was massaged and it was off to more profitable ventures! BHP maintain a veto on decisions of the fund's board and – until recently – the "right" to appoint three of the seven board members from the company's HQ in Melbourne. The mining transnational was supposedly sorry about its disastrous environmental legacy but not that sorry.

There is another twist to the story. Copper prices have surged in recent times and, rather than winding down, Ok Tedi might actually be expanding. The monies sitting in the PNGSDP are considerable and long term reserves are projected to hit \$3.7 billion by 2022. Not surprisingly, the PNG government would like to access some of those locked away funds for cash-starved development projects. BHP enraged PNG Prime Minister, Peter O'Neill, by accusing him of blocking the granting of exploration licences to the mining mega-corporation until control of PNGSDP is ceded to his government.

O'Neill was quoted as saying that BHP must drop its "colonial era mentality" and talk about "ending a role there can be no justification for its continuing to play." He vigorously denied any improper role in dealings with BHP or damaging the investment climate in PNG. "Last month I addressed 1,400 mining and oil and gas leaders, and financiers in Sydney at the annual PNG Mining and Petroleum Conference. The claim that this issue has undermined confidence could not be further from the truth," Mr O'Neill said.

The business pages have rallied to the side of BHP Billiton and the federal government. They note that PNG has a reputation internationally for corrupt government. The Australian Financial Review quoted an unnamed industry source who is concerned PNG will "... end up like Nigeria." AFR international editor Tony Walker wrote "No purpose is served by trading Australian interests, commercial or otherwise, for bad behaviour." The visa ban on Garnault was "intemperate and outrageous". The PNG's actions were a "serious infringement of free speech."

Attempts to portray BHP Billiton as thanklessly bearing the "white man's burden" in its dealings with PNG authorities might succeed with a narrow section of the readership of the business press. They won't succeed with members of the public who recall the terrible images of destruction caused by the Ok Tedi mine and they certainly won't succeed among the peoples of the region who must also be mightily sick of the paternalistic attitude (at best) of successive Australian governments and the corporate interests they have promoted with foreign policy in the region.

PRESS FUND

If former Parliamentary speaker Peter Slipper is convicted of having misused Cabcharge vouchers he'll have to quit parliament, even if the judge lets him off with a caution. If the conservative Coalition were to win the resulting by-election the government would be left with a knife-edge majority, giving the coalition a slender chance to gain power. The federal election falls due later this year, but the Coalition's popularity is fading, so they're in a hurry to grab power and implement their reactionary agenda. We want to help prevent this, but we need your Press Fund contributions, so please send us something for the next issue! Many thanks to those who contributed over the break, as follows:

Marcia Munn, in memory of Rex Munn, \$100.

JR Allen \$5, June Ayres \$50, Ron Barrett (*Guardian* tin) \$30.70, CG Johnson (*Guardian* tin) \$12, Marie McClintock \$20, Rollo Kiek \$20, "Round Figure" \$10.

Total: \$147.70

Total for 2012: \$11,682.70

Progressive total for 2013: \$10

Hunger strike and self-harm on Manus Island

Up to five male asylum seekers on Manus Island self-harmed earlier this month as the unrest in the detention camp continued following the transfer of another 40 single male asylum seekers from Darwin to Manus Island.

Three asylum seekers were admitted to the medical centre – an Iraqi man who attempted to hang himself; a man with severe injuries from putting his hand into a fan and another man who collapsed as a result of his hunger strike.

The protests are causing a high level of distress and anxiety as many of the self-harm incidents have been witnessed by families and children in the camp.

A group of 5 Iranian, 15 Afghan and 25 Iraqi asylum seekers have now declared themselves to be on hunger strike in protest at their illegal transfer to Manus Island.

The asylum seekers are still waiting for an answer to a second letter to the immigration department on January 7.

"Manus Island should be closed," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition, "The idea that it is a fit place to send families and children is absurd. Not only is the Australian government refusing

to process claims of asylum seekers asking for protection in Australia, it is deliberately mistreating them by sending them to Manus Island.

"The asylum seekers on Manus Island and Nauru want to know why there isn't one law for all asylum seekers who have arrived after August 13. The vast majority of asylum seekers who arrived after August 13 will live in the Australian community while their claims are processed – conditions that are vastly different from those on Manus Island and Nauru.

"The Minister seems determined to discriminate against a small number of asylum seekers by sending them to hell-holes of Manus Island and Nauru. We are calling on the government to end the discrimination, to apply one rule to all asylum seekers who arrive in Australia and return those presently incarcerated on Manus Island and Nauru to Australia."

On January 13 around 11.30am, an Iraqi asylum seeker attempted to hang himself on Manus Island.

The man, thought to be in his 30s, and who has children in Iraq, was part of the group of 40 asylum seekers transferred from Darwin to Manus Island. He is currently in the medical centre, and his condition is unknown.

One asylum seeker told the Refugee Action Coalition that, "He looked dead," when he was taken down.

The transfer has left the Manus Island detention centre distressed and in despair. Most of those transferred have refused to eat meals.

There was an impromptu protest gathering at the gates of the detention centre of people concerned about the welfare of the Iraqi man. The attempted suicide comes as tensions continue to mount over conditions and internet use in the detention centre.

Phone conversations are being monitored after photos of the conditions in the camp were sent to refugee advocates in Australia. Access to the internet for each asylum seeker has been cut from one hour a day to one hour three times a week.

On January 7, the asylum seekers issued another letter to the Department of Immigration expressing their concerns with the conditions.

The Refugee Action Coalition is calling on the government to halt the discriminatory transfers of asylum seekers to Manus Island and Nauru; to end the Pacific Solution 2.0 and to make immediate arrangements to bring all asylum seekers to mainland Australia. ✪

The wounds that would not heal

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"The most harmed deserve justice. In some churches and charities the cover-up goes on. Governments need courage. In some countries governments have secured significant reparations, proper compensation has been paid, criminal perpetrators have been exposed, church files opened, and prosecutors have secured convictions."

Robert Fitzgerald is a member of the Productivity Commission, who has produced a number of reports recommending policy on social issues. His previous positions include president of the Australian Council of Social Service, state president (NSW) of St Vincent de Paul Society, national committee member of Caritas Australia (Catholic international aid organisation) and board director of Families Australia and the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies.

Former Queensland police commissioner, Bob Atkinson, provides a link with police. He has 40 years in the police service and was Commissioner at the time of the death in custody of Cameron Mulrunji Doomadgee on Palm Island in 2004. He has since expressed sorrow over how the police service handled the case which failed to successfully prosecute those responsible.

Helen Milroy is a consultant psychiatrist with a background in mental health and focus on the

wellbeing of children. She is director for WA's Centre of Aboriginal Medical and Dental Health and a descendant of the Palyku people of the Pilbara region in WA.

Jennifer Coate is a Family Court Judge, former president of the Children's Court. Other previous appointments include State Coroner of Victoria.

Hopes high

It is vital that victims and their families and organisations representing or supporting them have the support they require if the Commission is to be successful in its undertakings.

To succeed the Commissioners must have the courage and necessary legislative and other support to take on church and other hierarchies and demand or seize from them what information they require, at the same time protecting victims and their families. McClellan sounds prepared to do this.

So far the response of the Catholic Church has not been encouraging. Following the announcement last November of a Royal Commission, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference responded by attempting to defend the reputation of the church: "It is unjust and inappropriate to suggest crimes are being – or have been – committed, without producing evidence."

In response to Peter Fox's

claims and "bad media", Cardinal George Pell defensively said that the church's approach to child sexual abuse had improved, a claim categorically denied by victims' organisations.

The Church's response to the Royal Commission's terms of reference was extremely guarded. There are hollow-sounding offers of co-operation along with the raising of issues of whether or not victims who have signed confidential agreements will be able to speak out. That is not to deny the genuine support for the Commission from individuals within the Church.

The question of compensation is one that will need watching. The Catholic Church alone could face billions of dollars in damages claims from victims and families of deceased victims. Those responsible must take responsibility to pay up. Taxpayers should not be left to foot the bill.

"I will believe in miracles when the cover-up is ended, files have to be opened, when the criminals, accomplices and accessories after the fact are exposed, turned over to the authorities and put in jail, when proper compensation is paid, and those who have been falsely honoured stand disgraced," Murray said in the same speech to the Barnardos AGM.

"Perdition doesn't cut it for me – justice must be done on earth." ✪

Labor shoves disadvantaged onto dole queues – again!

Peter Mac

The year began terribly for single mothers, when the Gillard government implemented a policy under which most of them were to be transferred from the parenting allowance scheme, which already leaves its recipients below the poverty line, onto the Newstart program, which has far lower payments.

Under the new rules, after a single parent's youngest child turns eight the parent will receive the Newstart allowance, not the parenting allowance. For partnered parents this will occur when their youngest turns six.

Approximately 100,000 welfare recipients are affected by the new policy, including 60,000 single parents. The allowance for single unemployed parents has been cut by between \$60 and \$100 per week. The worst affected are being forced to seek meals from charities. Entertainment and holidays are now out of the question, as well as essential medication and treatment by specialists.

The overall rate of homelessness is expected to soar. In desperation, some single mothers have been seeking work as pole dancers or even as prostitutes. As Katrina Rae, spokesperson for the Single Parents Action Group, noted grimly: "You would do anything to feed your family."

In a bitter irony, the new arrangements will make it extremely difficult for the unemployed to seek work, because of the cost of travel. The struggle to cope will savagely undermine their morale, making it increasingly hard to present a positive face at job interviews, even if the applicant can make it there in the first place.

The changes will also be a savage blow for people who work part time but still depend on welfare support, because Newstart recipients are entitled to earn far less than parenting payments before their payments are effected. Payments to a single unemployed person transferred to Newstart will fall by \$57.50 per week, but someone earning \$400 per week from part-time work will lose \$111.50 per week in welfare payments, and will also lose a number of concessions and the pensioner education supplement of \$15 to \$31 per week.

Minister in spectacular PR crash

The amended Newstart scheme originated from the government's determination to achieve a no-debt budget before this year's election. That objective was finally dumped recently, when the government realised that the cuts across the board it required would have a devastating impact on Labor's re-election prospects later this year.

