



Floods, climate change and the future

Peter Mac

The current floods in Queensland and northern NSW have caused mass evacuations and four deaths. Livestock and crop losses are huge. In Bundaberg alone, more than 2,000 homes were inundated, 40 beyond repair. Roads, rail lines, electricity and fresh water services have been cut. The estimated damage bill in Queensland is well past the billion dollar mark.

The response of communities, volunteers, the police and the armed services has been tremendous. Nevertheless, there are very serious long-term implications arising from these events for residents in the affected areas and for the Australian people as a whole, particularly regarding the response of the insurance industry and the state governments to the crisis.

Insurance manoeuvres

After the 2011 floods, insurance companies disputed hundreds of claims, sometimes arguing that the validity of a claim depended on whether floods were involved or just excessive rain.

The flood definition has now been amended, in order to avoid such disputes. However, plenty of claims are still disputed for other reasons, and at least one insurance company is refusing to insure homes in flood-affected Roma and Emerald. Premiums for flood-prone areas are now beyond the reach of many residents. Coverage for one home was reported to have risen from \$950 before the 2011 floods to \$2,200 per annum, with a claim limit of \$15,000.

One insurance executive has estimated that only one in four victims of the current crisis has flood insurance. Moreover, some companies are extending the higher premium rates to homes beyond flood-affected areas. Paul Pisasale, mayor of Ipswich, claims his premiums have skyrocketed, even though his own house is on the city's highest ground.

And finally, in some areas insurance companies are refusing to offer coverage at all, leaving residents with the bitter choice of moving out or facing disaster.

The insurance industry has complained bitterly that the damage bill

would not have been nearly as high if more weirs, barrages and levees had been constructed by government. That's undoubtedly true, but it doesn't excuse insurance companies from meeting the responsibilities to their clients.

What are the governments doing?

Many questions concerning governments arise from the current flood crisis, for example how developers got governments to permit the construction of so many houses in flood-risk areas.

After the 2011 floods, the federal government's National Disaster Insurance Review recommended that it bear part of the cost of providing cover for existing flood-prone homes.

However, this has not been implemented. Nor has the Queensland premier's suggestion of the reintroduction of a nationwide flood levy to subsidise reconstruction works. A far better solution would be for the government to pay for the works by reallocating funds set aside for questionable projects, and to set up a national insurance scheme offering low-cost basic home insurance coverage.

Insurance companies should be required by law to offer coverage to any homes that have been insured to date, with premiums capped, until the homes are relocated or rebuilt on higher ground. According to the *Australian Financial Review*, high risk flood cover for some properties can rise to \$20,000 per annum, yet 85 percent of households now have flood insurance, and insurance executives have admitted privately that more than 90 percent of those homes do not carry virtually no risk of flooding.

Governments will also need to review the extent of flood-prone areas, and to assist in the relocation of houses from those locations to higher ground. But governments must not only deal with the current situation, but also long-term implications.

The longer term starts now

The Queensland and NSW premiers have assiduously organised relief efforts and visited flood-hit



areas – after all, that's part of their job – but neither are willing to discuss the long-term implications.

Last week NSW premier Barry O'Farrell lost his temper during a TV interview, claiming he should not have to respond to questions about climate change while he was dealing with a flood crisis. "Gimme a break", he snarled.

But even as he spoke, emergency crews were struggling to contain fierce bushfires in Victoria. Last month the national average temperature was a record 36.9 degrees and the highest national daily temperature for the month was 40.3 degrees, also a record. When interviewed on ABC TV recently, a Queensland man said that in the last ten years his town had experienced "once in a hundred year" weather events six times. The increasing frequency and ferocity of

Australia's floods and fires are entirely consistent with climatologists' predictions concerning climate change and extreme weather events.

The Queensland coast now has many new ports for loading mining cargoes, particularly coal. At the same time the federal government has been struggling to dissuade the UN from declaring the Great Barrier Reef an endangered World Heritage site because of the extra shipping and pollution from the ports.

Meanwhile, mining corporations have been discharging waste water from their mines into the floods. The Queensland Environment Minister denied this had contributed to the crisis, and Premier Campbell Newman declared proudly: "We're in the coal business." Queensland homes will be subject to temporary water restrictions, but not industry.

The Greens have recommended the imposition of a 50 percent tax on every dollar earned over one million dollars, to cover reconstruction costs. In contrast, when federal opposition leader Tony Abbott publicly discussed the flood crisis last week he said virtually nothing about dealing with national emergencies, except that he would be better at the job than the current prime minister.

If the Gillard government wins September's federal election there is at least a chance that some action will be taken to address the long-term issues of climate change, especially if the government still depends on a coalition with the Greens and independents. However, if the conservative coalition takes power the prospects for such action are virtually nil. We must take every action to ensure that doesn't happen. ✪

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Guardian

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Gillard's election call

The corporate media have talked about little else since Prime Minister Gillard announced that the federal election will take place on September 14. Gillard used her National Press Club speech last week to spring the news. She said the record long lead-in had been decided upon so as to provide a more stable environment for "... individuals and business, investors and consumers, to plan their year", free from "... speculation about election timing." Speculation about the date has certainly been short-circuited but musing on the motives behind the announcement appears to have completely overtaken the commentariat. The distracted atmosphere has been heightened by questioning of the timing of the resignations in recent days of two high-ranking ministers in the Gillard government.

Maybe the announcement was intended to provide a bit of cover for the bombshell to be dropped the following day – the arrest of Craig Thomson and his extradition to Victoria to face a staggering 149 charges relating to the alleged misuse of Health Services Union funds. Liberal Senator Eric Abetz insists Gillard had prior knowledge of the arrest and it is true that the event would have featured more prominently in the media if so many column inches weren't devoted to the surprise election announcement. There can be little doubt, however, that the HSU scandal will drag on with the Opposition doing its best to link the corruption to the way the ALP works. Unfortunately for the union movement, there will be a lot of truth in what they say and it points to the urgent need for the cutting of unions' party affiliations in the interest of workers.

Others believe the announcement was supposed to draw attention away from the rest of the content of the National Press Club speech itself – the lack of detail about the cuts to be made in the May budget, the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the National Plan for School Improvement, which she says is being pursued to ensure "... quality teaching and learning, power for principals, new transparency on results and in return, the future funding arrangements which will meet the needs of every student." Gillard clearly hasn't finished with market-based "reforms" for education.

Many are convinced Gillard's strategy team sprang the early announcement to thwart pro-Rudd forces and any plans they might have had to challenge one more time for the leadership. Gillard's popularity in the polls is alarmingly low and some polling suggests Labor could lose the election by a margin of 37 seats. And so the speculation goes on.

The supposed "masters" of this political process, the voters, are being groomed by the media industrial complex to exercise their "choice" – more neo-liberal social engineering under Labor or even harsher austerity and theft under the Coalition. Many will protest this lack of real choice and vote Green despite the compromises that party made in its period of loose coalition with Labor. A real choice, one that would seriously challenge the dominance of the pro-corporate, pro-wealth agenda, one that will empower workers and communities rather than the monopolies, will not be ready to take part in September's contest.

The reasons for this lack of readiness read like a catalogue of the failings of the left in Australia in recent decades – a lack of focus on the organisation of the working class, a lack of unity about the need for socialism, a lack of unity in action around agreed campaigns. The Communist Party has not been influential enough to make a big impact on that situation. A strong Communist Party in a strong united front movement is therefore a top priority for serving up a challenge to capitalism and imperialism inside parliament and, more importantly, outside.

If readers of *The Guardian* have been considering joining the Communist Party of Australia, the time is ripe to do it. If ever we are to move beyond the tweedledum-tweedledee "choice" before the people of Australia at present, a bigger and more influential CPA is key.

PRESS FUND

During the recent floods the community spirit was exemplary, with neighbour helping neighbour in every town, and hundreds of volunteers rolling up their sleeves to help flood victims, often complete strangers. In its own small way the work of producing *The Guardian* depends on the same qualities, as much of our work is done by volunteers whose work is unseen but essential to production of the paper. Unlike the mass media we also depend on you, our readers, for contributions to the Press Fund, which help to defray our operating costs. So please, if you possibly can send us in something for the next issue. Many thanks to our contributors this week, as follows:

Maritime Branch, in memory of Mick Power, \$150

Eric Durston \$10, "Round Figure" \$10, Eileen Whitehead \$10

This week's total: \$180 Progressive total: \$220

Demand freedom and justice for David Ravelo

Ravelo is a member of Colombia's Regional Human Rights Corporation and was honoured by the Catholic Diocese of Barrancabermeja for his defence of human rights. He was recently convicted to 18 years in prison for what is widely regarded as a sham trial by national and international human rights organisations. The North American Committee to Free David Ravelo has drafted a sign-on letter reprinted below.

