



Rush to war preparations

Anna Pha

“The 9/11 decade is ending and a new one is taking its place. That’s why I launch the National Security Strategy today,” Prime Minister Julia Gillard told Alexandra Kirk on ABC Radio National on January 23. The National Security Strategy is one in a series of reviews and statements on security-related issues. On the surface it is fiercely nationalistic, while in reality surrendering Australia’s sovereignty to the US. It plays down the likelihood of a major war and attempts to direct attention to other non-military security risks. It presents Australia as a middle power, strengthening its “regional engagement” and shaping the world in its interests.

A new Defence White Paper is expected by June. In that context this process has a sense of urgency as the next White Paper is not due until 2014. There appears to be an urgent rush to war preparations.

The statement, called “Strong and Secure”, places emphasis on risks to Australia’s security such as cyber warfare, foreign espionage, terrorism, violent extremism, and serious organised crime, and outlines the government’s measures to deal with them. While toning down the 2009 Defence White Paper’s overtly aggressive stance towards China, China clearly remains the main target of Australian (and US) foreign policy and their military build-up in the region.

Its “vision” is for a “unified national security system that anticipates threats, protects the nation and shapes the world in Australia’s interest.” In particular, it seeks **“To promote a favourable international environment: to influence and shape our regional and global environment to be conducive to advancing Australia’s interests and values.”** (Bold in original)

This arrogant and nationalistic aim is a recurring theme. For example,

in the section defining national security, the statement says, “Importantly, national security is not just about countering threats; it is also about making the most of opportunities. In particular, Australia seeks to shape the international environment, both to prevent the emergence of security threats, and to achieve broader benefits for Australia (such as trade and economic benefits).”

“For Australia over the next decade, the most significant trends are likely to be:

- uncertainty in the global economy;
- a rebalancing of global power;
- the continuing importance of non-state actors; and
- low-level conflict in high-risk areas,” the statement says.

Yet, with the exception of the fourth point, these important trends are not developed in the document. Even coverage of the government’s main concern, the “Asian Ascendancy”, lacks detail concerning these developments and associated risks to Australia’s security.

Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd issued a national security statement in 2008. It was followed by a Defence White Paper in 2009, outlining the way forward to the year 2030. There was the promise of five-yearly reviews to update for new developments. (See *Guardian* # 1410 13-05-2009)

In the foreword to the security statement, Gillard refers to “the acceleration in the dramatic economic and strategic change occurring in our region”, which she says led her to commissioning the document. “We are entering a new national security era, in which the rapid economic and strategic change occurring in our region will be the most significant influence on our national security environment and policies.”

These regional changes were reported on in another statement, “Australia in the Asian Century” which was released in November 2011. It draws attention to the ascendancy of Asia and how Australian



Photo: Avante Media Australia

businesses should capitalise on these developments. (See *Guardian* #1573 14-11-2012)

Australia-US Alliance

The Australia-US alliance is promoted as “critical to our ability to deter and defeat adversaries.” Australia remains on the ready to intervene anywhere in the world on behalf of the US. Australia will retain forces in Afghanistan after 2014 as part of a new NATO-led mission. Australia is strengthening its ties with NATO which is planning to build its presence in our region.

The security statement says: “The Australia–United States Alliance (the Alliance) remains our most important security relationship. **It has formed the foundation of our defence and**

security cooperation since shortly after the Second World War. The Alliance has proved a critical enabler for the development of our own military capability. It remains an important anchor for peace and security in our region.

“The value of the Alliance lies not simply in its defence aspects. It strengthens our prosperity as well as our security. The United States is integral to global economic growth and security, **and provides the critical underpinning to the rules-based order that exists today.**” (Bold added)

The statement should have added that the US has also determined our foreign policy since then.

This claim reflects the government’s side-lining of the United

Nations and its preparedness to fight the US’s illegal wars to enforce rules and a new international order as dictated by the US.

However there is a short, not exactly honest, section on Australia’s seat on the UN Security Council (UNSC) in 2013-214. There it states:

“This is a major opportunity. As a middle power with global interests, Australia has long been a supporter of a rules-based international order. The UNSC has a central place in that order. It has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. To that end, the UNSC is empowered to authorise a range of measures, including sanctions and the use of force.”

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Guardian

Issue 1579

January 30, 2013

Downward economic spiral

It was not a very merry Christmas for the 16,000 or more workers who joined the ranks of the unemployed in December or the many more who saw their hours of work and wages cut. Nor has it been a very happy New Year for the 1,500 or more workers who have already lost their jobs this year. Boral, Santos, Vodafone, BlueScope, Ford, Holden, Qantas, Macquarie Bank, ANZ Bank, Fairfax Media, BHP Billiton, Xtrata, Aurison (privatised QR National railway), and state and federal governments were among the biggest employers sacking workers during the past year. Thousands of smaller companies and community organisations have also been forced to sack workers or cease operating altogether.

There are thousands more jobs on the line in the year ahead as economic conditions look set to worsen. Gourmet Food Holdings (the group that owns Rosella) went into receivership. Rio Tinto and the NAB are expected to swing the axe.

The official number of unemployed is now over 650,000 – a figure which is alarming enough, but the reality is far grimmer. Just one hour of paid work, and according to the official figures you are employed. Yet, there is an appalling complacency, no sense of urgency about job creation by state or federal governments. On the contrary, government policies are having a contractionary effect on the economy resulting in more sackings and reduced working hours.

Thousands of single parents started the year with a loss of their parenting entitlements, causing considerable hardship. Their loss of income leaves them with less to spend. The slashing of 14,000 public sector jobs by the Queensland state government and federal government cuts will only drive the economy deeper into recession. Every sacking results in less demand for goods and services contributing to the demise of more businesses, small businesses in particular.

In the dying days of 2012, the Gillard government finally admitted that it would not achieve its sacred budget surplus for the financial year 2012-13. Having acknowledged what everyone knew, the government still refuses to reverse some of its harshest and cruellest cuts or increase below-subsistence unemployment, single parent and other benefits. Nor is it prepared to restore the highly successful Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme – 80 percent of its beneficiaries were low incomes.

It used its budget surplus pledge as an excuse for cutting social spending and refusing to raise welfare payments. Its callous response to questioning how anyone could live on the dole's \$37 a day was that it was only a temporary measure, an incentive to find a job! What rubbish. With sackings continuing and job ads shrinking, it is not possible for everyone to find a job, let alone a job that pays a decent wage with good working conditions. Parents with family responsibilities and carers cannot up and move to the north west of Western Australia with a fly-in, fly-out schedule.

The budget surplus is not the reason behind the cuts. Nor is lack of money. The government has many other options such as raising instead of lowering corporate taxation, introducing a genuine tax on super profits, making real cuts (not postponed spending) to the military budget and abolishing its private hospital subsidy of more than \$5 billion per annum (private health insurance rebate).

The below subsistence level of welfare benefits, the cuts to dental care, the inadequate funding of public education and public hospitals, the insidious winding back of Medicare benefits, mass sackings of public servants and privatisations, are all part of state and federal government neo-liberal economic agendas. The federal government abandoned its goal of a budget surplus because it was an election year. It knew that if it wielded the axe any deeper on the public sector and social spending it would be political suicide.

The economy needs an expansionary economic policy. People need better services, welfare recipients need higher incomes. With higher incomes the additional spending on goods and services will stimulate the economy, save and generate jobs in the retail, manufacturing, housing and tourism sectors which are presently so recessed. Without such expansionary action the downward economic spiral which workers pay for with the loss of their jobs and income will only continue to deepen.

PRESS FUND

Lots of terrible things are done by governments in the name of economy – for example cutting down on welfare payments while increasing military expenditure for hostile foreign wars. Leaders of conservative governments like to say they have the public interest in mind, but beneath the surface of many seemingly worthwhile projects there's all too often a hidden agenda. *The Guardian* is dedicated to finding out and disclosing those agendas. However, we need your help, by way of contributions to the Press Fund, which helps us cover our operating costs. We also need it now, because there's been a very slow start to this year's contributions, so please send us something for the next issue! Many thanks to this week's contributors, as follows:

Mick Pilton (Port Kembla Maritime Veterans) \$20,
"Round Figure" \$10

This week's total: \$30 Progressive total: \$40

WFTU denounces imperialist intervention in Mali

The World Federation of Trade Unions strongly denounces the military intervention of the French "socialist" government of Francois Hollande in Mali with the support of other imperialist forces, using as pretext the intensification of the conflicts between the Malian army and the militant organisations that are appearing to be fighting for the independence of Northern Mali in Azawad.

The military intervention was presented as a response to the request of the Malian President, Dioncounda Traore; the President who was appointed in his position after the military coup of last March.

This French-led military operation in its former colony has been a joint one by Britain, Germany and the European Union, as well as USA, Canada and ECOWAS, all of whom have already been sending troops and air forces to Mali and have been providing their support according to

the December resolution of the United Nations Security Council.

After the genocide in Rwanda and the demolition of Libya, France continues to use the military bases it maintains in Africa in order to strengthen its role in the inter-imperialist competition and to serve the interests of its monopoly groups who are plundering the wealth-producing resources (gold, uranium etc.).

This orchestrated conflict between all the belligerents is another bloody show in the wounded African Continent, with the African people paying a heavy toll, aiming for the protection of the French interests in the uranium mines found in Tuareg areas of the West-African Region, the inter-imperialist competition for the control of the wealth-producing resources of Mali and the placement of puppet-governments in the African countries serving the leading imperialist forces.

The World Federation of Trade

Unions in solidarity with the working people and the poor people of Mali and the West-African countries is strongly denouncing the intensifying aggressiveness of the imperialist forces in the region that are further deteriorating the already difficult living conditions of the people in the region. They are aiming for the maintaining and enhancing of the plundering of the wealth-producing resources which belong to and should be used for the people's needs.

Finally we call upon the trade union federations, first and foremost, of the belligerent countries, to denounce and act against the participation of their governments to this warfare. The position of each trade union on the issue of imperialist wars is crucial and constitutes a criterion of what type of trade union organisation it is. The workers of the imperialist countries must express their international solidarity with their brothers in other countries. ✪

PCP condemns military intervention in Mali

Statement, Portuguese Communist Party

The ongoing foreign military intervention in Mali, spearheaded by France and involving other imperialist powers, is inseparable from the militaristic and interventionist path of NATO, the European Union and its main powers and, in the context of the ever-deepening crisis of capitalism and through several processes of increasing foreign intervention, militarisation of the continent. Also the destabilisation of several countries, seeks to strengthen imperialism's economic, political and geo-strategic domination of the continent and jeopardise the sovereignty and territorial integrity of several African States.