The government then introduced some popular new initiatives, including the new one-off Dad and Partner payment of a fortnight's minimum wage, i.e. \$1212 for working fathers and same-sex partners who earn less than \$150,000 and whose wives or partners have or adopt a child after January 1.

However, the planned transfers to Newstart, which are expected to save the government \$685 million over four years, were left in place. Apparently the protests from those affected were not considered particularly damaging to the government's chances at the polls.

On New Year's Day the Minister for Families, Jenny Macklin (who earns \$6,321 per week), was asked repeatedly whether she could live on \$35 per day, the minimum Newstart payment. She finally replied "I could", but following a nationwide uproar she was forced to admit she could not.

During her speech Ms Macklin commented: "Unfortunately we have far too many ... children growing up in families where nobody is working. The more that people go back to work, the better. It's better for the family, it's great for the kids to see Mum or Dad going to work."

And so it is! However, this statement, taken straight from the Liberal Party handbook, ignores the fact that the Newstart transfers won't put anyone into a job. Instead, they will effectively punish welfare recipients for not having a job, or for being partly employed.

The statement also reinforces conservative myths that most welfare recipients choose to stay unemployed because it's comfortable and they're lazy, or even that single women on welfare deliberately have children in order to gain the payments.



It's not the first time

The Labor government has, in effect, already taken action to thrust many of Australia's less wealthy citizens onto the dole queues. By raising the retirement age for men and women from 65 up to 67 years (until quite recently the retirement age for women was 60 years) the government has shortened the precious and all too brief period of retirement, when those who would have previously been eligible to receive an indexed age pension might have enjoyed travel, education, hobbies, time with children and grandchildren, and at least a degree of frugal comfort in their final years.

As it is, increasing the retirement age will not create new jobs, and older workers who find themselves unemployed during the extra work years

will be forced to rely on the Newstart allowance, just like the single parents.

The implementation of the new policy has caused severe controversy among Labor MPs some of whom have openly declared that Newstart should be increased immediately.

However the problem is not just that Newstart is low, but rather that the government deliberately shifted welfare recipients from an already threadbare welfare program to one with even more limited payments, without caring about the savage impact on recipients.

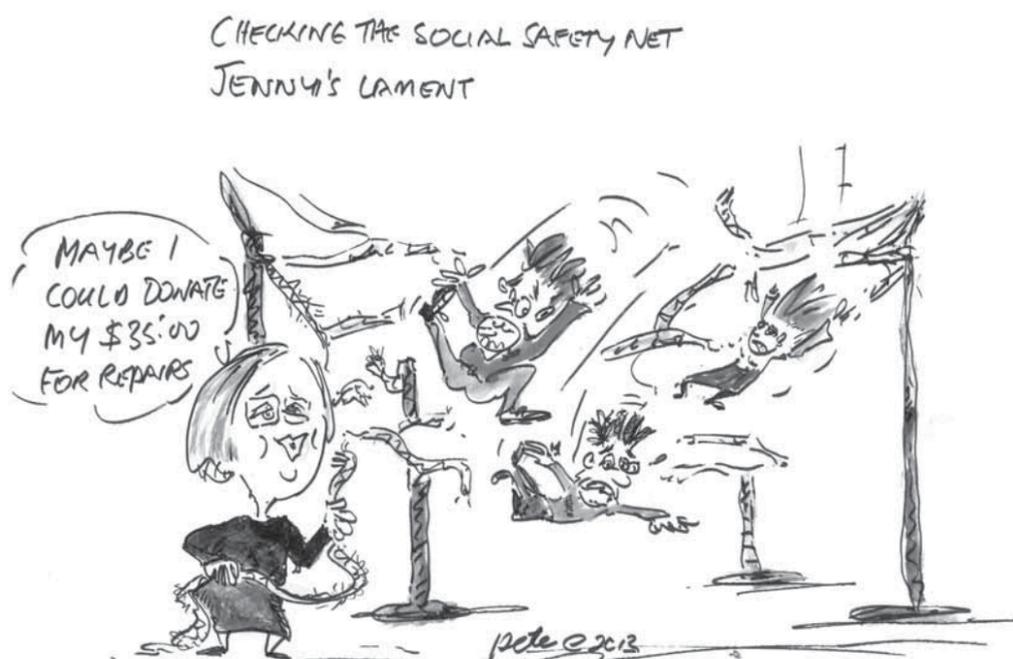
The Henry Tax Review in 2010 recommended that all social security payments should have a common indexation factor, and that huge gaps between various levels of welfare entitlements should be avoided. However, the government has not implemented

this recommendation, and is unlikely to do so because it might very well create a united front between the recipients of all the welfare programs, including the well-organised and militant aged pensioners.

Instead, as in so many other policy areas, welfare is being determined by a cynical manipulation of public opinion for the electoral advantage of the government, and not by concern for welfare recipients.

Cassandra Goldie, chief executive of the Australian Council for Social Services, commented that the new arrangements "...will have a devastating impact on single-parent families and their children. These families are already struggling as they live below the poverty line. ... You don't get people into work by driving them and their children into poverty." ✪

Pete's Corner



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Industrial action on agenda over enterprise bargaining

Staff at the University of Sydney and the University of New England will vote in the next month over industrial action on enterprise bargaining, following successful applications to Fair Work Australia by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU).

Neither university contested the union's applications for protected industrial action ballots.

Michael Thomson, the NTEU branch president at the University of Sydney, said that the ballot would most likely be held in early February with members voting on different forms of industrial action: one hour stoppages, 24 hour stoppages, and indefinite stoppages.

"University of Sydney management is offering less job security and wants to reduce sick leave

entitlements and cut academic workload provisions. Management is refusing to limit the numbers of academic casuals and is trying to wind back provisions for fixed-term staff to convert to ongoing positions," he said.

"Staff are still bruised from last year's job cuts and are angry at the lack of progress with the enterprise bargaining negotiations. Enough is enough."

University of Sydney management also proposes to remove classification protections for general staff and intellectual freedom provisions. The NTEU lodged its Log of Claims for a new Enterprise Agreement on August 7 last year, with management agreeing to only nine meetings in six months.

Thomson said that university staff are campaigning for an agreement

that improves the career prospects of general staff and academics in their early careers.

"Members met and voted unanimously to condemn the management proposals and to embark on an industrial campaign. If the membership ballot gets up, it is likely we'll be taking industrial action in the first week of teaching, March 4-8."

At the University of New England (UNE), negotiations on the academic Enterprise Agreement have stalled, after eight months of negotiations.

Dr Tim Battin, NTEU President at UNE, said that no agreement on any of the matters has been achieved.

"Our main focus in this round is with the extent of arbitrary decision-making on the part of management and the abuse of power, but despite the great patience of the NTEU team

in presenting its claims with reason and evidence, no movement from the management is forthcoming.

"For English language teachers, the best qualified in the sector but among the most poorly paid, the 'bargaining' has recently commenced, but already the obdurate stance of the management is obvious. The management of UNE could not even agree to the straightforward matter of coverage of the language teachers. That tells you something about a pig-headed approach that is unlikely to change without industrial action.

"All indications are that management will adopt the same stance for general/professional staff, but we wish to give this our specific attention over the coming weeks, and ballot our general/professional staff colleagues in due course."

The UNE ballot of academic staff and English language teachers will occur in the first half of February, with members voting on ten different forms of action, including work-to-rule, stoppages, and bans on particular activities. If the ballot is successful,



members will take industrial action from early March.

At the College of Law, staff voted 40 yes, 89 no against a management's enterprise agreement which would have reduced existing conditions at the college in a number of ways, including abolishing the automatic incremental increase staff receive on the anniversary of their employment for performance-based pay. The vote involved College of Law staff across NSW, Victoria, WA and Queensland. ☼

AMWU assists Tassie fire effort

Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union's (AMWU) Tasmanian branch has moved to assist members affected by the state's destructive bushfires. The branch's barbecue trailer is being taken to the bushfire zone in the state's south east, where it will be deployed on the advice of local authorities to help people in burned-out areas which have lost power.

The branch's generator will also be made available, with electricity not expected to be connected for a month in parts of the fire-ravaged Tasman and Forestier peninsulas.

Tasmanian state secretary John Short said the union would do all it could to assist affected AMWU members, including retired member Bob Brakey whose family home was one of 90 buildings destroyed in Dunalley.

Mr Brakey evacuated from the

house with his wife Kathryn as the fire raced over a nearby hill, managing to grab some family photos, two laptops and a change of clothes. He also saved the scooter belonging to his son Travis, who is paraplegic but was not at the house at the time.

Mr Brakey went to a friend's property about 8 kilometres away but spent much of the rest of the day and evening helping save it, then sheltering around the shoreline with local families as wildfire burned down to the beach that night.

"When we arrived back on Saturday morning we had a cuddle and a cry, but at least we have insurance on the house," he said. But that didn't cover all contents and the trauma of losing a home he had built up from a shack since the mid-1980s.

His next-door neighbour's

house was untouched while others behind him also burned, emphasising the cruelly random nature of fire.

"There's a lot of people worse off than us, they will really need some financial help. We've had support from many areas which we would never have thought of," Mr Brakey said after a visit from Mr Short.

Mr Short said collections would be taken up at workplaces through a campaign co-ordinated by Unions Tasmania.

"We'd also encourage our members throughout Australia to make a donation. At the moment cash is the most effective means of helping the community," he said.

Unions Tasmania secretary Kevin Harkins said the union effort will include a day of action by delegates raising funds on January 23. ☼

Independence is at stake if ABC salaries are published

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) is concerned that a push to reveal the salaries of ABC presenters could create a conflict between the need for transparency in major media organisations and editorial independence at the Corporation.

The union, which represents ABC workers, fears that the Freedom of Information request by the publisher, Herald & Weekly Times, and a recent decision by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, could open the floodgates for personal information about staff to enter the public domain.

Because of the breadth of the HWT's FOI request the personal records of any staff from on-air presenters through to production staff could be disclosed. This could mean the disclosure of a staff member's superannuation tally and personal loading through to their mobile phone, car parking and taxi receipts.

The CPSU is studying the AAT decision carefully and will liaise with its counterpart, the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, as to what steps it can take next. This includes seeking legal advice on how its members might be affected in the event the FOI request is successful.