Letter

Dr Eduardo Montealegre Lynett,
Fiscal General de la Nación,
Fiscalía General,
Dg. 22B No. 52-01
(Ciudad Salitre)Edf. C P.4,
Bogotá, Colombia

Dear Dr Montealegre,

This letter concerns David Ravelo who was arrested on September 14, 2010. He is presently wrongly held by your government at La Picota Prison in Bogota. It was announced on December 11, 2012 that he had been convicted of "aggravated homicide" and sentenced to 18 years in prison. Those of us signing this letter regard the judicial process delivering Mr

Ravelo to a long prison term as unjust and erroneous.

The pretext for David Ravelo's arrest and conviction is the allegation he participated in the murder in 1991 of David Núñez Cala, Secretary of Public Works in Barrancabermeja. That charge is false. David Ravelo is innocent. He must be released from prison.

Both Mr Ravelo's family and his colleagues at the CREDHOS human rights organisation in Barrancabermeja have long been subjected to death threats. The Colombian government must guarantee their safety.

Your government's purpose in inflicting a long prison sentence on David Ravelo, we suspect, was to silence a recognised defender of human rights. David Ravelo was instrumental in publicising abuses and violence in Barrancabermeja at the hands of murderous paramilitary criminals.

Conduct of Mr. Ravelo's trial was scandalous. The case against him rested on accusations from two jailed paramilitary murderers who, by testifying, gained reductions in their sentences.

Witness Orlando Noguera testified that the accusers tried to bribe him to corroborate their story. Over 30 witnesses prepared to defend David

Ravelo were prevented from testifying at his trial.

Corruption and fakery marking David Ravelo's trial is epitomised in the role played by prosecutor William Pacheco Granados. In 1991, Granados was a police lieutenant in Armenia. There, he helped arrange for the forced disappearance of Guillermo Hurtado Parra. Colombian law bans perpetrators of such crimes from service as a public official. Yet the Colombian state used Pacheco Granados, designated as "Prosecutor 22 of the National Anti-Terrorist Unit," as its agent in putting David Ravelo in prison.

Prosecutor Pacheco Granados is a criminal. David Ravelo is neither a criminal nor a terrorist. He must be freed.

The world is watching. United Nations human rights specialists and the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights have come to David Ravelo's defence. In December, 2012, British parliamentarians denounced his trial and conviction.

Sincerely yours,

(name, address, email, affiliation)

To cut and paste this letter into an email go to cpa.org.au and click on the "Free David Ravelo" link. ☺

The empire goes on the attack

Carolus Wimmer,
Political Bureau, Communist
Party of Venezuela

The pro-imperialist rightwing is looking for legalistic subterfuges to twist the sovereign will of the people and attack President Chávez. For the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV) there is no doubt that the new presidential term of President Hugo Chávez, which is to last six years, begins today, January 10. Regarding what might happen now that the head of state has announced that he cannot attend the swearing in at the National Assembly, we emphasize that the sovereign will of the people is the central element of any interpretation of what can be done about it.

President Chávez has been re-elected by a majority of voters, which is the embodiment of popular sovereignty constitutionally established in Article 5, which literally states that "sovereignty resides in

the people and is not transferable." Thus both in fact and in point of law the will of the people is clearly expressed that their president is and will continue to be Hugo Chávez.

The govt continues

We affirm that the current period ends today, and today a new period begins for which President Chávez was re-elected by the overwhelming will of the Venezuelan people. Therefore, there is continuity of governance, although eventually the ceremonial act of swearing in will have to take place before the Supreme Justice Tribune, at a later date.

Regarding the continuity of current cabinet of ministers, we stress that having continuity in governance, if the President ratifies his cabinet or not – in part or in its entirety – is an act that can be performed at any time.

A section of the self-styled Democratic Unity Table (MUD) – in reality this is a right-wing table

– has called for the destabilisation of the revolutionary process, calling for a general strike that undoubtedly is following the directives from US imperialism. Washington has avoided a public statement on the dispute. "We hope that any transition in Venezuela is democratic, legal, constitutional and transparent," the State Department's Latin America spokesperson William Ostick told the Efe news agency. But we know that in reality they want a transition to the past: without Chávez, without a conscious people active in the Bolivarian process, a Venezuela controlled by imperialism, a Latin America divided, etc.

Revolutionary and anti-imperialist forces must respond forcefully and with organisation to defend the popular will expressed on October 7 [date of national election]. We also call upon the revolutionary forces of the continent to express their solidarity in various ways with President Chávez and the Bolivarian process. ☺

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Education and "philanthropy"

Bob Briton

The haggling over education funding between the federal and state governments is about to get boisterous as the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting looms in April. The tussle takes place in the shadow of the release last year of the Gonski report. That document highlighted a decline in student performance over the last decade and recommended a \$6.5 billion boost to disadvantaged schools. Supporters of public education assume that its application would provide a life line for their funds-starved schools. A less well-reported aspect of the Gonski prescription for closing the outcomes gap is an increased role for philanthropy from the private, including the corporate, sector. It is a measure of the desperation in the community over schools funding that there is little debate over the nature of this "philanthropy".

A piece in The Australian Financial Review last week by Annemarie Rolls lifted the lid part way. The author is chief executive of Schools Connect Australia (formerly known as Business Working with Education Foundation). According to its website, Schools Connect Australia's objectives are to:

- broker and facilitate new partnerships
- advise on investment strategies in education
- manage corporate engagement in education
- evaluate partnerships that will see successful outcomes for all parties.

"We create sustainable partnerships to enrich student opportunities, outcomes and school capacity. We ensure these partnerships meet the needs of all partners, inspire innovation and involve rigorous evaluation to allow partners to test whether their goals are being achieved."

According to Schools Connect Australia, a major hurdle to forming such partnerships, mentoring and other schemes between business and public schools are the bureaucratic requirements, including complex tax arrangements. But what are the supposed benefits of this involvement?

"Such partnerships bring cultural capital – the sort of opportunities and aspirational beliefs – children in disadvantaged homes often miss. By injecting extra expertise into schools to help teachers, partnerships can make school a more meaningful and exciting place, not only for students disengaged from learning but for all students."

The line between philanthropy and middle class prejudice is fine in the material posted to the Schools Connect website. A strong assumption in it is that corporations are uniquely placed to make school curricula more relevant and interesting. This capacity for fun might come as a surprise to workers employed by those same corporations to do tedious, repetitive work!

An example of the corporate sector's contribution to schools is the Inspired by Industry pilot program launched last June. The program matches up IBM Australia Ltd, HJ Heinz Company Australia Ltd, Energy Australia Pty Ltd, Bionics Institute and Monash University (Operations Research industry projects) with Gleneagles Secondary College, Alkira Secondary College and Keysborough Secondary College in Victoria. The Baillieu government is very strong on promoting the school/big business nexus.

In the program "... teachers and their partners work together to co-design more engaging and relevant curriculum units for students. By integrating industry-based experiences into the teaching of science and maths, this project aims to strengthen the real world relevance of the science and maths curriculum in schools."

So what's in it for the growing list of companies expected to become philanthropic sponsors of Australian schools? Nothing but a warm inner glow and the feeling that they have contributed somehow to the future health of the country's manufacturing, research, agricultural and other sectors. That's if the companies and their promoters are to be believed.

In Adelaide, US arms manufacturer Raytheon sponsors a local public school at Aberfoyle Park by, among other gestures, supplying laptop computers to senior students. Other military industry partnerships



are being rolled out. The companies are being helped by a special curriculum to teach the sorts of skills these transnationals may need in the workplace but they deny any "hearts and minds" motivation. Few are inclined to believe them.

The question of the intentions of philanthropy is not new. "Like the system of patronage that served the arts and charity from the Renaissance through the 18th century, private foundations have the rarest privilege of all: they do not have to explain themselves. They do not have to justify the origins of their wealth, or how they use that wealth, or what the real benefit of their largesse is," as US commentator Curtis White wrote in Jacobin magazine lately. And how do beneficiaries keep benefactors happy to ensure a continued income stream from that source?