The military intervention in Mali, unleashed once again under the pretext of "fighting Islamic

terrorists", is inseparable from the plans of various imperialist powers, headed by France, to reconstitute their web of colonial domination, that was ended by decades of struggle of the African peoples, to control and exploit the region's abundant natural resources and specifically those of Mali, namely its oil and other subsoil resources such as uranium.

The domestic situation in Mali is, like those of other countries in Africa or other regions of the globe, the concrete result of the imperialist strategy of instigating sectarian, religious and ethnic conflicts which are used as pretexts for aggression and military occupation and, in itself, strengthens religious radicalism and terrorism.

It is in this light that the domestic conflict in Mali must be seen. A conflict which, through foreign intervention, may spread out to other countries of the region. The domestic situation in Mali will only be solved within the framework of respect for the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, free from interferences and foreign military interventions.

The PCP deplores the stance of the Portuguese government which, invoking the defence of Mali's stability and territorial integrity, has supported military intervention which will only serve to introduce greater elements of instability in that country and the region. ✪

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Coal seam gas and the fossil fuel crisis

Peter Mac

Residents of the Camden and Campbelltown areas in Sydney's south-west got a shock last year when they found out that energy company AGL intended to install coal seam gas (CSG) mining wells at 20 locations near their homes and in proposed new residential development areas nearby.

Following widespread protests the mining plan was reduced in scope. However, it still includes drilling 66 wells at 11 locations, with the mines extending up to 2.5 kilometres under residential areas. One well entry point is just a few hundred metres from houses.

Residents of Gregory Hills, an area recently developed by the company Dart West in 2010, say they received no warning of AGL's intention when they purchased their homes. One resident commented: "Some people are saying [Dart West] knew that coal seam gas was going in here before they started selling land to people, but it's not in any of our contracts. There was no information about it when we were actually buying our land."

The residents of urban and rural areas affected by coal seam gas mining are rightly concerned by reports of fires and gas leaks, health threats, land subsidence, and soil and water degradation.

However, the CSG threat is symptomatic of an even greater menace from the fossil fuel industry as a whole.

Part of a bigger problem

For two hundred years humans have burnt so much fossil fuel in power plants and engines, and in the process spouted so much carbon dioxide back into the atmosphere, that we're beginning to reverse the course of natural history which enabled human life to flourish.

The extra carbon has changed the atmosphere's refractive index, trapping solar radiation – i.e. the greenhouse effect. Moreover, methane is now escaping from melting arctic permafrost, and from CSG wells, and it's a far worse greenhouse gas than

carbon dioxide. The result is increasing heatwaves, droughts and violent weather events, as well as rising sea levels, the spread of tropical diseases and ocean acidification. Paradoxically, catastrophic falls in temperatures are expected in countries bordering the North Atlantic.

Mitigating climate change will necessitate making major cuts to global carbon emission levels. The UN wants to limit carbon emission growth (the "carbon budget") to two percent by 2050, with the intention of achieving a fifty-fifty chance of avoiding climate change tipping points (i.e. levels at which catastrophic climate changes would be unavoidable). To achieve this objective, at currently anticipated fossil fuel production levels global emissions would need to peak in 2019, (only six years away), and to fall rapidly thereafter.

However, an analysis of the world's expected fossil fuel production, to be released by Greenpeace this week, finds that the coal Australia expects to export by 2020 would be the second-biggest threat to the UN goal.

China will produce almost twice as much as Australia, but its population is far larger, so on a per capita basis we would not only be the worst carbon emitter but also the biggest producer of emission material by 2020.

The greatest obstacle to changing this appalling state of affairs is the entrenched opposition of the corporations that are the major producers or users of fossil fuels. To date they've claimed there's no point in cutting down fossil fuels production or use, because climate variations are not caused by human activity.

This argument is becoming difficult to sustain, and last week Mitch Hooke, chief executive of the Minerals Council of Australia fell back on the argument that "the proposal to stop Australia's coal exports won't stop global coal use – it will just send Australian jobs offshore and deprive state and federal governments of billions in revenue."

However, it's not a question of stopping coal mining immediately, but rather of phasing it out as soon as possible. Coal mining jobs lost over a period of time could be compensated



A protest in Murwillumbah, northern NSW.

by developing the renewable power industry, assisted by government funding currently provided to the fossil fuel industries (for example for developing carbon capture and storage).

Coal mining royalties or taxes lost by governments would be dwarfed by the cost of dealing with unrestrained climate change. Nor could the supply of coal be readily met by other nations. Australia is one of the world's biggest coal exporters, and our industry is highly developed, but we still struggle to get our coal to ports fast enough to meet current demand.

And finally, an announcement by Australia that it would phase out coal mining would apply intense pressure to the world's worst polluting nations (including the recalcitrant US) to clean up their act.

Getting there

Achieving these objectives would necessitate overcoming the

tremendous power of the fossil fuel industries. It would also involve replacing governments that have served their interests. A good example is the NSW government, which has classified the Camden/Campbelltown CSG project as "of state significance", thereby overriding normal environmental protection requirements.

The government is also certain to approve other CSG mining projects that involve the highly dangerous practice of "fracking" (induction of subterranean fractures and injection of fluids under pressure) around Sydney.

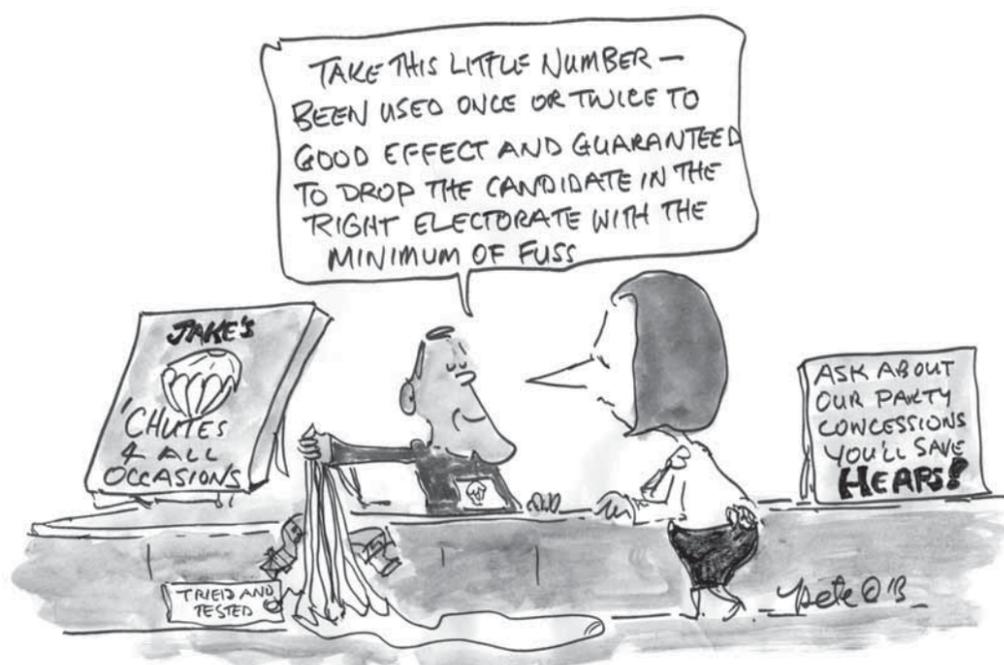
The government has also cut legal aid funding which has been available for people who wish to challenge mining proposals. It's also axed funding for the State Environmental Defender's Office (EDO), a government institution dedicated to protecting the interests of people affected by projects with serious environmental impacts. The NSW Energy Minister has described the EDO as

supporting "the left agenda to destroy the economy".

The NSW government has also rejected the recommendations of an inquiry, which recommended that a petroleum ombudsman should be appointed, and that CSG production should be subject to agreements with landholders. The inquiry also recommended the banning of any wells that could damage aquifers, the release into surface watercourses of water from wells, and all fracking operations while investigations into pressure chemicals are assessed.

Approval for new mines must be cut severely and must eventually cease altogether. To achieve this, the federal government could override state government approvals for projects that threaten the environment. But this won't happen under current Liberal or Labor regimes. It's up to the Australian people to replace them with state and federal governments that will – and to do so fast. ✪

Pete's Corner



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Call to prevent closure of Urgent Care Centre

The Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) Victorian Branch said news of the closure of the Urgent Care Centre at Colac Area Health is more concerning evidence of the lack of leadership shown by the state and federal governments in relation to the state health funding cuts and the callous nature of their political point scoring.

Lisa Fitzpatrick, branch secretary, has again called on Premier Baillieu to show leadership and stop the political point scoring and blame game associated with the Victorian health budget cuts.

"Regardless of who is to blame Victorian hospitals should not be forced to close essential services because the state and federal governments refuse to meet and fix this crisis," Ms Fitzpatrick said.

The past two years has seen \$723 million gone from Victoria's hospital budget, 85 percent or \$616 million cut by the Baillieu government and 15 percent or \$107 million cut by the Gillard government.

"Forcing the closure of the Urgent Care Centre at Colac Area Health risks the lives of the Colac and surrounding community. If the one ambulance in Colac is already

on a transfer, a critically ill person would be expected to wait for an ambulance from Geelong or even Warrnambool – over two hours away. In addition, Colac Area Health has been forced to close six beds permanently, further reducing services and risking the health and welfare of rural and regional Victorians."

She said that the state government must act urgently. "Premier Baillieu is responsible for Victorian hospitals and has an obligation to the Victorian community to show leadership and fix this funding shortfall.

"Only a small percentage of the \$616 million the Baillieu government has would restore full services at Colac Area Health, indeed only about 15 percent of the \$616 million cut from health by the Baillieu government would restore services cut throughout the state.

"A compromise must be reached between the federal and state governments. Disappointingly, thus far both levels of government are focused on winning the argument through the media. What Victorians want is a resolution that delivers the health service they are entitled to expect". ❖



New homelessness data confirms high demand

Data released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in December showed that around 230,000 people were supported by specialist homelessness services in 2011-12, of whom 56 percent were people at risk of becoming homeless and were assisted by

specialist homelessness services to stay housed. This is consistent with the number supported in 2010-11. Of grave concern, around one fifth of those who received support were children aged under 10.