CPSU national president Michael Tull said: "The ABC is a very transparent organisation and we applaud the fact that it does disclose top manager's salaries but this request goes well beyond that and raises some very important issues and concerns."

Mr Tull said the interpretation of the FOI request is so wide that it could sweep up all manner of personal details in its net. "You could end up with someone's group certificate being disclosed or even their performance review.

"The material that HWT is seeking could possibly even take into account the ways in which a journalist gathers material for his or her story, which goes to the very heart of the independence and confidentiality of ABC's newsgathering. These are details that should not end up in the public domain.

"You have to ask yourself who is that going to benefit? We view it as nothing more than an intrusion of someone's privacy."

The CPSU also warns that the publication of salary details of some of its top presenters could put the ABC at a disadvantage when it comes to negotiations with presenters and their agents. The Corporation could find that its top presenters are picked off by commercial networks which have deeper pockets.

Mr Tull also said the disclosure of such details, which could be used to undertake a snap audit of the cost of a particular program, could provide ammunition to those forces that would seek to undermine the ABC.

"The ABC is under attack from many different quarters and as it enters the final stages of its triennial funding discussions with the government, the disclosure of such details would only serve to arm its attackers." ☼

Nurses want Gillard gov't to act on nursing crisis

The overwhelming majority of nurses, midwives and the community want the Gillard government to do more to solve Australia's growing nursing crisis, according to a national poll carried out by the Australian Nursing Federation (ANF).

The ANF conducted the on-line survey of members and the wider public in December, as part of its ongoing national campaign "Stop passing the buck, Australia's nursing grads need jobs", which is calling on the federal government to find solutions to the growing shortage of nurses and midwives across the country.

The online poll posed two questions:

- Question 1: Should the federal Health Minister Tanya Plibersek do more to fix the graduate nurse crisis?

- Question 2: Should the Prime Minister waive HECS fees for nurse graduates who accept employment in areas of need?

More than 680 people across Australia responded, with the final results showing:

- Question 1: Yes – 97.4%. No – 1%. Unsure – 1.6%.

- Question 2: Yes – 87%. No – 6.5%. Unsure – 6.5%

ANF federal secretary, Lee Thomas, said the results of the poll "sent a very loud message to the Gillard government that the federal government has a place in working with State and Territory governments in fixing the country's nursing crisis.

"Our ANF members, along with concerned members of the public, have voted overwhelmingly for the federal government to step in and do more to solve Australia's current

shortage of nurses, especially the limited employment opportunities for our graduate nurses," Ms Thomas said.

"They also believe that one remedy is for the Prime Minister to waive HECS fees for nurse graduates who accept work in areas of need across the country.

"The poll results clearly show that the growing nursing crisis is set to become a real election issue for the Gillard government next year – and it's an issue the government must address and solve, otherwise safe patient care will be compromised and unfortunately, it will be the sick and the vulnerable who will suffer."

So far, the campaign has resulted in more than 2,650 emails to politicians, including 800 to federal Health Minister Tanya Plibersek with almost 10,000 community members signing up to show their support. ☼

Warning as juvenile jailings hit new high

Darren Coyne

Australia will be dealing with a "horrendous" adult Aboriginal prison population in the next five to ten years unless dramatic steps are taken now to curb the rising number of Aboriginal youth being locked up in detention. Figures released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show that the national rate of Aboriginal juvenile incarceration has continued to climb steadily, rising from 27 times the non-Indigenous rate in 2008, to the current level of 31 times.

Across the country, Aboriginal young people make up 54 percent of all juveniles incarcerated, with the Northern Territory and Western Australia much higher.

AIHW spokesperson Tim Beard said one in every 217 Indigenous young people aged 10-17 years would be in detention "on any average night".

The problem was particularly bad for young Aboriginal males, he said, as they accounted for 91 percent of young people in detention.

Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT chief legal officer John McKenzie told the *Koori Mail* newspaper that the ALS considered the problem a "national crisis".

Mr McKenzie, who has been involved in the ALS for more than 30 years, said it would be almost impossible to deal with unless the federal government began taking the issue seriously.

Mr McKenzie was also critical of federal government funding to Aboriginal legal services, which remained stagnant in comparison to Legal Aid funding.

"We are very concerned that as the problem gets worse we will be falling even further behind in what's required," he said.

"We are doing our best to pay staff what they're worth but our lawyers on average are earning 20 to 25 percent less than equivalent lawyers at Legal Aid."

The release of the AIHW figures prompted Warren Mundine, the head of the Generation One Indigenous employment initiative, to call for a



Young filmmakers in Woorabinda, Central Queensland.

national summit on the issue, accusing governments of creating an "Indigenous prison industry".

Mr Mundine told the *Australian* newspaper that Aboriginal overrepresentation in jails and juvenile detention centres was "a ticking time bomb and a 'disaster for the future of Aboriginal communities'".

Mr McKenzie said he would support such a summit, but warned that it was a starting point, not an end point.

Justice Reinvestment campaigner, Dr Tom Calma, who championed the idea of spending money on prevention rather than detention in his 2009 Social Justice Report, also tentatively backed the summit idea.

Dr Calma said however that there was already some very positive work underway, especially at a state and territory level, and that a federal Senate inquiry announced in November was also examining justice reinvestment.

Dr Calma urged anyone interested in the issue to make submission to that inquiry by March 15, 2013. The reporting date is May 18, 2013.

On another front, Dr Calma said the Justice Reinvestment campaign, which is supported by the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, was lobbying to have the Council of

Australian Governments (COAG) to take the issue on.

"We're targeting COAG because we want a national commitment led by the federal government," Dr Calma said.

"Each prison system is run by states or territories and it's important that there needs to be national leadership (to reduce Aboriginal incarceration rates)."

Meanwhile, Northern Territory Attorney General John Elferink has reportedly dismissed Mr Mundine's call for a national summit.

Despite the Territory having the nation's highest incarceration rate per head of population of both Indigenous young people and adults, Mr Elferink told the ABC that it wasn't the government's role to fix these problems, "the role starts with the parents".

Indigenous people account for 29 percent of the Territory population, but 78 percent of people in detention are Aboriginal.

As reported elsewhere, the NT government has just cut funding to the Balunu Foundation in Darwin, an Aboriginal-run charity set up to keep young Aboriginal people alive and out of trouble.

Koori Mail ★



Access to national parks could be interrupted over summer as rangers consider ways of protesting against the NSW government's introduction of hunting in 800 parks. A leaked draft risk assessment report warns that a fatality or serious injury by gun wound was a "major risk" once shooting begins in March. Rangers are thinking of options – walking off the job is one. Another option is for park staff to refuse collecting entrance fees as a way to keep parks open, the public protected from the industrial action and the NSW O'Farrell government hurting where it counts most – in the hip pocket. Steve Turner of the Public Service Association said rangers had reached a boiling point after the risk assessment listed parks' staff, contractors and volunteers at the top of those at risk of "projectiles" including bullets and the arrows of bow hunters. A Public Service Association survey of 293 rangers in September found more than 90 percent did not support hunting in national parks and did not believe it would control pests.

A national Senate inquiry into the involuntary or coerced sterilisation of people with disabilities in Australia began in September as part of the government's response to a series of calls from the United Nations for an end to non-therapeutic sterilisation without consent, regardless of disability. Under Australian law, parents wishing to sterilise a child or adult children who cannot give consent for non-therapeutic reasons must apply to the Family Court or, in some states, a guardianship board. The executive director of Women with Disabilities Australia pointed out that options such as family planning and others were not being explored because the sexuality of young women with disabilities was not widely accepted. Thus parents of women with intellectual disabilities go straight for sterilisation procedures rather than exploring existing and viable options which could prevent sterilisation.

Victorian taxpayers will be kept in the dark over the cost of high-profile (and usually expensive) infrastructure projects under a sweeping overhaul of Victoria's tendering practice. Just days before Christmas the Premier of Victoria revealed that the government would "no longer disclose" the cost of major projects. This will effectively prevent the public from obtaining any information on the estimated cost of major projects for months, if not longer. The new rules will diminish the ability of taxpayers to scrutinise publicly-funded projects even further. Lack of accountability and transparency in the tendering process for government contracts usually results in budget blow-outs and taxpayers paying shelling out for the costs.

Survival Day events around the nation - January 26

Canberra: At the Aboriginal Tent Embassy – a corroboree starts at 9am, everybody is welcome. A discussion titled "Sovereignty, the Constitution and Congress" will take place between 10am and 3pm. The discussion is convened by the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples.

Sydney: The 11th Yabun Festival, which usually attracts more than 20,000 people, is on again in Victoria Park, Broadway.

Melbourne: Three main Survival Day events. The Belgrave Community will hold its event in Belgrave, next to the pool in Benson Street from 12pm to 4pm. The 2013 Share The Spirit Festival

takes place in Treasury Gardens from 1pm to 7pm. Before the festival a rally and march will take place in Fitzroy. People are asked to gather at 8.30am on the corner of Gertrude and George Streets, Fitzroy for a smoking ceremony and welcome to country. Speakers and forum till noon, followed by a march to Treasury Gardens for the Share The Spirit Festival at 1pm. Baluk arts will have a Survival Day concert from 11am to 3pm on the Frankstone foreshore.

Adelaide: Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute will host a free event at Mulliwirraburka (Rymill Park).

Brisbane: The 1,000 Warrior

March is aiming for State Parliament House at 10am.

Western Australia: The Supreme Court Gardens in Perth will be the place to be for the Smokefree WA Survival Perth 2013 concert.

Northern Territory: The Darwin Aboriginal Rights Coalition has organised a Survival Day film screening at the Monsoon Movies Film Festival, being held at Fannie Bay.

Tasmania: An Invasion Day Rally and march organised by the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC), departing from the TAC office in Hobart at 11.30am. Acknowledgements: the *Koorie Mail* ★

The age of the siege: Nazi tactics revisited

Felicity Arbuthnot

The siege of Leningrad is still considered the most lethal siege in world history, a shocking “racially motivated starvation policy”, described as: “an integral part of Nazi policy in the Soviet Union during World War 2.”

The 872 day siege began on September 8, 1941 and was finally broken on January 27, 1944. It is described as “one of the longest and most destructive sieges in history and overwhelmingly the most costly in casualties.” Some historians cite it as a genocide. Due to record keeping complexities the exact number of deaths resultant from the blockade’s deprivations are uncertain, figures range from 632,000 to 1.5 million.