Philanthropy and other efforts to join schools and corporations at the hip are far from new, either. Big business and its requirements have long been considered the "real world" to which all other institutions must be bent in capitalist societies. The DINTA program in pre-Nazi Germany became the model for the whole society under Hitler. Western Electric and

the Goodyear Tyre Company in the US promoted similar programs. The "Hawthorn Experiments" carried out by Western Electric also pioneered the idea of melding education and the changing requirements of industry.

The British Institute of Industrial Psychology produced a report called The Problem of Incentives in Industry in the 1930s, which furnished a list of exploitable non-commercial incentives for workers. They included: "Interest and Pride in the Work, the Incentive of Appreciation, the Incentive of Knowledge, the Incentive of Loyalty, the Incentive of Welfare Schemes, Interest in the Firm, Encouragement of Suggestions, Cooperation in Time Study and the Incentive of Efficiency". This spirit

permeated the expanding industry/schools relationship of the time and since despite the increased sophistication of the language used to describe it.

Non-commercial incentives are obviously counterposed to wage increases and other real benefits. The focus on the interests and leadership of the company is done deliberately in order to squeeze out any role for workers organising to advance their own interests in unions or other organisations of the working class. This is most likely the real benefit for all those modern day philanthropists of education in Australia and elsewhere. These are the sorts of "opportunities and aspirational beliefs" and "cultural capital" they aim to deliver. ★

Pete's Corner



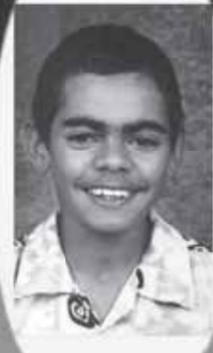
Sydney

Rally 9th Anniversary of TJ Hickey's death

9 YEARS TOO LONG!

RE OPEN THE TJ INQUIRY!

DEMAND JUSTICE FOR TJ AND ALL OTHER DEATHS IN CUSTODY!



10:30AM
THURS
14 FEB

CNR GEORGE AND PHILLIPS ST, WATERLOO

SIGN THE PETITION!!!

MEET AT THE FENCE LINE WHERE TJ DIED AND MARCH TO STATE PARLIAMENT HOUSE PRESENT THE PETITIONS DEMAND THAT THE TJ PLAQUE BE AFFIXED FINALLY TO THE FENCE LINE!

Organised by the Hickey family and the Indigenous Social Justice Association
Ray Jackson 0450 651 063 or Raul Bassi 0403 037 376 or isj@internode.com.net

Apprentices deserve a living wage

First-year building and construction apprentices must be paid a wage that meets their minimum living costs, the Construction Division of the CFMEU says. The CFMEU has made a joint application to Fair Work Australia, with the ACTU, AMWU and CEPU, calling for a wage rise for apprentices. The application would vary the building and construction awards to increase the minimum wage of a first year apprentice to 60 percent of the trade rate (i.e. \$423.66 per week).

The current first year wages for apprentices is \$317.75 – a woefully inadequate figure only slightly higher than the Newstart allowance.

The research showed that first and second-year junior apprentices were spending an average of \$440 per week on basic living costs (e.g. accommodation, telephone, food and non-alcoholic drinks, and transport and fuel).

CFMEU National Construction Division secretary Dave Noonan said that the current apprentice wages were stuck in a time warp and did not reflect the pressures on apprentices.

“Apprentices are not just 15 or 16-year-olds. Most are over 18 and many are in their 20s and may have families to support. A wage that does not cover basic living costs is a key reason why young people drop out of apprenticeships, despite liking the work.

“If you cannot afford to pay rent and own a car to drive to work, you are going to struggle to finish an apprenticeship.”

Apprentices rely on their families for support, work second jobs, or are forced into debt, just to get skills which our economy needs, said Mr Noonan.

Mr Noonan said a drop in apprenticeship completions would hurt Australia’s economy in the

long-term by causing shortages of skilled tradespeople.

“Apprenticeships have been a key part of the training system in Australia for decades. If we continue to lose apprentices we will become even more reliant on importing workers in key trades.

“At a time where 25 percent of young people are not working or in education or training we should be making it easier for apprentices, not harder.

“We are sure that there are many apprentices, and their parents, who support our application and urge them to let the Fair Work Commission know they support our claim.”

The full bench of the Fair Work Commission will begin hearings into the review of wages and conditions for apprentices, trainees and juniors at the start of March. The case is being heard as part of the two-yearly review of the Modern Awards system which came into being in 2010. ✪



CFMEU campaign to share benefits of the mining boom

A national advertising campaign demanding a better share of the benefits of the mining boom – including jobs for Australian workers, more investment in mining communities and improved management of the impacts on manufacturing and construction – was launched in Brisbane and Perth on January 28.

The Campaign has also launched a new dedicated website: www.letsspreaditaround.com.au.

Produced by the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union, the “Let’s Spread it Around” campaign involves a national advertising campaign focussed on the stories of four real Australians and how the mining boom has impacted on them.

As the country moves into a federal election year, this campaign calls for better management of the

mining boom to deliver more jobs for Australians, more investment in communities and better management of key segments of the economy such as manufacturing.

“The mining boom has created opportunities for many Australians, but it has left many more behind, badly hurting job-rich sectors such as manufacturing, tourism and education,” CFMEU Queensland Construction & General Division secretary Michael Ravbar said.

“While thousands of Queenslanders are losing their jobs, and unemployment has leapt to 6.2 percent, big mining companies want to bring in temporary [overseas] workers to build and operate mines. It defies common sense.

“The same is true for Western Australia, where unemployment has crept up to 4.3 percent, despite the boom, and youth unemployment

continues to be a major issue, while big mining companies use claims of a skills shortage to bring in temporary workers for the mines,” said Mick Buchan, CFMEU WA secretary.

CFMEU Queensland Mining and Energy District president Stephen Smyth believes many mining communities are also missing out on the community resources they deserve.

“People in mining communities are suffering from the high cost of living, the lack of amenities and the strain on local infrastructure,” he said.

“And the high Aussie dollar, driven by the boom, is putting more and more pressure on manufacturing jobs, which is why we need to make sure local projects use local products, and Australian manufacturers get an even break.” ✪

AEU and Vic govt enter into negotiations

Negotiations with the state government for a new Enterprise Bargaining Agreement for public school staff, begun on January 31, were a positive step and intense negotiations have been scheduled for next week, the Australian Education Union (AEU) said.

This was the first time the AEU and the government have met since negotiations broke down for a second time last November 22.

AEU Victorian president Meredith Peace said the talks were a positive start but warned that they remain a long way apart on a number of key issues.

“We have agreed to meet with the state government three times next week in a bid to resolve this dispute as quickly as possible.

“The state government has dragged this dispute out for over two years by refusing to listen to the concerns of education staff, parents and the broader community. This dispute will only be resolved through the negotiation process.”

The AEU put a significantly revised offer – of 4.2 percent per year over three years – to the government in November and have yet to receive a formal response.

“This offer was comparable to

teacher salaries in NSW and South Australia and in line with the police deal in Victoria,” said Ms Peace.

“If the Premier cares about the future of education in this state and respects the views of parents who want this dispute resolved – he will put a fair and reasonable offer forward,” Ms Peace said.

Due to a confidentiality agreement, the AEU could not reveal the content of the negotiations but AEU members can get full briefings at regional meetings. ✪

End ASIO refugees’ detention for life

Ranjini’s new baby boy, Paari, will grow up in detention for life because she is being held in detention indefinitely due to an ASIO negative security finding.

Ranjini has been held indefinitely in Villawood detention centre since receiving an ASIO negative security clearance seven months ago. On January 15 her new baby boy, Paartheepan (Paari), was born. He will now grow up in detention for life, along with Ranjini’s two other young children.

Ranjini and her three children are now all held in Villawood detention centre.

Although Ranjini, and 55 others also found to be refugees, have been declared a security risk by ASIO the government will not tell them why. A High Court ruling in October held that the government cannot keep them in detention simply on the basis of the ASIO negative finding. Yet the government is still dragging its feet on reviewing their cases and they remain in detention with no indication of when any of them might be released.

The detention for life of children, as well as all those on ASIO negative findings (some of them for as long as three years) is a shocking example of the vicious cruelty resulting from the government’s anti-refugee policies. Under the government’s wider detention policies 797 children were locked up in Australia at the end of October and 34 children have been sent to appalling conditions in detention on Manus Island.

Join our protest outside Villawood detention centre to call for the immediate release Ranjini and her children, along with all the ASIO negative refugees, and an end to the policies of detention and offshore processing.

Refugee Action Coalition

Legal challenge to Manus Island

On January 18, the PNG Opposition leader, Belden Namah, launched a constitutional challenge to the Manus Island detention centre with documents lodged in the National Court of Justice in Port Moresby.