"While the number of people supported remains high, the positive news is that services assisted 128,378 people who were at risk of homelessness to address the issues placing them at risk and to remain stably housed." Narelle Clay, Chairperson of Homelessness Australia said.

The data showed that children, young people, Indigenous Australians and women escaping domestic and family violence were the most likely to seek support from specialist homelessness services.

"It is concerning that we continue to see high numbers of very young children needing support

from homelessness services, usually in the care of a mother fleeing domestic violence. We need to ensure that where possible they are supported to remain safely in the family home or at least in their community. Equally concerning was the large number of young people aged 18-24 who received support from specialist homelessness services last year. This is a serious concern", said Nicole Lawder, CEO of Homelessness Australia.

The data shows that in the overwhelming majority of cases clients were able to have their support needs met. Health and medical services were the most needed specialist services for the homeless, and one in five people seeking help had a mental health issue.

More about Homelessness Australia: www.homelessness.org.au ❖

Vic govt's TAFE cuts cause major drop in enrolments

The Australian Education Union (AEU) has called on the Baillieu government to reinstate the \$300 million it cut from the public TAFE sector, following the release of Victorian Centre for Tertiary Admissions (VTAC) figures, which show a 25.8 percent drop in TAFE applications.

The VTAC figures also revealed that at least 170 fewer TAFE courses were available this year.

AEU Victorian branch president Meredith Peace said the Baillieu government's TAFE cuts are responsible for thousands of students no longer being able to attend TAFE to receive vital skills and qualifications.

"The Baillieu government must be held accountable for their actions and take responsibility for the fact that thousands of Victorians

are no longer applying to TAFE due to significant fee increases, campus closures and courses no longer being offered."

VTAC enrolments represent only a small percentage of total TAFE enrolments and are generally from teenagers and high school students.

This means that thousands of young Victorians who would have considered studying at TAFE are no longer applying and are having their pathways into future employment cut off at an extremely early stage in their lives.

"Over the coming months, we will hear from TAFEs directly about further course closures and a subsequent drop in teaching positions and student enrolments.

"Have no doubt that the carnage caused by the Baillieu government's

cuts will continue. These VTAC figures only scrape the surface.

"The fact that the Baillieu government is quibbling over the accuracy of the data based on its release date shows a brazen disregard for the damage they've caused to Victorians who relied on TAFE to receive a quality education.

"The government should be committing to a well-resourced, high quality TAFE sector and encouraging learning, not making it harder for students.

"The government is solely responsible for the dire situation our public TAFEs are in. The only way they can rectify this situation is by reinstating the \$300 million they cut without further delay," Ms Peace said. ❖

Danger of fire station closures

A car fire posed a dangerous threat to public safety in the Sydney suburb of Maroubra yesterday, thanks to the O'Farrell government's budget cuts and irresponsible policy of closing fire stations.

Firefighters received a call about the blaze near Maroubra shops, just 500 metres from the local fire station.

However, Maroubra station was empty because the local crew was forced to relocate to Sutherland due to a temporary station closure caused by budget cuts.

The situation was not properly dealt with until the next closest crew arrived from Matraville station, taking

seven minutes to get there, instead of the seconds Maroubra station would have, had it not been closed for the day.

Fire Brigade Employees' Union President, Darin Sullivan, said the state government's reckless approach to public safety was unsustainable.

"This blaze, just 500 metres from Maroubra Station demonstrates this government's blatant disregard for community safety," Mr Sullivan said.

"A car was allowed to blaze on a busy road near shops putting the public at risk for longer than necessary. Sooner or later, someone will be in that car."

He said the government was treating fire protection like a game of musical chairs.

"Communities across NSW need to know that at some stage, the music will stop and they will be left exposed.

"What makes this policy even more galling is that the government is attempting to slug households with a new property tax which will cost the average family \$300 per year.

"The O'Farrell government wants to cut fire protection and charge more for the privilege. That's simply unacceptable." ❖

Mandatory plain packaging of tobacco took full effect in Australia on December 1 – and had an immediate impact on smokers.

All tobacco products sold in Australia now must be in plain, standardised drab green-brown packs with mandatory graphic health warnings, and brand and variant names in small plain font.

Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) Australia has been told more smokers are calling Quitlines – and that it seems the new packs are directing smokers' attention towards the graphic health warnings – now the world's largest, covering 82 percent of each pack.

Said ASH chief executive Anne Jones: "The intention of this world-leading legislation is to reduce the appeal of tobacco products, to eliminate misleading messages about the harm caused by smoking, and to make the health warnings more prominent.

"From reports we're receiving, there are already signs of this happening."

Plain tobacco packs a turn-off for smokers

Quit services have noticed an increase in calls, some smokers saying they feel the cigarettes don't taste as good – possibly influenced by the lack of misleading colours, pictures and logos.

"This is a historic day. A powerful form of tobacco advertising has been banned for the first time, and the tobacco industry can no longer use the pack to glamourise smoking."

Australian children are only seeing tobacco packs showing this product as what it is: unhealthy and unglamorous.

"Again we congratulate the Australian government for taking this initiative in the face of aggressive, bullying tactics by the tobacco industry."

"We now look forward to many other countries ending this insidious and misleading form of tobacco advertising. The UK and New Zealand have already completed public consultations, and several others have expressed a keen interest." ❖

Rush to war preparations

Continued from page 1

The Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean rim are the main focus for military build-up and securing of partnerships and military alliances.

Strengthening regional ties

Gillard says, "Australia must strengthen its regional engagement to support security and prosperity in the Asian Century."

The promotion of bilateral and multi-lateral military and other partnerships with other countries in the region is central to the government's strategy. They include Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, India, Singapore, Myanmar, the Philippines and Vietnam. The US and Australia are working hard to bring India into the US's sphere. Australia's sale of uranium to India should be viewed in this context.

The US's aim is the containment and isolation of China which are strengthened by its military encirclement of China and military build-up in the region, in particular off the coast of China, with the support of its partners.

The development of these partnerships is part of the drive by the US to pull non-aligned India, Myanmar, Vietnam, Indonesia and other nations into its camp and try to shut China out. Everything is being done to cultivate divisions with China. Needless to say this agenda is not mentioned in the document.

China

Rudd's White Paper took a beligerent stand towards China. "A major power of China's stature can be expected to develop a globally significant military capability befitting its size. But the pace, scope and structure of China's military modernisation have the potential to give its neighbours cause for concern if not carefully explained, and if China does not reach out to others to build confidence regarding its military plans."

It went on to lecture China on what it had to do. This caused considerable offence and concern in China and elsewhere in the region.

The 2013 statement is more diplomatic, even if less honest. It speaks in terms of China as a regional partner and strengthening our relationship through "foreign and security dialogue and military-to-military engagement with China."

"China is playing an increasingly active role in regional affairs and multilateral forums and is building a significant military capability."

"...China's military growth is a natural, legitimate outcome of its growing economy and broadening interests. The rapidity of that military modernisation has given rise to a degree of uncertainty or even sensitivity."

China remains the elephant in the room throughout the document. All sorts of risks and threats to security are identified, but rarely a name put to the sources of them except for Iran, Hezbollah and North Korea which come in for the usual demonisation.

Risks

The document refers to economic and strategic changes but instead of elaborating on that they are, it focuses on a host of risks and how Australia will be prepared to respond to them.

These risks include terrorism; espionage (foreign states and commercial); foreign interference (not explained); attacks on Australia (eg by resource hungry countries) and Australia's interests anywhere in



Australia will continue with its expansion and restructuring of military bases to meet US requirements.

the world; organised crime; cyber warfare; so-called violations of our border integrity (eg asylum seekers, irregular migration patterns); attacks on our resources including offshore; instability in fragile and developing areas; climate change; cross border pandemics; and a range of natural disasters.

"A major war is unlikely," Gillard says. But Australia will still continue preparing for war. There will be an escalation of joint military exercises with the US and our partners. Australia will continue with its expansion and restructuring of military bases to meet US requirements and acquisition of new submarines, frigates, fighter jets, drones and other materiel.

A great deal has been said about financing Australia's military purchases. The 2009 White Paper laid the basis for a massive and relatively rapid build up of Australia's military capability, in particular, Australia's marine capability for off-shore offensive action. The military budget was to be insulated from the cuts being imposed on education, health, social welfare and measures to address climate change.

The Australian government has more than tripled its national intelligence effort (spying) between 2000 and 2012.

Civil and military integration

At present 384 federal police are deployed overseas, "including to promote the role of law and build law enforcement capacity abroad." No information is given regarding their locations.

Their deployment is part of a more recent strategy for taking over "fragile states" (previously referred to as "failed states") and other non-compliant states. The military move is accompanied by a civilian team to take over and re-establish government, law and order, "democratic" electoral processes, public infrastructure and to train and build military forces, etc, in line with Western interests.

In essence it is recolonisation dressed up to look like assistance. Instead of the more direct method of

occupation and direct foreign rule, it provides the necessary structures for foreign corporations to operate freely and puts in place a compliant government. It may be preceded by war as in Afghanistan or by "invitation" as in the case of Australia's intervention in the Solomon Islands.

Aid programs are increasingly being linked to military and other government operations.

Global strategic reordering

There is no doubt that major and, in some instances, rapid global reordering is underway. But the document does not deal with them, let alone how they might affect Australia. China's role is not analysed at all. Africa hardly scores a mention, South America is ignored, significant changes in Europe and much of Asia are not dealt with. Where mention is made, it says little of value.

For example, take the following two paragraphs:

"Beyond the region, we will look also for opportunities to cooperate with other close partners, such as the United Kingdom, Canada and France," and "On the whole, this global strategic reordering is positive. But it brings with it challenges. On the one hand it will enable Australia to reinvigorate traditional relationships, such as those with the United Kingdom, France and other like-minded countries, in the pursuit of common security interests on issues such as cyber."

Those fleeting references to the UK hide significant developments. Just prior to the release of the security statement, Britain's Defence Secretary Liam Fox and Foreign Minister William Hague were in Australia for talks with their Australian counterparts and signed a secretly negotiated Defence and Security Co-operation Treaty on January 18.