Sieges now extend to entire countries; they have become the torture before the destruction. And they are not counted in long days, but in long years. Iran, 33 years, Iraq, 13-plus years. Ironically the disparity in the deaths in Iraq resultant from that siege, mirror near exactly what was considered a “genocide” in Leningrad.

Syria has been subject to EU “restrictions” since 2011, ever more strangulating, with near every kind of financial transaction made impossible by May 2011, when “restrictions” were also placed on President Assad himself, all senior government officials, senior security and armed forces Heads. By February 2012, assets of individuals were frozen, as those of the Central Bank of Syria.

Cargo flights by Syrian carriers to the EU were also barred, as was trade in gold, precious metals and diamonds – anything which might translate in to hard cash, without which neither individuals or countries can purchase the most basic essentials.

By July 2012 Syrian Arab Airlines and even Syria’s Cotton Marketing Organisation had joined the EU’s victims.

America of course, had been way ahead of the game, with the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Act signed in to law on December 12, 2003, the year of Iraq’s comprehensive US-led destruction. Thus the mighty USA’s personal siege on under 21 million people, is now entering its tenth year.

Targeting the most vulnerable

By last August, as with Iraq before it, the inability to trade meant that, as ever, the now Nobel Peace Prize winning EU and the policies of the Nobel Peace Prize winning US President, were targeting Syria’s most vulnerable.

Many pharmaceutical companies had closed, resulting in severe shortages of medication for chronic diseases and the casualties of the insurgency, according to the World Health Organisation. Prior to the US-UK-EU-NATO supported insurgency, Syria had produced 90 percent of its drugs and medication needs.

However : “... production has been hit by the fighting, lack of raw materials, impact of sanctions and higher fuel costs.” Further, nearly all pharmaceutical plants were located in areas of heaviest fighting, Aleppo, Homs and Damascus provinces and have suffered “substantial damage.” The result is “a critical shortage of medicines”, according to WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic.

“Drugs for tuberculosis, hepatitis, hypertension, diabetes and cancer are urgently needed, as well as haemodialysis for kidney diseases.

“The health facilities that have stopped functioning are located in the most affected areas where the urgent need for medical and surgical interventions is the most prominent,” Jasarevic said.

The Syrian Health Ministry reported that it “lost” – stolen or destroyed – two hundred ambulances in a few weeks through June and early August 2012.

Banks run out of cash and the 2012 wheat harvest is likely to have been wrecked because of the shortage of labour, according to UN agencies. In the Middle East bread is still truly the “staff of life”. This all mirrors Iraq, even down to the wheat harvest – in Iraq those bombing the



The siege of Leningrad.

country over 13 years until the invasion, dropped flares on the harvested wheat and grains, reducing tentative bread security to ashes.

Syria struggles to meet its annual grain imports of around four million tons, because of a superb sleight of hand by the siege imposers. Essential foods are exempt from sanctions, but moneys are frozen, thus the wherewithal to trade. The country is ever potentially hours away from a bread crisis.

In 2011 Syria’s own harvest was hit by blight, water shortages and conflict. In December 2012 Iran sent consignments of flour to Syria, temporarily easing the bread crisis, but the siege under which Iran struggles is also of enormity – and shamefully under reported in the West.

As Iran shipped flour to Syria, Iran’s Health Ministry was approaching India for a life saving list of denied medications, for the most critical conditions in patients. Vital items denied included drugs to treat lung and breast cancers; brain tumours; heart ailments; infections after kidney, heart and pancreas transplants; meningitis in HIV patients; arthritis; bronchitis and respiratory distress in newborns; and epilepsy.

And here again is that sleight of hand: “Although trade in medicine is exempt from international sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council and the unilateral sanctions announced by the US and EU, Western banks have been declining to handle transactions” (Health Ministry).

Criminal

Targeting the sick is the action of the criminally insane. For targeting the newborn surely no expression has been conceived, except by Madeleine Albright when referring to Iraq’s sanctions related, half million child deaths: “... we think the price is worth it.” It was not a slip of the tongue; it was clearly to be the New World Order.

This partial list of medications unobtainable by Iran should be put on a wall of shame in Washington and all those Nobel winning EU capital cities:

Denied include chemotherapy; drugs used to prevent infections in kidney, heart and pancreas transplant patients and in AIDS treatment. Treatments for colon cancer; cell lung cancer; cancerous brain tumours; chemotherapy drugs for lung, ovarian and testicular cancer; treatment for non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

Also: treatment for breast cancer therapy; a range of chemotherapy drugs; treatment for life threatening recurring heart conditions; specific meningitis treatments; drugs for respiratory distress in the new born; anti-convulsion treatments for epileptic seizures; wide spectrum treatment for heart ailments.

Additionally: Nitroglycerine for angina and coronary artery disease; treatment for septicemia and bacterial meningitis; medication to reduce risk of premature birth; treatments for acute bronchitis, pneumonia, bone infections, gynaecological infections and those of urinary tract.

Nimidopine which reduces the risk of damage after bleeding inside the head, is also on the list. How fortunate Madam Clinton did not suffer her alleged brain-adjacent clot in Iran.

Last October Iran’s Head of The Foundation for Special Diseases, Fatemeh Hashemi, stated that six million patients were potentially at risk as a result of sanctioned medications. A holocaust forwarned – and met by that murderous “international community” with near silence.

Mehrnaz Shahabi also encapsulates the captives in this Age of the Siege:

“Iran (made) 97 percent of its needed drugs domestically ... The devalued currency means that raw materials imported for drug production are now a lot more expensive.

“In many cases, the raw material cannot even be paid for because of the banking sanctions, particularly as the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) in compliance with the EU sanctions, has stopped its electronic communication services for Iranian financial institutions and transactions from Iran.”

Thus in Syria, domestically produced drugs are almost unavailable.

Additionally the most advanced life-saving drugs cannot be made in generic form. These include drugs for heart disease, lung problems, kidney disease and dialysis, multiple sclerosis, thalassaemia, haemophilia and many forms of cancer.

Cancers in Iran have soared and a “cancer tsunami” is predicted by 2015. Since Iran borders and breathes the same air as Iraq, it would not be unreasonable to assume that as Iran is punished for its nuclear industry, America and Britain’s, in the form of the depleted uranium weapons used in Iraq, bears some responsibility for another health tragedy of enormity.

“All of the surgeries for thousands of haemophilic patients have been cancelled because a shortage of coagulant drugs. A 15-year-old child died at the end of October due to the absence of coagulant medication. The head of Iran’s Haemophilia Society has said, stating: ‘This is a blatant hostage-taking of the most vulnerable people by countries which claim they care about human rights. Even a few days of delay can have serious consequences like haemorrhage and disability.’”

As the New Year was celebrated across Europe and the “Land of the Free”, the Syrian Upper Mesopotamia Archbishop, Jaques Behnan Hindo, was writing an urgent appeal to the Presidency of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation.

In a situation which he warned “could soon

The war on Mali: What you should know

R Teichman

The French government has stated that it would “send 2,500 troops to support Malian government soldiers in the conflict against Islamist rebels. France has already deployed around 750 troops to Mali, and French carriers arrived in Bamako on Tuesday morning ...

“We will continue the deployment of forces on the ground and in the air ...

“We have one goal. To ensure that when we leave, when we end our intervention, Mali is safe, has legitimate authorities, an electoral process and there are no more terrorists threatening its territory.”

So this is the official narrative of France and those who support it. And of course this is what is widely reported by the mainstream media.

France is supported by other NATO members. US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta confirmed that the US was providing intelligence to French forces in Mali. Canada, Belgium, Denmark and Germany have also publicly backed the French incursion, pledging logistical support in the crackdown on the rebels.

If we are to believe this narrative we are misled again about the real reasons. A look at Mali's natural resources reveals what this is really about.

Mali's natural resources

Gold: Mali is Africa's third largest gold producer with large scale exploration ongoing. Mali has been famous for its gold since the days of the great Malian empire and the pilgrimage to Mecca of the Emperor Kankou Moussa in 1324. On his caravan he carried more than eight tonnes of gold! Mali has therefore been traditionally a mining country for over half a millennium.

Mali currently has seven operating gold mines which include Kalana and Morila in Southern Mali, Yatela, Sadiola and Loulo in Western Mali, and mines which have recently restarted production notably Syama and Tabakoto. Advanced gold exploration projects include Kofi, Kodieran, Goukoto, Komana, Banankoro, Kobada and Nampala.

Uranium: encouraging signs and exploration in full swing. Exploration is currently being carried out by several companies with clear indications of deposits of uranium in Mali. Uranium potential is located in the Falea area which covers 150 square kilometres of the Falea-North Guinea basin, a Neoproterozoic sedimentary basin marked by significant radiometric anomalies. Uranium potential in Falea is thought to be 5,000 tonnes. The Kidal Project, in the north eastern part of Mali, with an area of 19,930 square kilometres, the project covers a large crystalline geological province known as L'Adrar Des Iforas. Uranium potential in the Samit deposit, Gao region alone is thought to be 200 tonnes.

Diamonds: Mali has potential to develop its diamond exploration: in the Kayes administrative region, 30 kimberlitic pipes have been discovered of which eight show traces of diamonds.

What is being done now in Mali through bombs and bullets is being done to Ireland, Greece, Portugal and Spain by means of debt enslavement.



Precious stones: consist of the following and can be found in:

- Circle of Niore and Bafoulabe: Garnets and rare magnetic minerals;
- Circle of Bougouni and Faleme Basin: Pegmatite minerals;
- Le Gourma – garnet and corindons;
- L'Adrar des Iforas – pegmatite and metamorphosing minerals;
- Hombori Douentza Zone: quartz and carbonates.

Iron Ore, Bauxite and Manganese: significant resources present in Mali but still unexploited. Mali has according to estimates more than two million tonnes of potential iron ore reserves located in the areas of Djidian-Kenieba, Diamou and Bale.

Bauxite reserves: are thought to be 1.2 million tonnes located in Kita, Kenieba and Bafing- Makana. Traces of manganese have been found in Bafing – Makana, Tondibi and Tassiga.