The challenge asks the court to declare that the Memorandum of Understanding between Australian and Papua New Guinea is unlawful on two grounds: (i) that it allows Australia to force asylum seekers to enter Papua New Guinea, and (ii) that it allows the PNG government to deprive those asylum seekers of their liberty as soon as they enter Papua New Guinea.

Most significantly in the short term is that the documents lodged by Mr Namah asks the court for an interlocutory injunction to prevent any further transfers from Australia to Manus Island until the constitutional challenge is resolved.

“The challenge is a very welcome development. If the challenge succeeds it could see the Manus Island detention centre permanently closed, and prevent any further punitive camps being opened in PNG. It would be the end of one half of the Pacific Solution,” said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

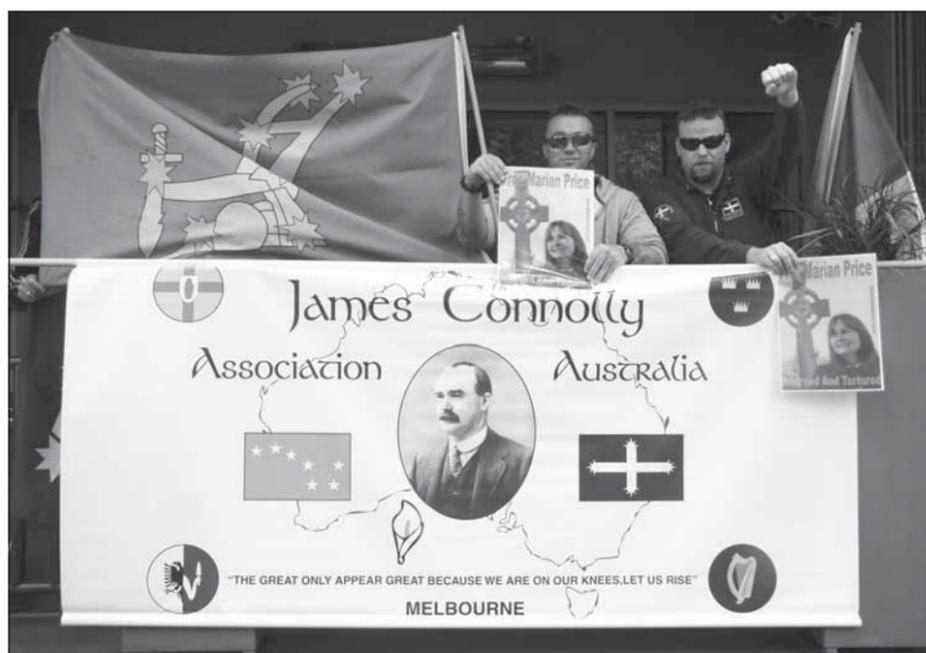
“The situation on Manus is getting worse each day. A 19 year-old Iranian asylum seeker attempted to suicide by both cutting his wrist and hanging himself. His present condition is unknown but it is believed that he has been transferred from the camp to the hospital.

“If the Australian government had any humanitarian conscience it would close both Nauru and Manus Island before the PNG court rules that it is illegal,” said Rintoul. ✪

Rally
11am Sunday February 10
at Villawood detention centre (Miwera Rd entrance)

Melbourne

James Connolly Association Banner Launch



Steven Katsineris

The James Connolly Association Australia was formed in early 2011. And in early November 2012, a branch of The James Connolly Association was established in Melbourne. The Association is named after the Irish patriot who lived and died in defence of the ideal of Irish Socialist Republicanism. The aim of the Association is to heighten awareness of the Republican and Socialist message among the people who make up the Irish diaspora in Australia and the general population. Also to struggle for the restoration of political status for Republican prisoners, to highlight the injustices inherent with British interference in Irish affairs, and as part of the broader Irish Republican community to lobby for a British withdrawal from Ireland. We believe in the right of the Irish people to the control of Irish destinies, free from external interference, and support the ideal of an independent All-Ireland Socialist Republic.

On the occasion of the arrival of a new banner for the recently formed branch a few members met outside the Celtic Club to view the banner. This meeting and the unfurling of the banner became an impromptu Free Marian Price protest when some photographs were being taken. Marian Price, 57, is one of several Irish Republican political prisoners currently being held in English jails. Marian was a former Republican volunteer, ex-political prisoner and hunger striker.

She was given a Royal pardon in 1980, but was rearrested in 2011 and put back in prison. Marian was not convicted for any crime, but has been held in detention in solitary confinement for her attendance at a Republican Easter Rising Commemoration rally in Derry and for holding up a piece of paper at that rally for a masked man while he read a message in April 2011.

There have been increasing concerns about the health of Marian Price and the matter has been raised by various Irish political parties including Sinn Fein and the Social Democratic Labour Party, among others.

The real reason Marian Price is being held is because the British state wants to punish and suppress her for her outspoken dissident views and crush her spirit. Her continued imprisonment is a clear example of internment without trial and an utterly disgraceful abuse of Marian's human rights. The British government has no legal right to detain Marian in a high security prison and hold her indefinitely, as she is not guilty of any serious crime. The imprisonment of Marian Price is clearly unjust and she should be immediately released.

The James Connolly Association, Melbourne continues to grow quickly and will soon begin to take a more forceful role in supporting Irish Republican political prisoners and exposing the blatant hypocrisy of the British justice system as practised against the nationalist population in northeast Ireland. ✪

Deceptive practices revealed

Farmers and conservationists are calling on the federal government to reject Whitehaven Coal's Maules Creek mine proposal and investigate whether the company has provided false or misleading information to obtain an approval under federal environment law.

Farmers whose properties may be impacted by the proposed open-cut coal mine in Leard Forest near Boggabri in northwest NSW came to Sydney last week to release an ecologist's report that highlights serious discrepancies in the Whitehaven Coal's biodiversity offsets program, which is a critical element of the company's application.

Nature Conservation Council chief executive officer Pepe Clarke said Whitehaven Coal planned to clear more than 500 hectares of critically endangered White Box-Gum woodland, which requires offsets of the same ecosystem type to be protected elsewhere.

"However, the areas that the company has mapped as endangered White Box-Gum woodland in their proposed offsets are in fact a totally different vegetation type," Mr Clarke said.

"The vegetation in the offsets is not endangered, contains little or no White Box and does not provide habitat for the threatened species the offset was supposed to protect: the Swift Parrot, Regent Honeyeater or Corben's Long-eared Bat."

He said that the NSW government had approved the mine on the basis of the highly questionable offsets and that a final decision on whether the mine will be approved by the federal government is now imminent.

"The federal government must reject the proposal and investigate whether the company has provided false or misleading information to obtain an approval under federal environment law."

The farmers' visit to Sydney coincided with Jonathan Moylan's appearance before the Australian Securities and Investments Commission in relation to his releasing a hoax media release under the ANZ Bank logo two weeks ago.

Meanwhile, reports the O'Farrell government slashed funding to the Environmental Defenders Office and tightened its eligibility guidelines to exclude "activists and lobby groups" after it had been lobbied by the mining industry are extremely disturbing, according to the Nature Conservation Council.

Pepe Clarke said the EDO funding cuts and tight new limits on eligibility were an unwarranted attack on a valuable community service.

"The EDO is a critical resource that ensures citizens understand and can exercise their legal rights to protect the environment when

other institutions fail to do so," Mr Clarke said.

"Many of those who the EDO assists are individuals or small community groups who have nowhere else to turn for advice."

Mr Clarke said the revelation that government attacks on the EDO began after the mining industry asked it to act added to the impression that the resource extraction industries have undue influence on the Coalition partners and on government policy.

The reports indicate the EDO's funding and operating guidelines were changed after Minerals Council's chief executive Stephen Galilee, who was formerly state Treasurer Mike Baird's chief-of-staff, wrote to Premier Barry O'Farrell accusing the EDO of a "deliberate campaign of economic sabotage" against the coal industry.

"While Mr O'Farrell's office reportedly declined to say whether anything was done in response to the letter, subsequent actions and comments by government ministers suggest the government's and the Minerals Council's views are very closely aligned," Mr Clarke said.