One aspect of their discussion was co-operation and cost-cutting on the building of frigates and submarines for the two navies. But there is far more to it than marine vessels. The UK is talking of greater involvement in the Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean rim.

Australia already had strong military and intelligence ties with Britain. This latest development needs to be considered in a wider global context. Britain, although part of the EU, has never fully committed to it. In the inter-imperialist rivalry between the US and the EU, Britain has always been closer to the US and more ready to join US military operations.

The recent announcement of a referendum on Britain's future in the EU by the conservative government and the strengthening of military ties with Australia – the US's deputy sheriff in the Asia-Pacific region – suggest the British government is pulling out of Europe and putting all its eggs in the US imperialist basket. These and other significant global developments are completely ignored or passed over with a fleeting reference in the security document.

This "global strategic reordering" is occurring at a far more rapid pace than anticipated at the time of the White Paper just four years ago. Not just China and India are developing and militarising more rapidly, but China has extended its influence through investment and aid on all five continents.

Inter-imperialist rivalries are taking on new dimensions; the EU and US economies are not only in crisis, but also in relative and absolute decline. The balance of economic power is rapidly shifting and with it political and military developments which do not favour the US or the EU. But nowhere is there discussion of these and the many other aspects of global strategic reordering which the statement says is so important.

Pivot into Asia

"The United States has publicly articulated its 'rebalancing' toward the Asia-Pacific and remains the world's most powerful strategic actor," the security statement says.

Under the heading "Future Directions", the list includes: "Encourage and facilitate the United States to continue playing its role as a stabilising pillar for regional security including by facilitating its rebalancing into the region and supporting the Global Force Posture Review."

This refers to the US's plans (announced in 2011) to build its presence in the Asia Pacific region and Indian Ocean – its "pivot into Asia" – which placed additional demands on Australia.

Australia followed with its own Australian Defence Force Posture Review, to bring policy into line with the US's changes.

Gillard and US President Barack Obama – during his visit to Australia in 2011 – announced the strengthening of the Australia-US alliance. (See "Bringing War to Our Doorstep", www.cpa.org.au, follow peace link.)

The changes to US policy are behind the sudden rush to prepare new security and defence documents, to bring them into line with the US's "pivot" and the new demands being placed on Australia by the US.

What is clear about all the documents – national security statements, White Papers – is that they are sanitised versions, written for public and overseas consumption. The public, as usual, is being kept in the dark as to the real agenda, in particular our loss of sovereignty and independence and ongoing war preparations.

The financing of Australia's reordering of its military and intelligence operations is played down in the security report. The tight fiscal situation is referred to, and the media are playing up recent cuts to the defence budget.

These cuts were not deep and largely illusory. Total spending on the whole area of military, intelligence and other security operations was not hit hard at all. The purchase of some large ticket items was postponed, including some that were not going to be ready on time! Watch this space, as they say, after the elections, when the big cuts will come – not to military operations but to social welfare, health and education.

In essence, the production of new security documents does not change the direction of Australia's foreign or defence policies or weaken Australia's focus on defending US global domination. They do nothing to build peace and security in our region, quite the contrary: they fuel the arms race, increase tensions and further erode Australia's sovereignty. ☘

The feral rich

For too long we've problematised the poor and overlooked the wealthy. It's time to turn the tables, argues **Vanessa Baird**.

Now here's a puzzle. The world economy is in a fix. Most people are getting poorer. Household income is down by more than five percent on last year. That's the global average; in some countries it's much worse. We need 80 million new jobs to get us back to pre-crash employment levels. And the progress on reducing world hunger has stalled, leaving one in seven people without enough to eat.

But for one group of people life just gets better, no matter where they live. Known as HNWI's – High Net Worth Individuals – this global elites' fortunes just keep rising.

The richest man in the world – telecoms tycoon Carlos Slim – is courted after giving a lecture at the UN in Geneva.

In the past year, the 400 richest Americans have seen their wealth grow by US\$200 billion [all amounts in US dollars] – enough to provide every student in the country with free education, except, of course, it isn't spent that way.

During the same period, the 1,000 richest Britons have watched their fortunes swell to record levels – to \$667 billion – a nearly five percent increase on the previous year.

India's ultra-rich increased in number by 30 percent in 2012. Sri Ram Khanna of the Delhi School of Economics observes: "The better-offs continue to prosper in a slowdown and are largely immune to it ... The lower your income, the more you are at risk. It is a global phenomenon."

How did we get here? How did members of this new plutocracy manage to peel themselves off from the rest of humanity, to feed off the crisis?

But first: let's have a look at who they might be.

Rich? Moi?

Meet Carlos Slim Helú, the richest man in the world. A Mexican telecoms tycoon, the portly 72-year-old is worth \$69 billion. Young Carlos was just 12 when he bought his first shares in a bank. He invested heavily during Mexico's 1982 financial crisis, buying into a wide variety of interests, including tobacco. But it was the privatisation of the state telephone utility that really made his fortune. It is said (though he denies this) that his close links with the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) government secured him an effective monopoly. This cosy relationship has persisted, regardless of which party is in power. Today, Slim has so many business interests that it is said you cannot spend a day in Mexico without putting money in his pocket.

Meet Australian mining heiress Gina Rinehart, aged 58. The world's richest woman (worth \$28 billion), she suggests that poor people should "spend less time in the pub" and that the minimum wage should be reduced. She funds climate sceptics and is now trying to use her growing share in the Australian media to fight against carbon cuts. Rinehart, who inherited Hancock Prospecting from her father, is currently engaged in an acrimonious battle involving three of her children and the family fortune.

Slim and Rinehart share the billionaire cachet with around 1,200 individuals in the world today. Beneath them is a legion of

millionaires, now numbering around 29 million. Their wealth comes from various sources. Around a third of the super-rich have inherited it. Two-thirds are described as "self-made". A fair number are maths graduates who have gone into IT and software development. Few are complete rags-to-riches cases; most have comfortable backgrounds and university educations. Financiers are disproportionately well represented among the wealthiest.

As to be expected, many of the rich have been busy augmenting their wealth through the services of hedge fund operators and private equity wizards.

New York City's Upper East Side is now home to a lot of people, many aged under 40, who are making \$20 or \$30 million a year from their hedge funds, reports business journalist Chrystia Freeland in her eye-popping book *Plutocrats: the rise of the new global super rich*.

But, naturally, maintaining the super-rich lifestyle has certain requirements, as Egyptian telecom billionaire Naguib Sawaris explained to Freeland. "To cover the fringe benefits, the plane, the boat, it takes a billion."

Luxury goods and services are in high demand. A London domestic service agency, Bespoke Bureau, placed 430 British-trained butlers last year, catering in particular to demand from Russia, China and the Middle East.

It may come as no surprise that many of the rich do not actually feel wealthy.

Economist Angus Deaton has shown that the richer you are the more covetous you become. Millionaires control 40 percent of the world's wealth. But Fidelity, a consultancy firm that regularly surveys millionaires, finds that whatever their wealth, they generally say they need double that amount. A recent survey of 1,000 millionaires, with an average net worth of \$3 million, revealed that a quarter felt they needed an extra \$5 million to feel wealthy.

How it's happened

To find the origins of today's feral incarnation of wealth we have to go back to the 1980s.

Free market policies were embraced by conservative governments on both sides of the Atlantic which cut through regulation, privatised state utilities and opened up new business opportunities. While most wages grew at a sluggish pace, top executive pay started to race ahead. New laws eroded union power, while globalisation enabled transnational corporations to outsource production to the country that offered the cheapest, usually non-unionised, labour.

Profit margins grew, benefiting shareholders and business owners. This was accompanied by fierce cuts in tax paid by both corporations and high earners.

But the most important factor was the decision to deregulate financial markets, taken initially in New York and London. Pay scales in the finance sector went through the roof, bonus culture went wild, greed was good. As we now know, it was a house of cards.

The political response to the 2008 financial crisis – first to bail out banks, then to cut public spending – has produced the crowning irony of our times: those who made the mess have come out virtually unscathed while the rest of us are being punished.

Even government efforts to stimulate growth have lined the pockets of the already prosperous by pushing up share prices and other assets. In Britain, the richest households were \$561,000 better off as a result of the Bank of England's quantitative easing program; the average increase for the poorest households was \$1,900.



Seriously rich: Louis Vuitton skateboard – \$8,250.

How do they spend it?

A few goods and services catering for the seriously rich:

- Customised 18-carat solid gold mobile phone from Aesir Copenhagen, designed by Yves Beher – **\$60,000**
- Night in the Royal Penthouse of the Hotel President Wilson, Geneva – **\$85,000**
- Meal for two at New York's Masa restaurant – **\$1,500** (base price \$450 per person without drink, tips)
- Crocodile-skin umbrella – **\$55,000**
- Small private jet hire – **\$9,000** per hour
- Mediterranean holiday at Royal Villa, Grand Resort, Lagonisi, Greece – **\$48,000** a night
- Green, orange, and black Renova coloured toilet paper – **\$20**
- Penthouse on the New York's Upper East Side – starting price **\$60 million**
- Trophy hunting in Namibia – **\$16,000** (one giraffe, mounting and shipping extra)
- Crystal ErgoRapido vacuum cleaner (with 3,730 Swarovski crystals) – **\$18,993**
- Louis Vuitton skateboard – **\$8,250**
- Little Gold 24-carat gold vibrator (silent and waterproof) – **\$325**
- Diamond encrusted bluetooth headset – **\$50,000**
- Tub of Harrods Posh Instant noodles – **\$43**
- Luxury frisbee – **\$305**
- Virgin Galactic space trip (per person) – **\$283,000**

The rich can afford to speculate with high-risk, high-return investments. If they are prepared to touch the toxic-looking stuff, the rewards can be thrilling. Vulture funds, for example, buy up debts from entities that are weak, or on the edge of default, at knockdown prices. Dart Management, registered in the Cayman Islands, made a killing on Greek debt it bought at just 35 percent of the nominal price

but which was paid back by the Greek people at a much higher value.

The crime scene is strewn with clues as to why. Exhibit number one: the \$150 million mustered by the British financial services industry to lobby politicians and regulators when the Barclays Libor rate-fixing scandal was provoking renewed calls for tougher rules. Exhibit two: the \$355 million the US finance industry spent on political lobbying in Washington in 2012, second only to the health industry lobby.