Other mineral resources and potential in Mali

Calcareous rock deposits: 10 million tonnes (Gangotery), 30 million tonnes (Astro) and Bah El Heri (Nord de Goundam) 2.2 million tonnes.

Copper: potentialities in Bafing Makan (Western Region) and Ouatagouna (Northern Region).

Marble: Selinkegny (Bafoulabe) 10.6 million tonnes estimated reserves and traces at Madibaya.

Gypsum: Taoudenit (35 million tonnes), Indice Kereit (Nord de Tessalit) 0.37 million tonnes.

Kaolin: Potential estimated reserves (1 million tonnes) located in Gao (Northern Region).

Phosphate: Reserve located at Tamaguilelt, production of 18,000 tonnes per annum and an estimated potential of 12 million tonnes. There

are four other potential deposits in the North of 10 million tonnes.

Lead and zinc: Tessalit in the Northern Region (1.7 million tonnes of estimated reserves) and traces in Bafing Makana (Western Region) and Fafa (Northern Mali).

Lithium: Indications in Kayes (Western Region) and estimated potential of 4 million tonnes in Bougouni (Southern Region).

Bitumen schist: Potential estimated at 870 million tonnes, indications found in Agamor and Almuoustrat in the Northern Region.

Lignite: Potential estimated at 1.3 million tonnes, indications found in Bourem (Northern Region).

Rock Salt: Estimated potential of 53 million tonnes in Taoudenni (Northern Region).

Diatomite: Estimated potential of 65 million tonnes in Douna Behri (Northern Region).

Mali's petroleum potential

Mali's petroleum potential has been documented since the 1970's where sporadic seismic and drilling revealed probable indications of oil. With the increasing price of global oil and gas resources, Mali has stepped up its promotion and research for oil exploration, production and potential exports. Mali could also provide a strategic transport route for Sub-Saharan oil and gas exports through to the Western world and there is the possibility of connecting the Taoudeni basin to European market through Algeria.

Work has already begun to reinterpret previously gathered geophysical and geological data collected, focussing on five sedimentary basins in the North of country including: Taoudeni, Tamesna, Ilumenden, Ditch Nara and Gao.

So here we have it. What is being done now in Mali through bombs and bullets is being done to Ireland, Greece, Portugal and Spain by means of debt enslavement.

And the people suffer and die

The British *Guardian* reported: “Sory Diakite, the mayor of Konna, says the dead included children who drowned after they threw themselves into a river in an effort to escape the bombs.

“Others were killed inside their courtyards, or outside their homes. People were trying to flee to find refuge. Some drowned in the river. At least three children threw themselves in the river. They were trying to swim to the other side. And there has been significant infrastructure damage,” said the mayor, who fled the town with his family and is now in Bamako.

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become catastrophic”, he said supply routes were halted and “every economic activity appears paralysed (causing) depletion of vital goods, and soaring prices.

“The lack of fuel prevents heating homes and leads to the complete closure of all agricultural activities, just as the planting season begins.

“The grain silos were looted and wheat was sold to Turkish traders who conveyed it in Turkey, under the gaze of the Turkish customs officers.”

It is impossible not to reflect that NATO ally Turkey is the equivalent of the bombing flame droppers on the Iraqi harvests.

In addition to the plundered grain, the Archbishop denounced the gradual disappearance of other vital products including, as in Iraq, baby milk.

Archbishop Hindo also sent an appeal to Iraq's Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki: “Please help us as quickly as possible, by sending 600 fuel tanks, 300 tanks of gasoline and some tons of flour.

“The first victims are the children. You experience in your body, in your soul – and in the children all the injustice” caused by draconian, life threatening, illegal, collective punishment on a nation's people, yet again starting with the unborn, the newborn, and the barely crawling.

At the end of WW 2, Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg) was awarded the status of Hero City for collective unwavering courage, resistance and inventiveness under Nazi atrocities.

The world is surely in need of the status of Hero Country for those who exhibit the same courageous qualities against those nations who emulate the same atrocities.

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Zero troops in Afghanistan is the right number

John Bachtell

Afghan president Hamid Karzai visited Washington on January 9 and 10, to meet with President Obama and other officials and hammer out the framework for a long-term relationship with the United States. The Obama administration is weighing future economic and military assistance and how many US troops to leave behind after 2014, when the US and NATO cease combat operations.

US peace leaders are urging zero troops left behind. In a letter to supporters, Kevin Martin, Executive Director of Peace Action wrote, "It should be clear to all Americans, that no residual troop levels can guarantee a political outcome in Afghanistan that will be to our liking. That's up to the people of Afghanistan."

Strategically located in Central Asia, Afghanistan remains vital to US corporate interests. For that reason, according to Zalmay Gulzad, professor at Harold Washington College in Chicago, the US foreign policy establishment wants a permanent presence.

"US troops have constructed four major military bases and numerous smaller ones. They really want to use those bases to keep an eye on China, Russia, India and Iran," said Gulzad, who was born in Afghanistan.

With US and NATO forces leaving and with the Obama administration "pivoting" toward a more aggressive presence in the Pacific region, a major shift in power relations in Central Asia is expected.

China, Russia, India and Iran all want to expand trade and cooperative relations with Afghanistan. The US is actively inhibiting this competition.

However, Pashtun nationalist forces are pressing Karzai to develop relations with the country's neighbours. Karzai attended the

Shanghai Cooperative Organisation (SCO) meeting in Beijing in June 2012 where Afghanistan and China upgraded their relationship to a strategic and cooperative partnership.

Most of the Afghanistan infrastructure was constructed by the Soviet Union and Russia has offered to rebuild it.

In addition, Afghanistan is sitting on astounding riches of mineral deposits, natural gas and oil, which has transnational corporations salivating. For example, a 2010 Pentagon report called Afghanistan the "Saudi Arabia of Lithium."

While some transnational corporations are hesitant to invest because of continued violence, Afghanistan signed an agreement with a consortium of Indian state-run and private companies to develop the country's largest iron ore deposits.

Similarly, Afghanistan signed a contract with China to develop the world's second largest copper deposit.

Afghanistan is also seen as a prime energy transfer corridor. Among the projects is the proposed US\$7.6 billion, 1,040 mile-long Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India natural gas pipeline (TAPI).

Meanwhile grassroots democratic forces, including intellectuals, nationalists, women, an underground labour movement, and youth who studied abroad, are stepping up the fight for sovereignty. Despite the dangers, the democratic forces want the 2014 elections to occur on schedule and are planning to field candidates.

"The situation is very tense right now," said Gulzad. "The democratic forces are between two rocks. They know that when the US leaves, the interference from Pakistan and Iran will grow, especially funding the Islamic fundamentalists. On the other hand if the US stays the democratic forces fear they will have limited influence.

"Elections are coming in April

Afghan president Hamid Karzai and US President Barack Obama.



2014 for president and parliament. If there is a vacuum of power, it is possible the elections won't be held. Or they could have a temporary government, including keeping Karzai for a few years," said Gulzad.

Karzai is hated by wide sections of the population who accuse his government of rampant corruption. The BBC reported 40 percent of Afghan diplomats refused to return home after completing their missions in the US and European countries, apparently convinced instability will grow.

The Taliban and other terrorist groups commit violence to intimidate the progressive forces, create instability and scare off foreign investment with the aim of recapturing power. But Gulzad says these groups have dramatically lost support among the Afghan people who suffered greatly under Taliban rule in the 1990s.

Activity of democratic forces has grown despite contending with violence and assassination.

"They form the Progressive Democratic Movement and have elected several legislators to the Parliament. They are working hand in hand to bring peace so economic

development will be possible," said Gulzad.

Afghan women still face oppression, abuse and acts of violence. Women's rights advocates face rising violence and assassinations.

Yet women have made important gains. For the first time, women were appointed governors in one province and one district. And before the 2012 elections there were more women in the Afghan parliament than the US Congress.

A growing number are defying threats and going to school. Over 20 percent of university students are now women.

Among the progressive forces is the socialist oriented Democratic Party of Afghanistan (DP, formerly People's Democratic Party or PDP), which has grassroots organisation across the country. Since the government offers no protection, the DP has held congresses each year outside the country.

The DP is working inside and outside Afghanistan with members constantly coming and going mainly from Europe. Others never left, spending years underground.

The Party's main concerns are

bringing peace and sovereignty, expanding education and rights for women, improving the daily conditions of life for people and farmers, building housing for war widows and orphans.

It has three major newspapers and several members of Parliament as part of Progressive Democratic Movement.

Gulzad said pictures of Babrak Karmal, the former leader of PDP and president of the country, are a hot commodity in the streets along with that of Ana-Hita, the first woman member of PDP elected to the parliament in 1970s.

According to Gulzad, "people are missing the time when communists were in power. Back then there was more security, benefits, and peace than now. There are more beggars today than ever."

Despite the dangers, the democratic forces agree continued US and NATO presence only fuels the violence.

"If anything, the more troops we leave behind, the greater our destabilising impact will be. Zero is the right number," concurred Martin.

People's World ☼

Cubans celebrating 54 years since the triumph of the Revolution

Lisa Karpova

In 2013, the Cuban people began the year with a national celebration, not only with the arrival of the New Year, but to commemorate the 54th anniversary of the triumph of the revolution that toppled dictator Fulgencio Batista, on January 1, 1959.

The Cuban flag was raised at City Hall in Santiago de Cuba, located in the east of the island, where the city was entered by the rebel army commander, Fidel Castro, with his revolutionary troops.

That day 54 years ago, simultaneously, also admitted to Havana were the troops of the Second National Front of Escambray, actions that marked the beginning of the emblematic Cuban Revolution. From City Hall, this day in 1959, hours later, Fidel announced the triumph of the rebels over the government troops of Batista, who that night, resigned the presidency and fled to the Dominican Republic.

Every January 1, this act is known as the "Holiday of the Flag," a tradition that includes singing the National Anthem before the giant flag hoisted, which according to popular belief, will announce by its position that if it stays flying, that means good luck in the new year.

The Cuban news agency Prensa Latina outlined that this is "a historic-cultural ceremony that spans over a century, since the first Republican mayor, Emilio Bacardi Moreau, initiated it."

In a total of 160 municipalities in the country, popular music orchestras and concert bands played in squares and parks, also scenarios with traditional Cuban dance festivals.