"The government must adequately fund the EDO to ensure ordinary people have access to legal advice that enables them to protect their local environment and the community's health." ✪



March 1 is the beginning of the "open season" for hunters to enter national parks and start shooting. The NSW government had made a deal with the Shooters and Fishers Party despite strong opposition from the public, park rangers and bushwalkers. Premier Barry O'Farrell was vocal in insisting that shooting would be safely and professionally run by the Game Council. The Game Council is supposed to issue licences and monitor compliance when the shooting begins. However, at the end of December a scandal involving the acting head of the Game Council erupted. He was stood down on suspicion of illegal hunting. Police investigation is still continuing and it will look into claims of illegal hunting, trespass and the inhumane killing of a feral goat. The NSW government will be well advised to reconsider its deal with the Shooters and Fishers Party to put the Game Council in charge seeing that it has already dismally failed. The best solution, however will be to abandon the idea of hunting in national parks altogether.

The NSW Environmental Defenders Office (EDO) and other publicly funded legal aid agencies must in future direct resources away from "activities which may reasonably be described as political advocacy or political activism". Community legal centres will be also barred from "public campaigning and advocacy", including "through traditional and social media and participating in rallies or demonstrations for causes seeking changes to government policies". These are some of the new guidelines to be released by the NSW Coalition government. Under the new guidelines, publicly funded community legal centres will be prevented from "conducting activist workshops" or "providing legal advice or representation to activist groups, lobby groups and action groups". It goes without saying that the majority of EDO clients fall into these categories. This is another blow to social justice advocates and general public who might want to exercise a democratic right not to agree to various destructive policies of either the private sector or the government. It also comes at a time when there is an ever-growing grass-roots campaign against fracking and extensive use of coal. Strange coincidence.

Federal Finance Minister Penny Wong in December boasted how the government had achieved more than \$13 billion in savings in the public sector since coming to office. This followed Treasurer Wayne Swan announcing the precious budget surplus wasn't going to happen and that the government would not be able to meet the funding for the Gonski education changes and the National Disability Insurance Scheme. The Community and Public Sector Union acting national secretary Louise Persse pointed out that demands on the public sector were increasing as the population was ageing and growing. "Responding to these challenges successfully and meeting the needs of the population requires a strong role for government and a strong and effective public service," she said.

Hidden agenda behind America's war on Africa

Ben Schreiner

Harnessing Asia's growth and dynamism is central to American economic and strategic interests: Hillary Clinton

France's military intervention into Mali may at first glance appear to have little to do with the US "pivot" to Asia. But as a French mission supposedly meant to bolster a UN sanctioned and African-led intervention has gone from "a question of weeks" to "the total re-conquest of Mali," what may have begun as a French affair has now become a Western intervention. And this in turn has drawn wider strategic interests into the conflict. Strategic interests, it is becoming clearer, shaped by the imperatives of the US Asia pivot.

Widening Intervention

The geopolitical posturing over the crisis in Mali, coming as France's intervention fans out across the region, is no more evident than in the public statements coming from both London and Washington.

As British Prime Minister David Cameron declared, the crisis in Mali "will require a response that is about years, even decades, rather than months." Backing up such bluster, Britain has reportedly joined France in dispatching special commando teams to Mali, in addition to surveillance drones.

In Washington, the talk of a long war to be waged across the entire Sahel region of Africa has also begun. As one US official speaking on the Western intervention into Mali warned, "It is going to take a long time and time means that it could take several years."

Such remarks mirror those made by outgoing US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

"This is going to be a very serious, ongoing threat because if you look at the size of northern Mali, if you look at the topography – it's not only desert, it's caves," Clinton remarked. "Sounds reminiscent. We are in for a struggle. But it is a necessary struggle. We cannot permit northern Mali to become a safe haven."

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, the safe haven refrain is also pulsating through the corridors of the Pentagon.

"Some top Pentagon officials and military officers warn that without more aggressive US action," the *Times* reports, "Mali could become a haven for extremists, akin to Afghanistan before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001."

And as the American public is prepped for the opening of a new front in the unending "war on terror," US intervention accelerates.

As the *Washington Post* reports, the US is now offering "aerial refuelling" to French warplanes, along with "planes to transport soldiers from other African nations."

US intelligence officials, meanwhile, have reportedly begun drawing up plans to provide "data to help French warplanes locate and attack militant targets." This, as Pentagon hawks continue to push for the use of drone strikes.

In fact, the *New York Times* reports the US has begun "preparing plans to establish a drone base in northwest Africa to increase unarmed surveillance missions on the local affiliate of Al-Qaeda and other Islamist extremist groups."



US military training local soldiers north of Bamako, Mali.

Photo: Max R Blumenfeld

The paper, which notes the base's likely location to be in Niger, reports the Pentagon has "not ruled out conducting missile strikes at some point if the threat worsens."

As one American official told the *Times*, the decision to establish a permanent drone base in northern Africa "is directly related to the Mali mission, but it could also give Africom [the US Military's Africa Command] a more enduring presence."

The very notion, though, of an Al-Qaeda threat in northern Mali so dire as to require Western intervention and a permanent US presence is anything but well-defined. As Blake Hounshell, managing editor of *Foreign Policy*, notes: "it's by no means clear what threat Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb...poses to the United States."

Indeed, the very notion of Al-Qaeda in Mali posing a threat to the West is predicated on the oft-repeated safe haven refrain. That is, the belief that without foreign intervention Al-Qaeda will use northern Mali as a staging ground to launch attacks within Western countries.

The useful menace

But while Western leaders dig deep to reassure themselves of the justness of their latest intervention, doubts are nonetheless increasing over the competence of the Malian army. As the *New York Times* reports, despite extensive US training, the Malian army has proven to be "a weak, dysfunctional force that is as much a cause of Mali's crisis as a potential part of the solution."

The Western "hope" in Mali, then, as the *Economist* argues, "is to kill as many as possible of the most fanatical jihadists, and to garrison the northern towns with soldiers from Mali and its neighbours, before the insurgents can regroup or bring in recruits."

With such "hope" one understands the talk of a struggle to be measured in decades.

Indeed, even the head of the US Africa Command, General Carter Ham, has acknowledged the limitations the West faces in Mali.

"Realistically," Ham recently remarked, "probably the best you can get is containment and disruption, so that Al-Qaeda is no longer able to control territory [there] as they do today."

But as US officials talk up the Al-Qaeda threat in Mali, one can't help but recall the assertion made by US Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta back in 2011. As Panetta then declared, the US was "within reach of strategically defeating Al-Qaeda." Yet, after the West's support of Islamists fighters in Libya and Syria, that handy Al-Qaeda spectre has evidently been roused sufficiently to haunt the Western mind once more.

Of course, despite all the public claims to the contrary, defeating Al-Qaeda has never really been a genuine pursuit of the US anyway. After all, a vanquished Al-Qaeda would really denote something of a strategic setback for Washington. It would deprive the US a source of proxy war foot soldiers, while also leaving Washington struggling to justify its global garrisoning. In the end then, the Al-Qaeda menace – that gift that keeps on giving – is simply too useful to defeat.

Containing China

One needs look no further than the intervention into Mali to see the Al-Qaeda threat bearing fruit for the West. All the attention on combating Al-Qaeda in northern Mali has provided the perfect cover for the US and its junior Western partners to pursue their grand strategy of containment against China. And with China increasingly out competing with Western interests throughout Africa, one understands the sudden neo-colonial urge in the West.

According to Razia Khan, the regional head of research for Africa at Standard Chartered Bank, bilateral trade between Africa and China

is nearing US\$200 billion annually, having grown at an average rate of 33.6 percent per year over the past decade. What's more, in the coming years Africa stands to become China's largest trade partner, surpassing both the EU and the US.

None of this has been lost on Washington. As the presumptive next US Secretary of State, John Kerry, noted during his Senate confirmation hearing, the US is knowingly playing from behind.

"Now with respect to China and Africa, China is all over Africa – I mean, all over Africa. And they're buying up long-term contracts on minerals, on ... you name it," Kerry commented. "And there're some places where we're not in the game, folks. And I hate to say it. And we got to get in."

In a 2010 diplomatic cable released by WikiLeaks, Johnnie Carson, US assistant secretary for *African Affairs*, echoed Kerry's concerns. In fact, Carson went so far as to classify China as a "very aggressive and pernicious economic competitor with no morals."

Such US sneering over growing Chinese investments in Africa were aired publicly during Secretary of State Clinton's visit through Africa back in August. As Clinton, in a clear jab at China declared on her trip, "Unlike other countries, America will stand up for democracy and universal human rights even when it might be easier to look the other way and keep the resources flowing."

(The rights violations of the US-trained Malian army puts just the latest lie to such righteous declarations.)