Politicians and regulators still persist in arguing in favour of light-touch self-regulation, saying that otherwise the high-finance "talent" will leave their jurisdictions, with a resulting loss in tax revenue. The same argument is used in support of low taxes on corporations and high earners. The corporate rich, especially those linked to finance, have governments in their pockets. To compound the problem, many in government are themselves millionaires and have close links to the industry.

This crisis has many victims, including democracy. British writer and commentator George Monbiot is not exaggerating when he describes the state we are in as one akin to "totalitarian capitalism".

"Rich people are successful and that's good for society"

Underpinning all this is an enduring set of beliefs about the acquisition of wealth. For some, especially those who remember the Cold War, the amassing of personal fortune is synonymous with political freedom. Others simply believe that "rich people deserve their wealth". Some 60 percent of Australians surveyed said they agreed with this statement, as did 58 percent of North Americans. British people were not so sure – at 45 percent – while only 16 percent of Russians and 9 percent of Greeks concurred with the statement.

It is said that "rich people create jobs". Nick Hanauer, a wealthy entrepreneur who founded the online advertising company aQuantive and then sold it to Microsoft for \$6 billion, thinks the idea is absurd. For him it's like saying "squirrels create evolution". Even if entrepreneurs or investors establish and build companies that eventually employ thousands of people, it is the customers and a healthy economic system surrounding the firm that create the jobs, not the owners.

Current reality is undermining the idea that the rich are "wealth creators" who add to the economy in a way that benefits society at large. In booming India, for example, many of the country's new millionaires are not software developers or manufacturing innovators, but what economists call "rent-seekers". Their predominant sources of income are land, natural

The political response to the 2008 financial crisis – first to bail out banks, then to cut public spending – has produced the crowning irony of our times: those who made the mess have come out virtually unscathed while the rest of us are being punished.



resources and government contracts or licences. Rather than create something new, they use contacts and cronyism to get a bigger slice of a pre-existing pie.

It turns out that the rich are actually doing more harm than good. London is rapidly pricing out locals. Homeless people can be seen laying out their cardboard in the doorways of Mayfair's elegant Regency houses. There is a housing crisis partly due to shortage and recession – a million builders are jobless. But there's another reason. The city's real estate has become the number one haven for rich international investors, who are buying almost 60 percent of properties valued at \$3.2 million or more. These buildings are often left empty for months on end but harsh new laws have made squatting an imprisonable offence. Local councils, meanwhile, are breaking up communities and shifting their poorer residents to other cities, which may be hundreds of kilometres away.

What's happening in London is symptomatic of the distortions created by runaway wealth and overheated property values.

Thousands of kilometres away in Peru is another casualty of feral capitalism. Gold is a prize commodity in times of trouble – and mining is bringing fat returns for corporations, investors and purchasers. Peasants have been shot as they protested against gold and other precious-metal mining projects that are poisoning their water and polluting their land.

The rich, says French writer Hervé Kempf, are quite literally destroying the earth. With their investments in oil and mining, the new global oligarchs are making the planet uninhabitable. And, like Gina Rinehart, they are using their clout to block the changes desperately needed to tackle climate change.

What next?

When young rioters rampaged the streets of British cities 18 months ago, looting shops and setting buildings alight, they were severely punished; many received harsh prison sentences. Media reports at the time used the words "feral" and "underclass" to describe them.

But one commentator, Peter Osborne of the usually conservative *Daily Telegraph*, pointed to another group of people that had 'forgotten they have duties as well as rights... the feral rich of Chelsea and Kensington' who had been nurturing "an almost universal culture of selfishness and greed".

There are signs, though, that some natural political allies of the rich – and some rich people themselves – are feeling increasingly uneasy. The perversity of the current situation and its egregious unfairness is damaging capitalism, they say. They are reminded of Marx's prediction about capitalism having within it the seeds of its own destruction.

Mouthing words about equality is not enough

There are even indications of tensions between the millionaires and the billionaires – the latter having become so much richer, so much faster, than the mere millionaires who are struggling to keep up. Equality is a buzz word that has entered all spheres now – including elite gatherings of business and world leaders at the World Economic Forum and in the pages of *The Economist*. Widening inequality is seen as a danger, a source of social unrest that disrupts the workings of capitalism.

This is where hope lies: in disruption from below. Today's inequality is the result of years of deliberate action to crush unions, drive down wages and create a self-serving elite of plutocrats. Mouthing nice words about greater equality is not enough. It has to come with serious redistribution of wealth and a dismantling of the institutions and practices that are perpetuating privilege and inequality. What the young British rioters of 2011 were doing was redistribution in action, but without discipline or a political framework. When Uncut protesters occupy Starbucks coffee shops and turn them into crèches – because that's the kind of thing that's being cut when the coffee giant dodges its taxes – it's smart and appropriate and wins public support. When 800 council workers in Caerphilly, Wales, walk out in protest at a 30 percent hike in pay for their bosses, it shows a significant shift in focus.

The mobilisation around corporate greed and aggressive tax avoidance in various parts of the world is revealing a long list of culprits – Apple, General Electric, Vodafone, Starbucks, Google, Amazon, PepsiCo, Goldman Sachs, Facebook – and generating widespread feelings of anger and revulsion. The mood has changed. In Greece, a country where tax avoidance was previously the social norm, the journalist who was put on trial for revealing the names of 2,000 high level tax dodgers is viewed as a hero by the people.

This coming year will see more austerity measures, as governments try to convince the people that the national deficit is their fault and they must pay for it with their jobs and their public services and their pension and their savings. They may encounter more resistance than they expect. Remember, the political class, like the rich, are in the minority. The plutocracy, and those in power who do their bidding, need the co-operation of the 99 percent, even if they think and behave as if they don't. They detach themselves from the rest of humanity at their peril. And we ignore them – or accept their hideously distorting power – at ours.

New Internationalist ✪

World's 100 richest earned enough to end global poverty four times over



The world's 100 richest people earned a stunning total of US\$240 billion in 2012 – enough money to end extreme poverty worldwide four times over, Oxfam has revealed, adding that the global economic crisis is further enriching the super-rich.

"The richest 1 percent has increased its income by 60 percent in the last 20 years with the financial crisis accelerating rather than slowing the process," while the income of the top 0.01 percent has seen even greater growth, a new Oxfam report said.

For example, the luxury goods market has seen double-digit growth every year since the crisis hit, the report stated. And while the world's 100 richest people earned US\$240 billion last year, people in "extreme poverty" lived on less than US\$1.25 a day.

Oxfam's new report, "The Cost of Inequality: How Wealth and Income Extremes Hurt us All," argues that the extreme concentration of wealth actually hinders the world's ability to reduce poverty.

The report was published before the World Economic Forum in Davos, and calls on world leaders to "end extreme wealth by 2025, and reverse the rapid increase in inequality seen in the majority of countries in the last 20 years."

Oxfam's report argues that extreme wealth is unethical, economically inefficient, politically corrosive, socially divisive and environmentally destructive.

The report proposes a new global deal to world leaders to curb extreme poverty to 1990s levels by:

- closing tax havens, yielding US\$189 billion in additional tax revenues
- reversing regressive forms of taxation
- introducing a global minimum corporation tax rate
- boosting wages proportional to capital returns
- increasing investment in free public services

The problem is a global one, Oxfam said: "In the UK inequality is rapidly returning to levels not seen since the time of Charles Dickens." In the US, the richest 1 percent's share of income has doubled since 1980 from 10 to 20 percent, according to the report. For the top 0.01 percent, their share of national income quadrupled, reaching levels never seen before.

"We can no longer pretend that the creation of wealth for a few will inevitably benefit the many – too often the reverse is true," Executive Director of Oxfam International Jeremy Hobbs said.

Hobbs explained that concentration of wealth in the hands of the top few minimises economic activity, making it harder for others to participate: "From tax havens to weak employment laws, the richest benefit from a global economic system which is rigged in their favor."

The report highlights that politics has become controlled by the super-wealthy, which leads to policies "benefitting the richest few and not the poor majority."

Russia Today ✪

Israel's election ratified the apartheid status quo

Alex Kane

The liberal Zionist wing of the American Jewish community are deluding themselves about the results of the Israeli elections. They see the Israeli elections as a triumph for politicians who are going to revive the peace process with the Palestinians and make vital moves to “save” Israel, in their words, from the scourge of apartheid or a one-state solution with equal rights for all.

But their rhetoric about the outcome of the elections represents a fantasy with little bearing in the reality of what the Israeli government is and will continue to be: a settlement expanding, occupation supporting right-wing government that is committed to the suppression of Palestinian rights within the Green Line and in the West Bank and Gaza. The Israeli government, in other words, will remain committed to the status quo of apartheid.

Both J Street and Americans for Peace Now, two reliable barometers of American liberal Zionist opinion, sent out statements hailing the results of the elections. Israel's election results “provide a new opening for peace and a chance to construct a coalition committed to pursuing a two-state solution. It is important to note that there will be more explicit supporters of the two-state solution in this Knesset than in the last,” crows J Street. “The big winner in the election, the centrist Yesh Atid (There is a Future) party, has already made it clear that one of its key demands is a revival of the peace process. The Labor Party also increased its strength.”

Americans for Peace Now's statement was similar, if a bit more measured. “The elections revealed an Israeli electorate that, like its counterpart in the United States, voted in large numbers for progressive values, for change and for hope – as demonstrated by the strong showing of Yair Lapid's new party,” Debra DeLee, the group's president, said in a statement.

The spin is enough to make your head hurt. What's the reality?

Let's start with Yair Lapid, the handsome Israeli television host whose party took everyone by surprise by garnering 19 seats in the Knesset. Lapid has been derided as a man who has no ideological core, willing to go where the wind blows. And the wind is blowing towards joining a government with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose government pummelled the Gaza Strip, killing over 100 civilians. The talk in the Israeli media is that Lapid will likely be Netanyahu's

foreign minister, able to put a pretty face to the world while defending an ugly system.