The celebration for the anniversary of the Revolution began on December 30, when they performed the first such cultural events. Similarly, for January 6, when over a hundred choruses performed around the country, with the participation of children and adolescents.

Achievements of the Revolution

The Cuban Revolution marked the beginning of a period of transformation that ended a system favouring political and economic elites, and they began to build a country for the benefit of the majority of the population.

Cubans celebrate, as the Island closed 2012 with 11,163,934 people, an infant mortality rate below five per thousand live births, the lowest in the Americas, and a life expectancy close to 80 years.

Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez said that "In Cuba, the targets of the Millennium Declaration have been met almost entirely, and in some cases far exceeded."

He also stressed that "the commitment goes beyond the borders of the country, to contribute to the social development of other nations, with thousands of employees of health, education, sport and culture spread around the planet."

Meanwhile, in 2013, Havana

projected an increase of 3.7 percent in gross domestic product (GDP), economic progression that matches the average planned by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and agencies rating the Latin American region.

Prensa Latina added that these achievements are framed on a hostile stage, noting that seven of every 10 Cubans have been born under the influence of an economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States for more than half a century.

Barriers to trade, freedom of navigation and access to investments and credits, persecution of Cuban financial transactions worldwide, a travel ban on US citizens and encouraging subversion, are some of the effects of the blockade, which is almost unanimously rejected by the international community.

On November 13, a total of 188 countries, against only three demanded in the General Assembly of the United Nations that the

blockade imposed by Washington be ended.

Multiple congratulations

As part of the celebration, the Executive Vice President of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro, sent a letter of greetings to the Cuban people during the beginning of the celebrations of the 54th anniversary of the Revolution.

"On behalf of the Commander, President Hugo Chavez Frías, and from the depths of the love of the people of Simon Bolivar, I want to give live testimony of our infinite gratitude for the help, delivery and solidarity that have been incarnated in everyday Cuban Missions in Venezuela," says the message.

Also during the last week, Cuba has received letters of greeting from Nicaragua, Suriname, Barbados, Jamaica, Antigua and Barbuda, Romania and Kiribati, among other nations of America, Europe and Asia. *Pravda.Ru* ☼

Mali: Complicating a mess long in the making



A motorcyclist waves his support as French troops in two armored personnel carriers drive through Mali's capital Bamako on the road to Mopti.

Emile Schepers

As French military units, including aviation and infantry, attacked Islamist rebels in Mali since last week the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy and Germany pledged support, while military contingents from nearby African countries also prepared to intervene. Although many Malians appear to be welcoming the intervention so far, it is the culmination of a series of actions by France and the United States that have created a situation of no-good options for this impoverished West African country.

The French justify their intervention by warning that not only Mali but also the whole region could become the base for terrorist actions, which would affect not only Africa but Europe as well. Mali is located in the Sahel region of West Africa. However, in the wake of French intervention, Islamist fighters seized a gas production facility in Eastern Algeria, taking as hostages several score Norwegian, American, British and other employees, but freeing all Algerian employees.

First some background

A year ago, Tuaregs in Northeastern Mali had begun an armed uprising (not their first) aimed at creating a new Tuareg state, to be called Azawad, out of parts of Mali and neighbouring countries, which also have large Tuareg minorities. Claiming that the Malian government was not providing the army with sufficient resources to defeat the Tuareg rebellion, junior officers led by Captain Amadou Sanogo overthrew the government in March.

The coup disorganised and divided the Malian forces, allowing the rebels to make rapid advances, whereby they captured the whole of Northeastern Mali, including the famous city of Timbuktu. The

Tuaregs separatist organisation, the National Liberation Movement of Azawad (MNLA), had taken on as allies several militant Islamist forces, including Ansar Dine (Defenders of the Faith), Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and MUJAO (Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa). Malian and foreign fighters from these groups rapidly moved to the front of the rebellion, taking over the cities in the Northeast, pushing the Tuareg separatist fighters aside and imposing an extremely harsh form of Sharia law on the local inhabitants.

Most people in Mali are Muslims, but practice a more liberal, Sufi-influenced form of Islam, which also incorporates local African traditions. The rebels have now imposed prohibitions on music, restrictions on women's dress and movements and other bans, while also introducing execution of adulterers, maiming of thieves and the destruction of historic tombs of Sufi saints.

NATO intervention in Libya: a catalyst

Tuareg disaffection is not new, but the rebellion got a big boost from the French and NATO attack on Libya, which resulted in the overthrow and killing of Muammar Gaddafi last year. Among other things, this allowed a vast amount of armaments and supplies from the Libyan Army to fall into the hands of the Tuareg-Islamist alliance. Many trained and experienced Tuareg officers and soldiers from Libya were now launched into Mali along with all the hardware.

US involvement worsens situation

A very troubling article in the *New York Times* suggests a deep US involvement in creating the current bloody developments. Evidently, the US has provided extensive training

for Malian military officers. However, many of the officers who have received this training have gone over to the rebels, taking their skills with them. Captain Sanogo, leader of the March 2011 coup, which even further destabilised the situation and opened the door for the Islamist takeover of all of Northeastern Mali, was also trained by the United States. This is a situation which could repeat itself elsewhere in Africa. Most Americans probably do not know that the United States has now got a military presence in numerous African countries, with some "boots on the ground," but many more involved in training and support missions like the one that has gone so spectacularly wrong in Mali.

Political-economic view

When Mali got its independence from France in 1960, it was the recipient of much aid from the Soviet Union and Eastern European socialist countries. Especially after socialism collapsed in Europe, Mali was pressured into accepting many policies that tie it to the French economy. One of these policies is that its currency, the West African CFA Franc (also shared by other West African states most of which are former French colonies) is partly controlled by France.

Mali, like most of its neighbours, is dependent on credit from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which require, in exchange for extending credit, programs of "structural adjustment" which emphasise "free" trade, privatisation and austerity.

Like other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Mali is rich in natural resources, which it provides at low cost to French and other outside corporations. In Mali's case, the major products are gold (Mali is third in Africa after South Africa and Ghana), agricultural and fisheries products. There may be major oil deposits

under the Saharan sands of the North, currently controlled by the Islamist insurgents.

Mali's neighbour, Niger, has major uranium deposits on which France relies for a large proportion of its energy needs. This was the famous "yellowcake" uranium ore, which manipulated by George W Bush and Tony Blair, played a major role in providing a pretext for the Iraq war.

Yet Mali (population 15 million) is one of the poorest countries in the world. Its per capita Gross Domestic Product is about US\$1,200 per year and its infant mortality rate is over 100 infant deaths annually per thousand live births. The literacy level is a little more than 30 percent, with all these things being worse in the barren northeast.

On top of all this comes a major problem of climate change: The Sahara Desert is relentlessly pushing southward, forcing cattle, sheep and camel herding people to leave their traditional zones of settlement. Actually, this desertification process has been affecting the whole Sahel belt since before the days of the Ancient Egyptian Pharaohs; but global warming and other factors are intensifying it and increasing social conflicts, while creating a huge multinational refugee problem. The war in Mali comes on top of these pre-existing disasters, with the displacement of several hundred thousand people.

Bombs drop, more danger ahead

The original idea was not to call on the French to prop up the Malian government. The African Union and ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) were supposed to do that job in coordination with the Malian army, and with the sanction of the United Nations Security Council. However, most observers say that such an all-African force could not be ready until September and the

Islamists stole a march on them by last week's thrust toward Bamako.

The French have been bombing rebel positions in the Northeast, but the rebels have gone to ground, in some cases moving their fighters into the homes of the civilian population. Meanwhile, the rebels have moved past the narrow waist of the country which separates the rebel held Northeast from the populous Southwest, capturing and holding the important centres of Konna and Diabali and threatening Mopti, a key regional capital.

The French say that their stay in Mali may be extended. The people of Mali now find themselves trapped between two unappetising alternatives: Submit to harsh Sharia law imposed by the rebels, or hand over effective sovereignty to a foreign occupying force in which their former colonial masters play the most prominent role, and have their own economic and political agenda.

According to reports on the scene, many people in Bamako and other regions of Mali are currently glad that the French troops have arrived; they see the Islamists as a bigger threat. But time will tell how that will hold up over the long haul.

The main organisation of the Marxist left in Mali, the SADI (African Solidarity for Democracy and Independence) issued a statement in support of the Malian army troops going to combat the Islamic insurgency, but warned about things developing into a war, which would end up justifying foreign occupation of the country.

The seizing of the gas facility in Algeria adds a new dimension to the crisis. Among the Islamist fighters' demands are an end to Algerian collaboration with French intervention and the freeing of Islamist prisoners in Algeria. In the 1990s, a war took place between the government and Islamists, which cost 200,000 lives by some estimates.

People's World ☛

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



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In thrall to market vagaries

An open letter to Paul Howes*

Brother Howes, I found your column in *The Sunday Telegraph* (January 13) entirely predictable.

You talk about the Golden Rule of Do Unto Others. Have you ever known a Boss to live by this rule? Do you really believe that Big Business, that is polluting the environment for profit, is concerned with golden rules?

The current bushfires that are ravaging the state of NSW are the result

of increasing temperatures caused by climate change.

The burning of coal is the main reason for this. The threat to the environment is becoming so serious, that any action that interferes with the coal industry even for a short time should be applauded.

You talk about investments; well you should know that investing always involves risks. There is always a possibility that investors will get their fingers burnt.

As far as workers' super is involved, this points up the need for a National Superannuation Fund that is guaranteed by the government, rather than at present, one that is prey to market vagaries.

So we now come to pictures of Tony Abbot in firefighter's gear giving the impression of being an all round good bloke. Well, we will see what a good bloke he is when coming to power; when he reduces pensions, abolishes Medicare and commits any number of other crimes against the working class. All of which he will do when you and the other faceless

men of the Labor Party hand over power to him because you are more concerned with fighting the Greens than opposing the reactionary policies of the Liberals.

Ronald Barrett
Sydney

*Paul Howes is national secretary of the Australian Workers' Union

On your Marx

"All that is solid melts into air". Why is this famous term Marx used in the Manifesto of the Communist Party, a brilliant metaphor of the once solid icecaps now melting as capitalism heats the planet up? Marx was pointing out that capitalism is a system that what was here today and is gone tomorrow because of capitalism's "Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation".