In response to Clinton's jab, China's state-run *Xinhua* news agency shot back that Clinton's trip was "aimed at least partly at discrediting China's engagement with the continent and curbing China's influence there."

And it is with such a fear of US containment in mind that Beijing has come to interpret France's intervention into Mali as a gateway for further Western interventions. As He Wenping of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences warns, "French forces' involvement in Mali will provide the case for legalisation of a new interventionism in Africa."

And indeed it will, just as the West's Libyan romp, costing China US\$20 billion in investments, helped set the stage for the current intervention into Mali. For in order for the US to harness Asia's (read China's) growth and dynamism – and thus cement America's Pacific Century – the US must come to also harness the growth and dynamism of Africa.

The US containment of China, then, requires a pivot of sorts to Africa. Only the African pivot appears set to fall under the banner of that ever-malleable "war on terror."

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The very notion of an Al-Qaeda threat in northern Mali so dire as to require Western intervention and a permanent US presence is anything but well-defined.

France, Qatar, and the New World Disorder

Gearóid Ó Colmáin

According to investigative journalist Silvia Cattori, the barbaric bombing of Aleppo University on January 15 has been officially claimed by the terrorist group the Al Nusra Front. This confirmation should not come as a surprise to those who have been following closely events in the Levant since March 17, 2011, when unknown snipers opened fire in the southern Syrian town of Deraa killing several policemen and innocent protesters.

Since then, snipers and jihadist death squads from Libya, Chechnya, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, and even France and the UK inter alia, backed by NATO intelligence and Gulf petromonarch cash, have waged a genocidal non-conventional war upon the Syrian people. This has relied heavily on a sophisticated international disinformation campaign in the corporate controlled press, whereby all crimes committed by the terrorists are systematically blamed on the Syrian government.

Eighty-two students in Aleppo University were murdered on January 15 from a missile launched by the Western media's beloved "rebels": these gangs of convicts, drug-smugglers, rapists, child abusers, and common thugs presented to the gullible Western public as "revolutionaries."

Since 2011, over 2,000 schools and educational centres in Syria have been destroyed by the Western-backed jihadists, who are attempting to annihilate the Syrian state in order to construct a "New Middle East" that accords with NATO and Gulf state geopolitical objectives. When will this nightmare of terrorism end?

Meanwhile, there was an icy silence in Paris, London, and Washington, not a word of condemnation after the Aleppo atrocity.

Cowards

Unlike the Houla Massacre last year, committed by the opposition but blamed on the Syrian government, there were no calls from Paris, London and Washington for an international investigation after the Aleppo bombing.

Everybody knows who the perpetrators are. So there is silence. Cowards hide. Cowards prey on the weak and defenceless. Cowards dissemble and use cover for their actions. The Western military-intelligence establishment are despicable cowards. They hide behind pompous newspeak about human rights and democracy while committing the most heinous crimes known to man. They bomb other countries while pushing buttons in computers, thousands of kilometres from the action. They send in drugged psychopaths to kill, rob and destroy the people of countries who get in their way.

The callous silence of the Western governments at the massacre in Aleppo contrasted sharply with the strong and unequivocal condemnations that came from Brazil, Venezuela, Russia, and China. The emerging powers in the world are bearing witness to the self-destruction of Western civilisation through an excess of greed and megalomania.

There are no words in any language to describe the atrocities NATO's contras are committing against the people of Syria. But the world is looking on in horror and outrage. Large parts of Latin America know what is going on. Large parts of Asia and Russia too, know who is behind the violence in Syria. The truth will out in time. The balance of power in the world is



The aftermath of the bombing at Aleppo University on January 15.

shifting and sooner or later, the criminals behind these neo-colonial wars and their vast network of collaborators will be brought to justice. There are signs that Jordan may realign itself with Iraq, Iran, and Syria after signing new energy deals with Iraq on January. This could be fatal for the terrorists in Western Syria, as Jordan has hitherto been used as a base for the terror campaign. The Syrian state is strong enough to survive. The spirit of the Syrian people is indomitable. The illusions of the Arab Spring have faded. No one can argue now that the Arab Spring was about democracy and human rights. The Muslim Brotherhood have taken power in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya with Western support. No one can pretend any more that the conflict in Syria is about democracy.

The French military-industrial-media complex is currently buzzing with orgiastic delight as French troops re-conquer mineral and gas-rich Mali, under the pretext of fighting terrorism, while French Special Forces train and facilitate Al-Qaeda affiliated terrorists in Syria – a geopolitical theatre of the absurd worthy of Ionescu!

France

The French government bombed and destroyed two African countries in 2011.

France is engaged in an endless colonial war in Afghanistan, while the "patrie de droits de l'homme" has been conducting a covert war in Syria since last year and is now attempting to bomb its way back into Mali with a view to destroying Algeria. Uranium-rich Niger will be next. In short, neo-colonial aggression by the French government has led to the deaths of thousands of innocent people and has ruined the lives of millions of others; it is complicit in war crimes and crimes against humanity and is leading us closer to world war.

Furthermore, domestic repression in France is on the increase with more and more troops being brought out onto the streets of Paris to "protect" the population from potential "Islamists" the French government's Gulf friends are financing, while France's African and Magreb immigrant minorities are constantly stopped and harassed for no reason by the police.

On a more positive note, there are some encouraging signs of increasing political dissent emanating from the more moderate officials of French imperialism. It would appear that the US strategy of chaos, the nihilistic policy of supporting Islamic terrorists in order to destroy one state while claiming to fight them in another is becoming impossible to ignore. Former French foreign minister Dominique De Villepin told radio *France Inter* on January 18 that the cause of the destabilisation in Mali was NATO's war on Libya in 2011. De Villepin conceded that Libya is now overrun by jihadist militia.

Responding to a question from a caller concerning Qatar's role in funding Islamist groups, De Villepin seemed to indicate that it was possible that "certain Gulf states" were financing Islamist extremist groups in Mali and Syria. It is unfortunately impossible to reproduce De Villepin's exact response to the question concerning Qatar's role in Syria and Mali as France Inter edited this from their podcast version.

They also edited out De Villepin's highly significant suggestion that France should enter into negotiations with Russia in an effort to resolve the geopolitical impasse in Syria. In short, the three most important contributions by the former French foreign minister were edited out by the war propagandists running France's state radio. In these strange, belligerent times even the voices of moderate imperialist representatives are anathema to the roaring dogs of war.

Qatar's financing of Islamist terror in Mali, Libya, Syria, and elsewhere and the incestuous relationship between the absolutist Gulf emirate and the Quai d'Orsay is now no secret to the more informed sections of the French public.

The real reasons for the French elite's love affair with Gulf despotism has to do with the convergence of class interests. The Gulf despots support neo-liberal capitalism. They are authoritarian and neo-feudal. There is nothing Western capitalists love more than authoritarian regimes who comply with western economic interests and crush all dissent. For example, Qatari poet Mohammed Al-Ajami was imprisoned for life

recently for the crime of criticising the Emir of Qatar.

Funding terrorism

This is not the first time Qatar's funding of terrorism has been admitted by the mainstream French media. The widely read satirical journal *Le Canard Enchaîné* published an article in June 2012 confirming the fact long exposed by the alternative media that France's closest "partner" in the Middle East was in fact a state-sponsor of terrorism. Alain Chouet, the former chef de service of the French intelligence agency has also confirmed the role of Qatar in financing terrorism in Syria and Mali.

It is now becoming impossible to ignore the horrible reality behind France's foreign wars, as more and more officials and mainstream journalists are exposing the French government's complicity in terrorism using the Special Forces and terrorist groups of the petro-monarchies to destabilise resource rich nations and attain geo-political objectives.

After the repression of the *Paris Commune* in 1871, the reactionary French government of Adolphe Thiers promoted the Catholic religion in education as a means of deflecting the desires of the French working class away from social justice towards piety and obedience to the bourgeois state. A similar policy was adopted in Ireland by the British imperial state after the failure of the Young Irelander uprising of 1848. Catholic seminaries proliferated and Irish workers were told to put up with their fate in this life in order to secure deliverance in the next.

The absurdity of current French foreign policy becomes glaringly apparent when one considers the fact that secular, Baathist Syria, more than any other country in the Middle East, has deep cultural ties with France. Until last year, French tourists flocked to Syria's hundreds of breath-taking historical and archaeological sites. The Syrian government has always been a keen promoter of French culture. Secularism is as fundamental to modern Syria as it is to France.

In this sense, Bachar Al-Assad's Syria is ironically the most pro-Western country in the Middle East.