Lapid's statements on the Palestinians and where he campaigned tell you all you need to know about this supposedly “centrist” man dedicated to a “peace process” with the Palestinians. The Palestine Centre's Yousef Munnayer points to this statement by Lapid, which shows how the “Liberal Zionist gravitation toward Lapid shows that the movement is by definition more about being anti-Netanyahu than anti-occupation or pro-liberation or anything else”:

“While it may be true that the humane thing is to remove the roadblocks and checkpoints, to stop the occupation immediately, to enable the Palestinians freedom of movement in the territories, to tear down the bloody inhumane wall, to promise them the basic rights ensured to every individual. It's just that I will end up paying for this with my life. Petty of me perhaps to dwell on this point. After all, how important is my life when compared to the chance for peace, justice and equal rights. But still, call me a weakling; call me thickheaded – I don't want to die.”

That statement from Lapid was made in 2007. More recently, he campaigned in the settlement of Ariel, deep into the occupied West Bank and which sits on valuable water reserves stolen from Palestinians. *Haaretz* reported in October 2012 that “Lapid said the Palestinians would have to recognise that the large settlement blocs of Ariel, Gush Etzion and Ma'aleh Adumim would remain within the State of Israel.” All of these settlements are illegal under international law and effectively foreclose the possibility of a contiguous Palestinian state. And as this site recently noted, Lapid recently said that Israel “must at last get rid of the Palestinians and put a fence between us.”

This is hardly a man interested in genuine peace with the Palestinians.

Then there's the notion pushed by J Street and Americans for Peace Now that, contrary to the all the media projections, this was an election that did not see a lurch to the right. It's true that there was not a big leap to the far-right, and you could say that on domestic issues enough Israeli voters went for the centre. But on the other hand, Likud-Yisrael Beiteinu still garnered the most seats and the far-right Jewish Home party snagged 12 Knesset seats. So in fact the right remains in power, still deeply committed to the same destructive policies J Street and Americans for Peace Now deplore.

Munnayer debunks this



fictional take in this piece on The Daily Beast's Open Zion blog:

This election outcome does mean that Israel has shifted right. Some breathed a sigh of relief when Naftali Bennett's Jewish Home party only garnered 11-12 seats instead of the expected 14-15, and believed this meant that the notion that Israel was shifting right was unfounded. Well, there are two significant problems with this. First, the Jewish Home party significantly exceeded the number of seats – seven – that its components (remnants of the National Union and Jewish Home of 2009) received in 2009. The number of seats they received this time would have been higher if not for an increased turnout in the Tel Aviv bubble, where voters are largely oblivious to the occupation but wary of anything religious.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, the number of seats Bennett's party receives is not the only metric of rightward shifts in Israel. Take for example the fact that during the primaries for the Likud – which led the self-proclaimed most pro-settlement government in Israeli history – that party elected even more pro-settler elements into its leadership.

The Likud, which then merged with Avigdor Lieberman, the man who was routinely referred to as “far-right” and “ultra-nationalist” only one election ago, is the largest party in the Israeli political system and now has others to its right. Last, keep in mind that while the members of the governing coalition and some

of their natural allies were openly and staunchly pro-colonisation and even annexation, no party in the Zionist opposition vociferously challenged the Israeli settlement enterprise – with the possible exception of Meretz, which took in a grand total of 7 seats. Those 7 seats, by the way, were considered a remarkable and unexpected triumph. (*The Daily Beast*)

J Street also mentions the Labor Party, which garnered 15 Knesset seats (compared to the party's 13 seats in the previous government), as reason for hope. But the Labor Party leader's Shelly Yachimovich sees no problem with the West Bank colonisation project. “I certainly do not see the settlement project as a sin and a crime,” she told *Haaretz*.

I'll end with both of these organisations' praise for Tzipi Livni. Livni, of course, was foreign minister when Israel waged its punishing assault on the Gaza Strip in 2008-09, killing 1,400 Palestinians. Livni is the woman who famously said that it was “good” to go “wild” on Gaza – which is exactly what the Israelis did, as they rained down white phosphorus on a civilian population and killed civilians left and right.

And before the elections, +972 *Magazine* ran this piece by blogger Idan Landau that conclusively shows why Livni is not going to be the person to bring peace:

Do you remember the Palestine Papers? For a brief moment, in January 2011, the world reeled at

the exposure of documents from the talks held between the PA and Ehud Olmert's government in 2008. The Israeli team at the talks was led by Tzipi Livni, who negotiated with the head of the Palestinian team, Abu Alaa. The embarrassing documents were immediately denied by both parties; after all, they presented the Israeli side as obstinately rejectionist and the Palestinians as sycophantic collaborators.

Livni played a central part in this historical fiasco: it was she who rejected, with unconcealed contempt, Abu Alaa's meek attempt to discuss the partition of Jerusalem (“Huston [sic], we have a problem,” Livni sneered, apparently unaware she was presenting Israel, not the PA, as afloat in outer space.) (+972 *Magazine*)

The liberal American Zionists are utterly delusional, grasping at any straw to try and convince the world that there is a possibility for a two-state solution and that Israel can make peace. But “peace” on Lapid and Livni's terms is no peace at all, let alone justice. Both of those figures who J Street and Americans for Peace Now are celebrating have nothing to offer but continued maintenance of an apartheid status quo. I have the same question that Phil Weiss has: when will liberal Zionists give up their dream? It's dead in the water right now, with no signs of the (mythical) liberal, democratic Israel they love. And the elections don't change that reality one bit.

Information Clearing House ✪

... their rhetoric about the outcome of the elections represents a fantasy with little bearing in the reality of what the Israeli government is and will continue to be: a settlement expanding, occupation supporting right-wing government that is committed to the suppression of Palestinian rights within the Green Line and in the West Bank and Gaza.

Mali, imperialism and "Françafrique"

Emile Schepers

About 3,000 French troops have now entered the war in Mali, at the request of Malian President Dioncounda Traoré. Television shows Malian citizens cheering them as, alongside the Malian army, they head to battle against Islamist rebels who have taken over the entire Northeast of the country and had seemed ready to conquer the rest of it. Yet doubts are expressed by some, given France's recent historical role in West Africa.

After the Second World War, Europe's two major remaining colonial powers, France and the United Kingdom, found that they could no longer rule their African colonies as before. Yet for reasons mostly economic but also geopolitical and nationalistic, they were not willing to give them up entirely, and sought mechanisms to maintain control. This replacement for colonial rule came in the form of what Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, called "neocolonialism". By this Nkrumah meant maintaining effective control by means of outside-directed economic, political, diplomatic and, sometimes, military means.

For France, neocolonialism came in the form of what today is called "Françafrique".

France recognised the nominal independence of African colonies in exchange for which local ruling elites remained subordinate to French interests. French companies got favourable trade and development deals, and the currencies of the former colonies were to be the West African and Central African CFA Francs, with France playing a major role in monetary policy. The French military was allowed access to bases in the African countries, initially to ward off "communist" challenges.

Françafrique involves institutional structures in both France and Africa, and is tightly tied to the French president's office and to French undercover services. Various crimes,



US planes deliver French troops to Mali.

including corruption and murder, have been carried out under its aegis. It has often worked in tandem with the US Central Intelligence Agency and also British and other European intelligence services.

Almost all the French colonies in Africa were at one time or another forced to accept this arrangement. There were exceptions. The president of Guinea, Ahmed Sekou Touré, refused to enter into agreements limiting his country's national sovereignty. In reprisal, departing French colonial employees destroyed as much infrastructure and equipment as they could. In Togo, the first president, Sylvanus Olympio, decided to ally himself with the United States instead of France. His reward, in 1963, was a bullet. The shooter was a Togolese sergeant in the French army, Etienne Eyadéma, whose stated gripe was that Olympio was trying to keep the Togolese army small so as to save money, thus denying jobs to soldiers like himself. To nobody's surprise, Eyadéma became president,

a faithful servant of French neocolonial interests for 38 years.

This was the pattern that followed for decades. African rulers who were faithful to Françafrique, such as President Felix Houphouët-Boigny of Cote-D'Ivoire, stayed in power while those who objected were overthrown. Eventually, this "Françafrique" system came to include other francophone countries in Africa, including Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, that had never been French colonies, and even the former Spanish colony of Equatorial Guinea.

"Françafrique" brought France some very unsavoury friends, many of whom had been soldiers either in the French colonial army or in the French army proper, and who shot their way into power with French connivance. One example of many was Hissene Habré, the dictator of Chad, now awaiting trial for crimes against humanity that cost thousands of innocent lives.

Françafrique ended the life of one of the most outstanding left-wing

leaders of post-colonial Africa. Thomas Sankara became president of Upper Volta in 1983 and changed its name to Burkina Faso. He set out on a socialist program that included land reform and other policies beneficial to the working class and poor farmers. In 1987 Sankara was killed in a French-backed military coup headed by Blaise Compaoré, another ex-soldier of the colonial forces, who is today the president.

The result of all this French "help" for its former African colonies has been that many are among the poorest countries in the world, with abysmal standards of education and health. Yet Mali and its neighbours have fabulous subsoil wealth.

The end of Françafrique has been a major demand of the communist left in France, and also of the African left. In last year's French presidential elections, the victorious Socialist Party candidate and now president, Francois Hollande promised to accomplish this. But the rise of China in African economic affairs, competing with France

for resources and markets, has given Françafrique another reason to exist. A pretext is "the war against terrorism".

The overthrow of Gaddafi of Libya last year can be seen as partly a Françafrique operation. Gaddafi's Libya, with its vast supplies of oil, natural gas and subterranean water, and especially with its ability to out-invest and out-purchase French interests in trade and financial matters, was a very big threat. The president of France at the time, Nicolas Sarkozy, was gung ho to use violence against Gaddafi. The other NATO powers joined in, including especially the United States whose pressure in the United Nations got the disastrous "humanitarian intervention" in Libya underway.

This month the French defence minister, Jean Yves le Drian, had a little slip of the tongue: He swore that France's goal is nothing less than the "reconquest" of the whole of Mali.

Perhaps he meant "liberation," n'est ce pas?

People's World ☪

Native movement sweeps Canada and US

Albert Bender

Idle No More is a Native protest movement that arose in Canada and is now engulfing that country and the US. Native communities from coast to coast in the US have embraced this upheaval. Throughout our country, rallies of hundreds to thousands have performed traditional round dances flash mobs in support of INM, to the beat of drumming, singing and chanting, in malls and other public venues. Some of these activities have taken place without incident and some have not.