Although these words are just as true today he was not specifically

writing about the environment but the particular nature of capitalism which is its "need of a constantly expanding market for its products, chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe" It uses the "cheap prices of its commodities" as "heavy artillery... to create a world after its own image".

The means of production "during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal production forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of nature's forces to man... clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalisation of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground", means eventually even the icecaps are not safe.

Marx likens this uncontrollable

"gigantic means of production and of exchange" to a "sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spell". The point being made is that capitalism by its nature has only one direction. It cannot be tamed by even the sorcerer or the environmentalist because it has to exploit all before it, which includes the environment, for it to continue to survive. Marx later on explains the only answer to this problem is a total replacement of the bourgeois dictatorship, something that has become urgent if we wish to see ice caps again.

Howard Patterson
Vic

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?
Write a letter to the Editor

Culture & Life

Life and death in Chile's "sacrificial zone"

For decades the people of Huasco province have been forced to live with the effects of pollution caused by the industrial projects surrounding their towns. Mischa Wilmers meets the activists fighting to protect their environment and their health.

The sign says "look after the flora and fauna" – but there is precious little left to protect. Looking out over its desolate shores, it is hard to believe the town of Huasco was until relatively recently a bustling fishing port, where dozens of colourful boats proudly lined the docks. Today would seem the perfect day for fishing. The sea is calm and the weather hot, yet there are no fishers in sight, and a solitary industrial cargo ship dominates the otherwise empty waters.

The absence of people fishing here has a simple explanation: there are no longer any fish in the sea. On a mound a few hundred metres away, a thick plume of white smoke rising from the chimney of an enormous thermoelectric power plant offers a clue as to what became of the town's fishing industry. Just behind it, the entry gates to the vast dumping grounds of an iron refinery display the words "Look after the flora and fauna". A casual inspection of the surrounding area suggests there is little nature left to protect.

The inhabitants of northern Chile's Huasco province describe themselves as living in a "sacrificial zone". Stretching across a fertile valley, the region was once renowned for its flowing river, providing a green oasis and agricultural hub at the extreme south of Chile's Atacama Desert. But over the last two decades the valley has become littered with numerous industrial projects the malign environmental impact of which is impossible to quantify.

A goldmine in a nearby glacier has caused the river to dry up and olive crops to diminish. A giant pig slaughter house is poisoning the air of the nearby village of Freirina, forcing villagers to live with the constant foul stench. Yet many of the 8,000 residents in Huasco town believe

they face an even greater challenge than that of defending their natural habitat. "Everybody here knows somebody close to them who has cancer," Soledad Fuentealba tells me. "Seeing many of our friends and neighbours die young has driven us to take action."

Petcoke pollution

As a founding member of the campaigning group SOS Huasco and mother of two teenage daughters, Fuentealba is primarily concerned with the health effects of pollution from the town's neighbouring Guacolda power plant, which is 50 per-cent owned by US corporation AES. Since the first of its four units was constructed in 1995, Guacolda has been burning petroleum coke (petcoke) – a substance which is banned in much of the world because of the hazardous chemicals it releases into the air, and which was only legalised in Chile after the plant was caught using it illegally in 2001.

According to Fuentealba, the town's health has been deteriorating ever since. Down the road, her neighbour Blanca Diaz Silva tells me she believes the pollution may be to blame for her 19-year-old son's cancer. Shortly after starting secondary school, Waldo, who also suffers from severe learning difficulties, was diagnosed with testicular cancer and has been receiving treatment in Santiago ever since. "Sometimes he asks me, 'mum, why me? What have I done to deserve this?'" sobs Silva. "We have to find out who is responsible for this and hold them to account."

Doctor Javier Castro, a GP at Huasco hospital, says stories like Silva's are disturbingly common. "The hospital ward for terminally ill patients is unusually busy. Incidences of cancer are worryingly high, as are respiratory problems," he laments.

The evidence linking Huasco's air pollution to health problems is not merely anecdotal. In 2005 the University of Chile conducted a study into the potential health effects of exposure to

petcoke pollution. The study took urine samples from over 50 of Huasco's schoolchildren (including one of Fuentealba's two teenage daughters). It found, among other discrepancies, that they contained far higher levels of nickel, a known carcinogen, compared with samples from children who had not been exposed to petcoke pollution. The following year a second study from the same university revealed Huasco's mortality rates for women between the ages of 20 and 44 were 3.5 times higher than the national average.

Yet successive governments have continued to approve projects which could further damage the region's environment. In 2008, Spanish energy giant Endesa revealed plans to build a 750-megawatt thermoelectric power plant, Punta Alcalde, just 13 kilometres from Huasco town. Following a tortuous battle during which enraged activists engaged in talks with government ministers, Endesa's permit was finally denied in July 2012, when the Commission for Environmental Evaluation of the Atacama Region ruled the plant did not comply with air pollution requirements. Then, in December, a ministerial committee overturned that decision after Endesa promised to install special filters designed to curb the release of toxic gases.

An uncertain future

The news did not go down well in Huasco where hundreds of protesters picketed roads leading to the town and clashed with police who used tear gas and water cannons to disperse the dissenters. Similar scenes were observed in Freirina following a successful appeal by Chilean food manufacturer Agrosuper against a decision to shut down a pig farm which had not complied with health regulations.

Four days later I attended a meeting with around 40 of the region's most committed activists in a small, derelict bungalow on the outskirts of Freirina. The mood at the gathering was intense as, one by one, activists from both

of the affected towns stood up to speak of their solidarity with each other and unwavering commitment to protect their communities.

Afterwards I spoke to Andrea Cisternas, the chief spokesperson of the Huasco Valley socio-environmental movement, who described the negative impact of the projects. "They talk about creating jobs, which is true, but more than anything they are making our communities become dependent on them for work. This is a region in which large corporations have imposed their projects on us at the expense of our culture, health and daily lives."

Meanwhile, Endesa has refused to back down, insisting that the proposed plant will have no effect on Huasco's environment, or the health of its people. But this position has been challenged by several environmental organisations, including the world's leading ocean conservation group, Oceana, which has opposed the government's decision to approve Punta Alcalde and launched an online campaign to draw attention to the region's pre-existing environmental problems. A report on their website sums up the consequences of the pollution: "...these plants have been pumping warm water and pollutants into the oceans, destroying the local ecosystems and raising mercury levels in fish. On land, toxic clouds and heavy-metal contamination are sickening the local populations."

Huasco's residents know they face an uncertain future. An appeal has been launched against the government's decision to approve Punta Alcalde. Whatever the outcome, the resilience of those leading the movement will be hard to stifle. In December, Agrosuper was forced into announcing the closure of its pig farm following the uprising in Freirina, and many in Huasco believe there is simply too much at risk to give up their battle any time soon. "Our fight has ceased to be an environmental campaign," says Soledad Fuentealba. "Now we are fighting for our lives."

New Internationalist ☘



Guacolda power plant.



Sunday 3 February –
Saturday 9 February

READERS PLEASE NOTE: We have decided with this issue to start our coverage of the week's television a week later than has been our custom up til now. This is to allow for the fact that the paper does not arrive in some areas until anything up to three days after the week has already commenced. Readers should be guided by the dates at the top of the column as to whether this is the right issue of the paper for them.

Forensic science has been part of the crime film genre almost from the very beginning of cinema. And now there are so many programs utilising forensic archaeology that they are almost a sub genre of their own (*Cold Case*, *Waking The Dead*, *The Body Farm*).

So it seems only logical that we should have a new four-part series that applies genuine forensic science to try to identify human remains that are hundreds of years old, under the curiously clumsy title *History Cold Case* (SBS ONE Sundays from January 27 at 7.30pm). It started last week with a skeleton of a knight dug up in a basement of Stirling Castle, but this week the skeleton comes from a shallow pauper's grave in an area of London reserved for burying prostitutes and syphilis sufferers.

The forensic team from the University of Dundee find this foray into the recent past rather grim and above all sad, and learn a lot in the process.

Australian Story (ABC1 Mondays at 8.00pm repeated on Saturday at 12.30pm) is often very interesting and deserves to be

better promoted. This week's instalment concerns a portfolio of stunning studio portraits of Aborigines taken in the 19th century by a German photographer who settled in Australia. It is also the story of the white couple who saw an ad for an auction in London where the photographs were to be sold and decided that they should be brought back to Australia.

They got them (at considerable cost) and then presented them to the local community. It is a fascinating program that works on a number of levels. Well worth watching.

Defeating The Superbugs (SBS ONE Tuesday 5 February at 8.30pm) is a typical product of the BBC *Horizon* team: well researched, comprehensive, and mercifully free of the hysteria that Americans would feel obliged to include lest they lose viewer interest! In other words, solid – not to say stolid.

Not that there aren't times when one feels that a little hysteria would be justified, such as in the all too brief section dealing with the probable link between the rapid growth of antibiotic-resistant bugs and the commercial agri-business practice of routinely feeding vast amounts of antibiotics to cattle and pigs to increase yield.

The emergence of germs that are immune to our medicines poses a very serious threat to humanity. The program shows how science is trying to counter this development, using everything from the antibiotic properties of the cockroach, research into the genetic makeup of a particular bacterium, and forgotten Russian research that could harness another of our enemies, the virus, for use against bacteria.

The first-rate and often quite charming *The Miss Fisher Mysteries* proved (if proof were needed) that Australia could make enjoyable and very competent period mysteries. Now, hard on that series' heels comes another period crime series, *The Doctor Blake Mysteries* (ABC1 Fridays at 8.30pm). *Miss Fisher* was set in Melbourne in the 1920s, *Doctor Blake* is set in Ballarat in the late 1950s.

Craig McLachlan plays the leading character Dr Lucien Blake, who acts as Medical Examiner for



The Doctor Blake Mysteries (ABC1 Fridays at 8.30pm) – Craig McLachlan plays Dr Lucien Blake.

the local coppers in between seeing patients. A former POW of the Japanese, he has no idea what became of his wife and daughter after the fall of Singapore.

I have seen two episodes of the ten in the series and am looking forward to seeing the rest. Graham Greene used to divide his novels into his serious works and his "entertainments". This series would qualify as an entertainment, but a quite good one, without pretensions to be anything else.