Describing the French political scene in Paris during the 1930's, Micheal Jabara Carley writes: "This was the Republic of Pals" where "rigorously honest men were on good terms with fairly honest men who were on good terms with shady men who were on good terms with despicable crooks."

Despicable crooks are still running this world and as Malcolm X understood too well, their media servants in all languages work over time to make us love the crooks and hate their victims.

Information Clearing House ✳

The emerging powers in the world are bearing witness to the self-destruction of Western civilisation through an excess of greed and megalomania.

Assault against PAME workers

Statement, Communist Party of Greece

On January 30 there was a savage assault by the riot police against trade-unionists at the Ministry of Labour, where they went to protest against the unacceptable statements of the Minister of Labour G Vrotsis. The Minister claimed that the social security system "was built on the basis of client relationships", related to the decision taken by the government to escalate the authoritarianism and repression against the working class people's struggles in order to implement the harsh austerity measures.

The naked violence and savagery of the government which sent in the riot police and arrested 35 PAME trade unionists, injured nine workers is the next link in the chain of the "law and order" operation being rabidly implemented in the recent period by the government.

Mobilisation of workers

They gathered outside the Ministry of Labour. However, the riot police were able to drag the 35 trade-unionists, who they had arrested, to the police vans using batons and tear gas, pushing back the demonstrators who had gathered together in a mass solidarity demonstration.

The very right of the people to

A savage assault by the riot police against trade-unionists at the Ministry of Labour.



strike, to demonstrate in an organised way and to fight against the anti-worker offensive is being targeted by the government and the bourgeois class which it serves.

In order to pass the tests of the "investors", i.e. the domestic and foreign monopolies, the government, hand in hand with the judiciary which has a clear class character, is attempting to impose a deathly silence all over the country, offering guarantees

of security for capital against the labour and people's movement.

The provocation of the government has failed

The government, some hours afterwards, disseminated tampered photographs to the bourgeois media allegedly from the office of the Minister of Labour with folders and furniture scattered all over the place, in order to convince people that the delegation of PAME and the trade unions invaded the Ministry in order to cause damage and to vandalise. The PAME trade unionists exposed the provocation, stating categorically that our class-oriented labour movement does not have such practices and that they are trying to set up a provocation against the working class struggle.

The statement from the government's spokesperson was provocative and slanderous, who not at all by chance called the protest a "form of violence" and "extremism".

Their intimidation will not succeed. The demonstrators, with a very large rally, staunch and organised,

who had gathered outside the Ministry of Labour marched to the General Police Directorate of Athens, where the trade-unionists had been detained, shouting slogans, such as "Release the workers from the police station, they are not terrorists, they want jobs" and "the law and order of the bosses will be smashed by the just cause of the workers". As the time passed, the solidarity was reinforced and the number of people outside the police station increased.

Anger and solidarity overflowing

Dozens of statements by trade unions, labour centres, federations and organisations concerning the provocative repressive assault by the government are being issued continuously in the aftermath of the events.

Late in the afternoon it was announced that the detentions were transformed into arrests and that the Attorney charged the 35 trade-unionists with disturbance of the peace and aggravated damage. The rally outside the Athens' Police Directorate continued until late at night and a

new demonstration was arranged for the next day so that all the charges against the arrested militants of the class-oriented movement are dropped and that they be released.

The trial of the trade-unionists

In the end, the 35 trade-unionists were set free. Previously, they had been arraigned instantaneously to be tried, with the charge of "illegal loitering in a public place", but the trial was postponed to the February 12 as the Ministry's witnesses did not appear.

It is indicative that the trade-unionists were not arraigned on the charge of "aggravated damage", something the Minister had claimed in a provocative way, accusing the trade-unionists of PAME of "damaging the offices". Every hour that passes exposes the fact that this accusation could not be substantiated.

In these conditions the strengthening of international class solidarity with the struggles in Greece and with PAME is crucial. ✪

Israel boycotts UN forum

Israel has boycotted the UN human rights forum over fears of scrutiny of its treatment of residents of the occupied territories. Israel is now the first state in history to win a deferral of the periodical review of its human rights record.

Tel Aviv has refused to send a delegation to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva for the Universal Periodic Review procedure where UN member states have their human rights record evaluated every four years.

Israel's cooperation with the council stopped last March after the UN set up a committee to inspect the effects of the Israeli settlements on Palestinians.

Israel which earlier accused the United Nations of anti-Israel bias reiterated its stance, saying that the council has passed more resolutions against Israel than all other countries combined.

"After a series of votes and statements and incidents we have decided to suspend our working relations with that body," Yigal Palmor, Israeli foreign ministry spokesman, told the Financial Times. "I can confirm that there is no change in that policy."

"There have been more resolutions condemning Israel than the rest of the world put together," an Israeli government official said. "It's not a fair game – it's not even a game."

Following the Israeli decision, the council has decided to postpone its review until no later than

November. The Council president has also called on the body to adopt a draft response to an unprecedented move by Israel.

Egypt's representative meanwhile has warned that a "soft" approach would create a dangerous precedent and leave "a wide-open door for more cases of non-cooperation."

Activist groups lashed out against Israel's disregard for international law.

"By not participating in its own review, Israel is setting a dangerous precedent," Eilis Ni Chaitnia, an advocacy officer with al-Haq, a human rights organisation based in Ramallah said. "This is the first time any country has made a determined effort not to attend."

Others thought that the council's decision to delay gives Tel Aviv the opportunity to make amends. Eight Israeli human rights organisations issued a statement saying, "Israel now has a golden opportunity to reverse its decision not to participate," adding "it is legitimate for Israel to express criticism of the work of the Council and its recommendations, but Israel should do so through engagement with the Universal Periodic Review, as it has done in previous sessions."

The investigation into Israel's Human Rights record began in 2007, but last year the UN started to pay particular attention to Israel's activities in the West Bank. *Russia Today* ✪

Ministers "put market ahead of action on flooding"

Tony Patey

Britain: Senior MPs have warned the government that it is putting market competition in the water industry before urgent measures to protect homes and businesses from the "shattering" impacts of flooding. The Commons environment, food and rural affairs committee said the draft Water Bill helps increase competition in the provision of water supplies for customers.

But ministers are not showing enough urgency in implementing measures improving the country's resilience to flooding and drought, it said. A report highlighted the failure to create sustainable drainage systems or combat the use of impermeable surfaces in back gardens and businesses.

It claimed ministers are taking too long over moves to improve the safety of reservoirs at risk of flooding and raised concerns that local authorities and the Environment Agency are sidelining dredging and maintaining water courses.

The MPs also called on ministers to give more information on how homeowners at high risk of flooding can continue to have access to affordable insurance after a deal on the issue expires later this year. They said bill-payers should not have to bear the costs of those who do not pay up on bills, and they should be legally protected from bad debt in the water industry.

Committee chairwoman Tory MP Anne McIntosh said the government had been "too slow" to act. "New laws will increase competition in the retail water market, and

while we welcome those changes, government must get on with implementing changes that would reduce flooding," she said.

"Widespread flooding has once again wrought devastation and heartache in communities across the country."

She said successive government hadn't "had the mettle" to tackle flooding.

Shadow environment secretary Mary Creagh said she was astonished the government had not put in place advanced computing systems to predict severe weather.

She said: "Instead they are pursuing an ideologically driven shake-up of the water industry that could mean higher bills, and serious environmental damage."

Morning Star ✪

Criminal insanity of Clinton's double-think

Finian Cunningham

In her farewell speech, outgoing US secretary of state Hillary Clinton accused Russia and Iran of "stepping up" military support for Syria and thereby adding fuel to possible regional conflict. Her words displayed breath-taking myopia and double-think, and this from somebody who is being hailed as one of America's brightest foreign diplomats in decades.

The first thing about Clinton's remarks is: so what? Both Russia and Iran have long-standing mutual defence pacts with the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad. If those countries are sharing military equipment and personnel then that is perfectly legal under the terms of defence agreements signed between sovereign states.

Secondly – and how is this for myopia and double-think? – just as Clinton is remonstrating with Russia and Iran, the Western powers are sending fighter bombers, helicopter gun-ships, drones, refuelling mid-tankers and cargo planes plus thousands of military personnel to the West African county of Mali to crush separatist militants. That full-scale "stepping up of military support" is headed up by France, which claims that it is responding to an ally in need – the dubious regime in Mali's capital, Bamako.

Unlike the support given to Syria by Russia and Iran, the French and Western intervention in Mali has tenuous, if any, legal foundation. The Francophile regime in Bamako is an administration that was put in power by a military coup last April. The junta's appointed so-called interim president, Dioucounda Traore, is an unelected French puppet with no legally constituted popular authority.