In certain parts of the country, most famously Colorado and Minnesota, Native people have been barred from malls and even arrested for just "looking Native American." This is an unspeakable outrage. Police were quoted as telling mall security, "If they look Native American, tell them to leave." This is 1960s Mississippi-style racist police action directed

against American Indian people for simply trying to assemble and exercise free speech in support of INM. Why isn't there a national uproar? Native people of the US are realising that the civil rights progress of the 1960s in many respects bypassed Indigenous citizens.

The INM movement, started by four Indigenous women in November last year and now sweeping the Western Hemisphere at warp speed, was in response to the Canadian government's Omnibus Bill C-45 that would further strip reservations of lands and also environmental protections. This infamous legislation was passed on December 14, after Assembly of First Nations (AFN) representatives were even barred from government meetings on the bill.

This led to a series of rallies and protests and a hunger strike by Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence demanding a meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Steven

Harper and the Governor General on Aboriginal rights. Chief Spence is camping out in a tepee on an ice-covered island in the Ottawa River across from Parliament Hill, Canada's seat of government.

In the meantime, the movement has sparked countless demonstrations and direct actions, including blockades of railways, roads and border crossings in Canada and rallies and flash mobs from coast to coast in the US. Suffice it to say that INM has morphed into the most massive Native American Indian movement in history.

The movement is not new, but is the latest manifestation of centuries-old Native resistance to the exploitation, marginalisation and continuous daily discrimination experienced by Indian citizens. Indeed, Native people have never forgotten that all of Canada and the US, two of the wealthiest nations in the world, is treaty land and that these two nations achieved their economic heights by using the

land and resources of Indigenous nations that was for the most part illegally acquired.

On January 16 this year, INM held a national Day of Action that brought Canadian roads, railways and border crossings to a standstill with blockades. The blockades, though predominantly Indigenous, were often supported by non-Native participation. The movement, which started with Indian sovereignty and environmental protection, is now addressing a panoply of Native issues including poverty, suicides rates, joblessness, health and the protection of women. Media from around the world are covering INM.

But where, we may ask, is US mainstream media coverage of this gigantic political movement? The "Buckskin Curtain" has struck again in an attempt to hide this immense social upheaval. But social media technology has circumvented the US news machine. Indeed, INM support groups have

arisen across the globe – throughout the Western Hemisphere from Alaska to the southernmost part of South America, to Europe, the Middle East, Asia, New Zealand and Australia.

In the latter 20th century the American Indian Movement and other freedom-seeking organisations ushered in a tremendous upsurge of Native activism resulting in the 1970 Mayflower takeover, the 1973 Trail of Broken Treaties, the 1973 Wounded Knee occupation and other defiant actions. Similarly the Idle No More movement may well bring about an even greater upheaval in the struggle for global justice for all oppressed peoples.

This is not just an Indian issue. The movement is reaching out to all justice-minded citizens to participate in INM, because the issues that are being fought for affect all the people of this earth.

People's World ☪

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Humane methods available

A three year study of 6,000 merino sheep in southern Victoria released by the Australian Veterinary Association found that the lowest incidences of flystrike occurred on sheep who had not been mulesed, but who were simply treated with insecticides.

According to University of Melbourne's Dr John Larsen, who ran the study, "In the unmulesed group, that did receive the early treatment insecticide, we had strike rates that were either zero or very low prevalence, less than 2 to 2.5 percent. That

was similar to or better than the sheep that were mulesed."

This revealing study was paid for by Australian Wool Innovation, which is funded by Australian wool growers and tax-payers. Yet surprisingly, AWI have not acted to publicise the results of this study.

The Cooperative Research Centre for Sheep Innovation (CRC) has promoted success stories of ending mulesing through selective breeding along with running workshops on how wool growers can stop mulesing. And many farmers have chosen to end mulesing with great success using insecticides, improved husbandry and selective breeding. Now this study has confirmed that early application of insecticides can work better than the painful mulesing mutilation.

With scientific findings and success stories showing that there are humane methods available *right now* – there can surely be little stalling time left for AWI. Their dirty little secret is coming out – mulesing is so dead it's attracting even more flies than normal.

Claire Fryer
PETA Australia

Peace struggle continues

I was very fortunate that Bob Small, a returned Digger from World War I, was my teacher for the latter part of 1938. Bob Small told us about the terrible suffering some ex-servicemen endured.

I remember him telling the class about the soldier who was gassed and had to live in a bath of oil, and another soldier who spent the day twisting a piece of cotton. He also told us that he had difficulty falling asleep and had to take sleeping powders to induce sleep.

Every Friday afternoon he selected a subject for us to debate. I seemed to have an aptitude for this. Several years later at the Sydney Domain, I heard Marxist speakers explaining the economic causes of war.

In 1956, I received a prize from the Peace Movement for collecting over 1,000 signatures for a petition to ban thermo nuclear weapons.

The campaign for this worthy objective is still in progress and will continue to be until world public opinion compels their governments

to stop their production and destroy existing stock piles.

The survival of the human race must obviously take precedence over the manufacturers of the means of destruction.

Bernie Rosen
Sydney

A popular coalition partner

Your article (issue 1573) on Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Winnipeg is an excellent article. Someone should write the whole episode on this period. The conclusion of the Dictatorship

of the Proletariat in 1991 was as the present-day President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin stated, a catastrophe.

Our allies in WW2 saw that country devastated losing millions of its citizens, regrouping and building one of the greatest countries on earth with its mineral wealth intact. The death of Stalin saw its demise: capitalism has won the cold war.

Stalin was no angel but their leaders thereafter, had no will to complete the building of communism. There is no reason why the CPA cannot be a popular coalition partner if it meant governing Australia.

Erwin Williamson
SA

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

Write a letter to the Editor

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Working poverty and bombing the Moon

Everything that's wrong with capitalism is encompassed in the current controversy over cutting single mothers' welfare payments. The fact that it is based on the unfounded belief that unemployed people are unemployed by choice, for starters.

Anyone who has been unemployed or had a family member in that position knows that no one willingly endures the constant harassment by Centrelink for pitifully little money in preference to working. The fact is that Centrelink has no jobs to offer the unemployed, and its training programs to make people "job ready" are a demeaning farce.

But with government ministers and senior public servants convinced that unemployed people are nothing more than "dole bludgers", it is no wonder that Centrelink staff have been persuaded to see their role as getting people off the unemployment lists by whatever means they can – short of providing them with jobs, which they can't.

Jenny Macklin, the extremely well-paid Minister for Families, justified her recent assault on single mothers' benefits with the inevitable statement "We have to get people off benefits". But did she announce funding for a job creation project? No, she did not. She simply cut their benefits by \$60 to \$100 a week.

Employers, who make up Jenny Macklin's principal constituency, have a long tradition of trying to starve workers into submission. It's one of their favourite tactics. She didn't care where those single mothers went when they could no longer feed their child or children on the meagre handout she allowed them. That was not her problem.

All she had to do was report to the House the good news that thanks to her efforts the number of single parents on benefits had declined. Hurrah!

However, news sources and relief agencies report a surge in single mothers seeking jobs in brothels and strip clubs since Ms Macklin's heartless cuts came into effect. Capitalism's beloved "market forces" provide no other means for unqualified female workers to earn enough to raise a child.

What a contrast with socialism! In the Soviet Union (and the socialist countries of Eastern Europe) costs were much lower: education and health care were free, rent was pegged at not more than four percent of weekly income, and everyone was *guaranteed* a job.

When I was a young chap, I vividly remember seeing a film at the local cinema that opened with a shot of some well-known London landmark – Big Ben, Nelson's Column, something like that – over which was superimposed a prominent title telling us where we were. If it had been an American film the title would probably have said "London, England" in case viewer thought it was supposed to be London Texas, presumably.

But it was an English film so the title read "LONDON – Seat of Empire". Gosh, how impressive, eh?

Today, however, such a title would be more likely to read LONDON – Seat of poverty and despair. The NHS, once the jewel in the county's welfare crown, is being dismantled by the Tory-dominated government. In the documentary film

Sicko, the director Michael Moore quizzed a group of Americans living in London about the NHS. Not one of them criticised it as "socialised medicine", the US health industry's *bête noir*. Instead they could not praise the government-funded health system enough.

Meanwhile, students are being priced out of an education, jobs are disappearing by the thousand, social divisions within society are widening alarmingly. The Tory-dominated government's only response has been to more heavily arm the police and increase their powers to spy on the population (on the grounds that it's necessary to combat terrorism and paedophiles!).

In its latest report, *Monitoring Poverty*, Britain's New Policy Institute says over six million people in Britain, in *working* households, are living in poverty *in addition to* 5.1 million people in workless households also living in poverty.

Dave Prentis, the General Secretary of the public sector union Unison, commented that "faced with no job, many [people] are being forced to grab whatever they can get – low-paid, part-time work that doesn't recognise their skills or experience."

"It is a blight on this country that we have so many living with in-work poverty. The government should stop these damaging cuts, bring in the living wage, and create long-term sustainable jobs through investment in housing and infrastructure."

Did you see that news report at the end of last year about the secret US plan to set off a nuclear bomb on the Moon? The crack-brained



In the UK social divisions within society are widening alarmingly.

plot was hatched by US Cold War nutters in response to the Soviet Union's launching of Sputnik 1 in October 1957. Until then they had smugly believed that although the Russians also had the Bomb, they lacked a credible means to deliver it to targets in the USA. The Americans, on the other hand, had a huge fleet of long-range jet bombers stationed all around the USSR and constantly on instant alert to fly missions to "nuke" Soviet cities.

With the launch of Sputnik, the USSR reduced all that costly preparation for an airborne nuclear attack to naught. It was now obvious to everyone that the "backward" Russians could hit any city or military installation in the USA at will, and there was nothing the Yanks could do to stop it.

And so "Project A119" was born. Its innocuous cover identity was "A Study of Lunar Research Flights", but its real function, as related to Associated Press by 85 year-old US physicist Leonard Reiffel, was to intimidate the Soviet Union.

What was planned was simple enough: a US missile carrying a nuclear warhead would be launched from a secret location and aimed at the Moon. The warhead would detonate on impact with the Moon, providing a "magnificent nuclear flash" visible from Earth that would serve to terrify the Soviet Union and boost US confidence.