The series is credited as being "an original creation of Scottish Australian producer George Adams", but surely a share of the credit must go to Stuart Page who wrote some seven of the first eight episodes.

The new prime time costume series on the ABC is *The Paradise* (ABC1 Saturdays at 7.30pm). Set in "Britain's first department store", the series is basically *Downton Abbey* with shop assistants instead of servants. Or at least that was probably the intention of the creator of the series, Bill Gallagher. There

are lots of elegant costumes (the store has an upper class clientele), the shop girls live on the premises, and there are lots of jealousies, rivalries, and "human tragedies" to contend with.

The cast of British actors are very good: some, one feels, can probably play this sort of thing in their sleep and make it look good.

The curious thing about the series is that it is based on a novel by Emil Zola, one in his 20-volume series *Les Rougon-Macquart*, which he described as "the natural and social history of a family under the Second Empire" (the Second Empire was the period of the reign of Napoleon III). The novels demonstrate the effects

of heredity, but Zola varies this by setting each novel in the series in a different milieu to show the effect of environment. *The Paradise* is adapted from *Au Bonheur des Dames* (written in 1883 and known in English as *Ladies' Delight*) in which Zola depicts the mechanisms of a new economic entity, the department store, and its impact on smaller merchants.

Zola characterised the novel as "a poem of modern activity", exemplified in his sweeping descriptions of crowds and displays of materials for sale. The TV series seems less lofty in its aims, being essentially a very stylish soap opera with nothing to suggest its French origins. ☼

Sydney POLITICS in the pub

February 1

THE ARAB SPRING – TRANSFORMATION OR FAILURE?

Ahmed Shboul, Hon A/Professor, Department of Arab & Semitic Studies Sydney Uni;
Noah Bassil, Dr, Macquarie University;

February 8

GAZA & BEYOND – HELLFIRE OR RESOLUTION?

Stuart Rees, Professor, Director, Sydney Peace Foundation;
Cathy Peters, Human Rights Activist, Radio Producer;

February 15

NAURU – AUSTRALIA'S SHAME – NO RIGHTS, NO HOPE, WHAT MUST BE DONE?

Louise Newman, Professor, Psychiatry, Monash University;
Alex Pagliaro, runs Amnesty Refugee Program, visitor to Nauru;

February 22

STOPPING COAL SEAM GAS – THE NEW ALLIANCE BETWEEN CITY AND COUNTRY

Rosemary Nakervil, farmer and member "Lock the Gate";
Jeremy Buckingham, NSW Greens MLC;

March 1

OBAMA'S SECOND TERM – WHAT CAN WE EXPECT?

Michael Ondaatze, Dr, School of Humanities and Social Science, Newcastle University;
Brendon O'Connor, A/Professor, US Studies Centre, Sydney Uni;

March 8

CHINA – A NEW LEADERSHIP, A NEW ERA – WHAT WILL IT BRING?

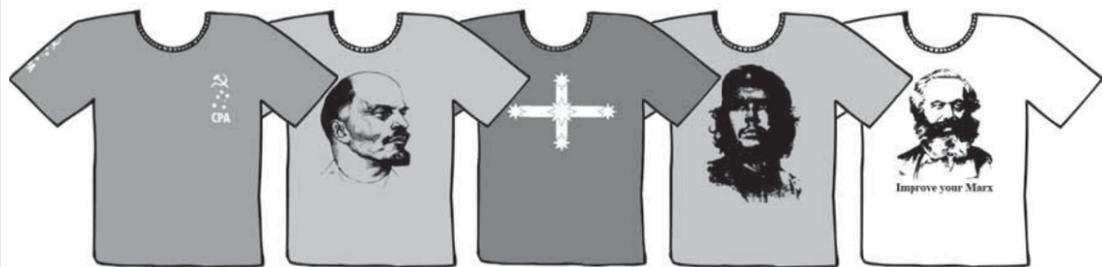
David Goodman, Professor, China Research Unit, UTS;
Kerry Brown, Professor, Professor Chinese Politics & Director China Studies Centre, Sydney University;

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US military intervention in Africa

Statement, United National Anti-war Coalition

On Christmas Day, 2012 – a time when few people were paying attention to the news – the Associated Press reported that the Obama administration had decided to send some 3,500 US troops early in 2013 into as many as 35 of Africa's 54 countries, claiming it is part of an intensifying Pentagon effort to train countries to battle "extremists" and to "give the United States a ready and trained force to dispatch to Africa if crises requiring the US military emerge."

History of US forces in Africa

It was a significant escalation of what has been a steadily increasing introduction of US forces into the formerly colonised continent. Over the past few decades, the US has devoted more and more attention to Africa, both because of its vast natural resources, consumer and government markets and historically cheap labour, and because of the US' increasingly fierce competition with China both for these resources and for political influence with African countries.

On December 30 the president had sent 50 US troops to Chad, "to help evacuate US citizens and embassy personnel from the neighbouring Central African Republic's capital of Bangui in the face of rebel advances toward the city."

In the fall of 2011, the US sent about 100 US troops "to help hunt down the leaders of the notoriously violent Lord's Resistance Army in and around Uganda." (CNN, October 11, 2011)

That same CNN article reported the Pentagon also was "sending equipment to Central African armed forces and training a Democratic Republic of Congo light infantry battalion deployed in that country's northeast" and that the Pentagon's US Africa Command, or AFRICOM, was "exploring ways to support the military of South Sudan."

By early October 2010, the report stated, "the US military had more than 1,700 troops deployed in sub-Saharan Africa," mostly stationed in the small East African country of Djibouti, but with "at least a small presence in 33 different nations in sub-Saharan Africa."

Although AFRICOM now operates throughout Africa, its operational command centre is still in Stuttgart, Germany. That's because no African country has yet agreed to host it. The Command now may have found its de facto headquarters in Ougadougou, Burkina Faso, from which it has been sending drone surveillance flights over northern Mali.

In June 2005, AFRICOM launched its five-year Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Partnership. That was followed in 2006 with Flintlock, a now annual "regional exercise among African, Western, and US counterterrorism forces."

In February 2012, there was Atlas Accord 12, an "annual-joint-aerial-delivery exercise, hosted by US Army Africa," which "brings together US Army personnel with militaries in Africa to enhance air drop capabilities and ensure effective delivery of military resupply materials and humanitarian aid." (Website of US Army Africa, AFRICOM, February 10, 2012). This took place while the Tuareg rebellion was unfolding in the north.

The arguments supporting the deployments are always the same: the presence of "Islamists" or other extremists in countries suffering from a lack of financial resources, unstable governments and internal strife – all of which, where they exist, can be traced to the legacy of Western colonialism and neocolonialism.



Photo: Dominic Pitrone

US intervention in Mali

One country has emerged as a particular focus of interest for the US military: the West African Republic of Mali.

Early in 2012, long-simmering grievances of various ethnic groups in Northern Mali erupted in a resumption of an off-and-on-again armed struggle for independence that dates back to the French colonial period. On March 21 a group of mid-level officers and rank-and-file soldiers, angered by the government's inability to effectively combat the rebellion, staged a coup, ousting the democratically elected president, Amadou Toumani Toure. Prior to the coup, AFRICOM had established training programs and joint operations with the Malian army.

Meanwhile, hundreds of Tuaregs who had sought work in Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's Libya, some as soldiers in the Libyan army, were returning home to escape the anti-Black pogroms being carried out by the Western-backed "rebel" forces. Many came back with their weapons and joined the rebellion. On April 6 the National Movement for the Liberation of the Azawad, or MNLA, a military-political force representing the impoverished Tuareg people in Northern Mali, declared the northern half of the country to be a new, independent nation.

Also coming into the country were what the US described as large numbers of Arab fighters who identified with forces such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), whose goal was to take control of all of Mali and impose a severe interpretation of Sharia law.

It was the presence of these outside forces that gave the US and France an excuse to try and orchestrate a regional military intervention in Mali, supposedly to prevent the North from

becoming a haven for terrorists. In addition, the US and France are both planning to send spy drones over the territory to assist in identifying targets for overt bombing missions.

However, those reports of large numbers of Islamists entering the area have been denied by the rival MNLA.

"The arrival of convoys of jihadists from Sudan and Western Sahara are totally false," said MNLA spokesperson Ibrahim Ag Mohamed Assaleh. "We categorically deny it."

Even a Malian security source told the French Press Agency that there is "the arrival of new terrorists in the north of Mali," but that claims of several hundred are "exaggerated."

Ignoring these objections, the US and France are now making political, diplomatic and military plans to force through a UN-backed plan to essentially invade Mali and take control of its weak political and military infrastructure. The mechanism for the invasion would be the Economic Community of West African States, or ECOWAS, a 15-nation regional political and military alliance in which the US has strong influence.

Why Mali?

Why Mali? Two reasons: oil, and the country's critical geo-political importance.

It has long been suspected that the north-eastern region of Mali that borders Algeria potentially holds vast oil and gas reserves. The recent confirmation of oil reserves near Tessalit, a small Malian oasis town about 85 kilometres from the Algerian border, has fed Western hunger for control of that area.

The second reason for the intensifying US interest is that Mali borders no less than seven West and North African countries, including Algeria, Niger, Senegal and Mauritania.

Controlling Mali would give the US an important hub from which to influence regional developments. This has been Washington's strategy for the Continent as a whole: to use economic aid and military training to develop close relationships with key governments and their militaries – such as Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda – so the US can use them as a network of regional proxies to control all of Africa. This was the strategy that England and France used to control the Middle East after World War I, as well as the one England used with such success in India during that country's colonial period.

Meanwhile, there is not one significant force in or out of the Malian government that has called for outside intervention, whether led by the Western powers or ECOWAS.

Without a doubt, Africa has many problems – poverty, insufficient infrastructure, AIDS, high infant mortality rates and short life expectancies. Such is the legacy of the forced removal of tens of millions of its most productive people, as well as the many years of brutal and exploitative colonisation.

Responsibility of anti-war movement

But Africa still is a continent of vast natural resources: gold, diamonds, uranium, oil, natural gas, fishing and agriculture. There is no reason why Africans cannot develop these resources to not only meet their own needs but to be in a position to help other impoverished peoples. But first they must have something they lost hundreds of years ago: control over their continent's riches.

United National Anti-war Coalition is an alliance of US-based organisations ✪



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