They would have liked to send a hydrogen bomb but reluctantly concluded that the weight was too great to carry at that time the 238,000 miles to the Moon. Reiffel did not reveal why the project was eventually scotched, but common sense probably had something to do with it. ☺



Rob Gowland
previews
ABC & SBS
Public Television

Sunday February 10 –
Saturday February 16

Ignorance and extreme religious belief go together so frequently that one can easily forget that most of the great religious teachers did *not* preach intolerance. That was usually the work of their followers. For them, intolerance was a form of affirmation that they were following the *true* god and all others were despised as frauds and vermin.

In poverty-stricken societies, where ignorance is rife and the political leadership likes it that way because it helps to keep social unrest channelled in manageable directions, ghastly crimes are sanctioned in the name of religion and "honour". The death by stoning of adulterous women (but not men) or chopping the hands off thieves or trade unionists in lands ruled by the oil princes spring to mind.

In Pakistan this barbarity takes a peculiar and vicious form: the throwing of acid into the face of a woman who is deemed to have "dishonoured" her husband. The acid is thrown by the husband who claims to have been "wronged", or often by his relative, a mother-in-law or a sister or brother.

In *Saving Face* (ABC2 Sunday February 10 at 8.30pm) one of the unfortunate victims of this practice tells how her mother-in-law threw acid in her face then poured kerosene on her and set it alight. Her husband denies that anyone did anything to her: she set herself alight, is his story.

Every year in Pakistan at least 100 people (mostly women) are the victims of brutal acid attacks. Horribly scarred, often survivors have to go on living with the husband and family

that scarred them, for there are few alternatives.

Now the victims themselves have established an organisation of survivors of acid attacks, where they can remove the scarves that cover their disfigurement and not feel embarrassed, can talk to people who have suffered as they have.

The film is directed by Oscar-winning filmmaker Daniel Junge and Emmy-award winning Pakistani director Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy. It won the 2012 Academy Award for Best Documentary Short.

The ABC's two current panel games are both screened on ABC1 on Wednesday nights, though fortunately at different times: *Qi*, hosted by Stephen Fry, is on ABC1 at 8.00pm while the somewhat less interesting *Would I Lie To You?*, hosted by Rob Brydon, goes to air at 9.30pm.

Just to confuse things, Rob Brydon and his two team captains David Mitchell and Lee Mack often are guests on the panel of *Qi*.

Never mind, they're all funny guys and while you might not learn much from *Would I Lie To You?* it can still be fun to watch some clever folk being witty. And for old fogies like myself, these two shows do capture some of the mood and spirit of BBC radio classics like *My Word* and *My Music*.

Gynaecologists may get the big money, but most of the work and most of the actual care in an obstetrics ward is provided by the nursing staff, who are not paid nearly as much.

The new British observational documentary series *The Midwives* (ABC1 Thursdays from February 14 at 9.30pm) was filmed in the Central Delivery Unit at Saint Mary's Hospital in Manchester, designated (for reasons that are not explained) as "one of the busiest labour wards in the UK".

To become a midwife in the UK, trainees undertake a three-year course and clock up 40 births under supervision. After that they are on their own.

In six parts, this series was filmed over six months and gets to know the midwives, the experienced old hands and the young women who are new to the profession. There



David Mitchell, Rob Brydon (host) and Lee Mack – *Would I Lie To You?*, ABC1 on Wednesday nights at 9.30pm.

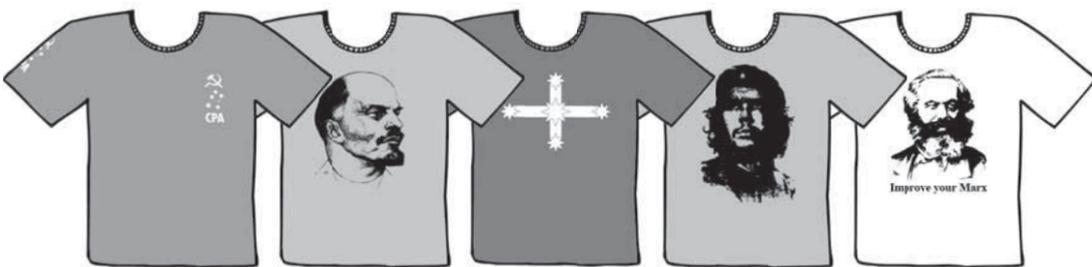
is plenty of real life drama as the midwives are confronted with a mixture of straightforward and high risk deliveries.

The quality of an observational documentary is largely determined by the choice of subject, and in that regard *The Midwives* has been fortunate. The series is informative and instructive.

This week's episode in *The Doctor Blake Mysteries* (ABC1 Friday February 15 at 8.30pm) sees a straight-forward fatal drink-driving accident turn into a case of snakebite, a vacuum cleaner salesman's convention and a locked cellar room.

As usual, Chief Superintendent Lawson (Joel Tobeck) goes for the obvious, while the ever-curious Dr Blake (Craig McLachlan) wants to dig deeper.

I find this series to be well-crafted, well-scripted and well acted. It merely proves something we already knew: that in the field of television drama we can make shows as good as anything from abroad.



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February 1

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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;
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Inauguration Day: Two Nobel Laureates, drones apart

One day ...

Children at school will ask:

What is war?

You will answer them.

You will tell them:

Those words are not used any more.

Like stagecoaches, galleys or slavery.

Words no longer meaningful.

Martin Luther King,
January 15 1929 – April 4 1968



Martin Luther King
and Barack Obama

Felicity Arbuthnot

Oh the cynicism. The man whose words have rung down over four decades, encapsulating a non-violent demand for peace, equality and fairness: "I have a dream" has again been resurrected as President Obama's philosophical icon.

In the most blatant act of symbolism, as Africa is now threatened by a President who touted the importance of his African roots four years ago, Obama reaffirmed his Presidential oath on both Abraham Lincoln's Bible – and that of Martin Luther King – on the day dedicated to Martin Luther King.

In truth, the ceremony was a bit of a sham. The President was sworn in the day before in a private ceremony in the White House, with, according to the *New York Times*, "Michelle Obama holding the family Bible for the ceremony," as their daughters, Malia and Sasha stood beside their father in the Blue Room as he recited the 35 word oath in the Constitution," as four years ago, administered by Chief Justice John G Roberts. "About a dozen relatives of the Obamas and Jane Roberts, the Justice's wife, watched, out of camera range."

Back on the January 20, 2009, the inaugural address contained some fine words – proven to be empty:

"The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation, the

God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness ... from the grandest capitals to the small village where my father was born ... know that America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and we are ready to lead once more (but) power ... does not entitle us to do as we please ..."

Obama assured, "To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect." People would be judged on: "... what you can build, not what you destroy."

Tell that to the droned and dismembered of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, the ruined of Libya, Syria, Iraq, the fearful and threatened in Iran and now those in Africa in villages similar to where "my father was born."

Six months later in Cairo, he avowed: "I have come here to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world ... I have known Islam on three continents."

It seems he is now prepared to blow it up on three continents.

The scale of human carnage under the Nobel Peace Laureate President is astounding, shaming and chilling: Bush's roughly 24,000 air strikes in seven years from 2002 to 2008 amounted to an air strike about every three hours, while Obama's 20,130 in four years add up to one every one and three quarter hours.

The Obama Administration is responsible for at least 18,274 air strikes in Afghanistan since 2009, at least 1,160 by pilotless drones. At least 116 air strikes were conducted in Iraq in 2009, and in Libya approximately 1,460 of NATO's 7,700 strikes in 2011 were US bombings.

There is also thought to be a five-fold increase in air and drone strikes over George W Bush's second term's murderous record in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia.

The man who swore on Martin Luther King Junior's Bible is reported as personally deciding, weekly, who will be dismembered-by-drone, carried out by a youth at a computer screen around six thousand miles away. No law, no trial, just extrajudicial murder or mass murder of "suspected Islamic militants" – no questions ever asked, even when they are later proved to be baby, toddler or kindergarten age "militants".

But assassinations are now the sickening norm, as also Osama bin Laden, then allegedly Colonel Gaddafi, the latter after US Ambassador Christopher Stevens arrived in Libya with a cargo ship of munitions and mercenaries. Both "bodies" disappeared, even death's dignities denied.

Terrorist actions

On Sunday, January 20, as the President swore the solemn oath to "... preserve and protect ..." nine Yemenis were summarily executed by a US drone. The "indispensable nation" struck again.

As the New Year was celebrated, two more election promises were reduced to dust. The President signed into law the 2013 National Defence Authorisation Act, blocking any attempt to close Gulag Guantanamo. There are more funds for war in Afghanistan – which might have a US presence until 2025 – or forever, depending on your view – and of course the inhuman sanctions on Iran with the risk of six million patients' deaths, due to lack of medical essentials, were tightened.

Barak Obama's initial nomination at the Democratic convention was on the 45th anniversary of King's "I have a dream" speech. King had called America "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world."

What an irony that his memory is being used by a man who lauds his apparent assassination of Osama bin Laden and whose Secretary of State laughs hilariously at the appalling death of Libya's sovereign leader saying, "We came, we saw, he died."

King, in his speech believed that "With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood ..."

Martin Luther King was a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate. It has to be wondered if the current White House Nobel recipient read this passage from Dr King's acceptance speech (December 11, 1964).

"So we must fix our vision not merely on the negative expulsion of war, but upon the positive affirmation of peace. We must see that peace represents a sweeter music, a cosmic melody that is far superior to the discords of war. Somehow we must transform the dynamics of the world power struggle from the negative nuclear arms race, which no one can win, to a positive contest to harness man's creative genius for the purpose of making peace and prosperity a reality for all of the nations of the world. In short, we must shift the arms race into a 'peace race.'"

It would seem that in his desecration of Iraq, even George W Bush manipulated Dr King's words in world class political cynicism. In a carefully choreographed clip which went around the world, on June 28, 2004, Condoleezza Rice passed Bush a note at the NATO summit opening session in Turkey, regarding Iraq's "free and democratic elections." It read:

"Mr President, Iraq is sovereign, the letter was passed from (Iraq's US 'Viceroy' Paul Bremer) at 10.26 am Iraq time, Condi."

Bush scrawled back: "Let freedom ring."

Dr King's last words in his "Dream" speech are: "...from every mountainside, let freedom ring."

The might of Presidents have seemingly hijacked the dream of an assassinated dreamer. Humanity is surely shamed.

Pravda Ru 🇺🇸



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