The Western powers can't even wave a fig leaf of a United Nations Security Council mandate for their Malian interference. The UNSC vote on the issue of Mali on December 20 only gave qualified authorisation for an African-led military mission under the auspices of the Economic



Hillary Clinton.

Community of West African States (ECOWAS). There was no authorisation at the UNSC for a French or Western military offensive.

So, the French and latterly the British and Americans can weigh into Malian internal affairs with bombers and Special Forces – exacerbating violations by the corrupt Malian army – and this illegal military onslaught in Mali is supposedly permissible.

Whereas, Russia and Iran come to the aid of a sovereign state through a long-standing defence pact between sovereign states, and somehow this is an outrage, according to Clinton's rationale.

Speaking in Washington, Clinton told the assembled supine press corps, "The Iranians have made it clear for some time that keeping Assad in power is one of their highest priorities. There is a lot of concern that they are increasing the quality of the weapons because Assad is using up his weaponry."

Yes, Assad is "using up his weaponry" precisely because his country is under attack from Western-backed mercenaries.

As for Russia, Clinton went on, "The Russians are not passive bystanders in their support for Assad. We have reasons to believe that the Russians continue to supply financial and military assistance in the form of equipment to Assad."

Again, so what? The only basis for Clinton's condemnation is her own propagandized subjective and totally spurious logic.

Perhaps, the crescendo in Clinton's ability for double-think was this nugget, "I personally have been warning for quite some time of the dangers associated with an increasingly lethal civil war and a potential proxy war. Therefore, I think it's incumbent on those nations that have refused to be constructive players to reconsider their positions because the worst kind of predictions of what could happen internally and spilling over the borders of Syria are certainly within the realm of the possible now."

These words were uttered by America's "top diplomat" only hours after Israeli warplanes launched unprovoked deadly air strikes on

the sovereign state of Syria with American hardware, foreknowledge and approval. And yet, despite this violation of the UN Charter by America's mid-east attack dog, Clinton admonishes Russia and Iran for refusing "to be constructive players".

For the past 22 months, Washington and its Western allies, along with Turkey and the Arab Sunni dictatorships of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, have been fuelling a covert war of aggression in Syria.

Washington in particular has been funnelling weapons and militants into Syria via its Arab conduits to tear that country asunder with the most vicious terrorism imaginable. Car bombings of civilian areas, including hospitals, schools and universities; the destruction of mosques and shrines; and mass executions – the latest in Aleppo where up to 100 bodies were pulled out of a river, bullets in the head.

Nothing and no-one is off-limits in the Western-fuelled annihilation of Syrian society. If that is being a "constructive player" then someone

ought to check Clinton's pulse to see if she is actually still alive or is she a corpse mouthing programmed drivel?

Political initiatives from the governments of Syria, Russia and Iran for a negotiated settlement to the Syrian crisis have been plentiful, yet spurned at every turn, with Western-backed violence ramped up.

The Geneva accord signed up to last June by the members of the UN Security Council calling for a transition that involved the participation of the Assad government was a baby strangled at birth by the recalcitrant Western axis of evil.

And yet given the outrageous provocation of continued Western aggression in Syria – and the very real danger of regional conflagration that that entails – Washington has the preposterous audacity to denounce Russia and Iran for not being constructive players and for assisting an ally through legal and justifiable means.

Make no mistake, Clinton's replacement as secretary of state, John Kerry, will be no better.

Information Clearing House ✪

UN to investigate US drone strikes

Marilyn Bechtel

The announcement late last month that a United Nations expert will spend much of the year investigating the civilian impact and human rights implications of targeted killings – largely by armed drone aircraft – comes as several related aspects of US military policy are intersecting early in President Obama's second term.

Three countries – the US, United Kingdom and Israel – are known to have used drones in targeted strikes. The vast majority have been conducted by the US. Strikes by armed drones in areas like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen, and resulting deaths among civilians as well as armed insurgents have risen sharply in recent years.

The president's nominee to head the CIA, John Brennan, is often called the "chief architect" of the agency's drone strike program,

or the drone "czar." He has also called for establishing legal restrictions on their use. The issue is sure to be prominent in Brennan's confirmation hearings in early February.

And the US military is preparing to open a new base for drone flights in northwest Africa.

On January 24 British lawyer Ben Emmerson, the UN Special Rapporteur on counterterrorism and human rights, told a London press conference that he would launch an inquiry into the civilian impact and human rights implications of targeted killings, with a report due next fall.

"The exponential rise in the use of drone technology in a variety of military and non-military contexts represents a real challenge to the framework of established international law," he told reporters.

In a January 29 interview with *wired.com's* Spencer Ackerman, Emmerson said he would focus on

25 specific situations in the Middle East and south Asia, most involving drone attacks. Noting that countries are obligated under international law to conduct "independent and impartial" investigations of drone attacks involving civilian deaths, he said the UN may have to investigate individual strikes if nations fail to do so.

Three countries asked for the UN investigation: Pakistan, and two unnamed permanent Security Council members, presumed to be Russia and China.

In Pakistan, drone strikes rose from 35 in the last year of George W Bush's presidency, to 117 in 2010, before dropping to 64 in 2011 and 46 in 2012. Seven drone strikes hit Pakistan in the first 10 days of this year.

A report issued last fall by the Stanford Law School and New York University School of Law said in the last eight years, between 2,562 and 3,325 people have been

killed in drone attacks there, including between 474 and 881 civilians – among them some 176 children – while only an estimated 2 percent of fatalities involved "high level" militants.

Peace and civil rights organisations are welcoming the UN probe. The American Civil Liberties Union is participating in a legal challenge on behalf of three Americans killed in targeted strikes in Yemen in 2011, and is also litigating two Freedom of Information Act lawsuits related to the targeted killing program. The ACLU points to the government's "vague and shifting legal standards" and lack of oversight and accountability to make sure strikes are consistent with the Constitution and with international law.

Hina Shamsi, director of the ACLU's National Security Project, welcomed the inquiry "in the hopes that global pressure will bring the US back into line with international

law requirements that strictly limit the use of lethal force."

As the Senate confirmation process proceeds for Brennan, and for Chuck Hagel to become Defence Secretary, Just Foreign Policy has launched a petition calling for more transparency and accountability regarding drone strikes, compliance with international and US law, and an end to types of strikes that are particularly apt to result in high civilian casualties.

Meanwhile, the New York Times noted on January 28 that as part of its increased attention to Africa, the US military is getting ready to set up a drone base in northwest Africa – probably in Niger – to conduct surveillance missions on extremist groups in the area. Initially the drones are to be unarmed, but future missile strikes have not been ruled out.

People's World ✪

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

War no more

The late Roy Alchin was a member of the CPA for many years. His first occupation was a shearer. Before the change in the Commonwealth Constitution in 1967, giving citizenship to Indigenous Australians, Roy gave them as much support as possible.

When he came to Sydney, he worked as a watchman and was made a life member of the Miscellaneous Workers' Union. The enclosed article was written several years before his death in 1994 and it received a wide circulation.

I am sure that if he was still

with us, he would submit it to *The Guardian* for publication.

With best wishes for the New Year.

Berrie Rosen

Do Away with War

By Roy Alchin

The greatest waste of the world's resources is the stockpiling of thermonuclear and conventional weapons.

If this enormous wealth now wasted on the means of destruction were used for the purpose of peaceful construction, the world would be a safer and better place to live in.

Campaign for peace

If we are going to prevent a nuclear war and pioneer the way for a better life for those who come after us, we should campaign for peace. We should also campaign to do away with war, because it is a survival of the most primitive and barbaric way of resolving conflict between nations.

Support the peace movement

The peace movement in Australia and throughout the world is making considerable headway. Its great humanitarian aims and ideals deserve your full support.

Jobs outsourced

The state government's lack of respect for public sector workers is clearer than ever, with the revelation that road maintenance work will be outsourced and the public sector banned from tendering for the work.

Hundreds of workers employed by Roads and Maritime Services now face an uncertain future.

If this is supposed to be about efficiency, why would the hard working men and women at Roads and Maritime Services be denied the opportunity to keep doing this work?

This government is now going to the extraordinary length of privatising essential services like road maintenance, just to create business opportunities for private sector interests.

The fact that the public sector has been excluded from tendering for this work shows that there is no fat and the public sector is operating efficiently.

The new private operators of road maintenance work will need to make a profit. Clearly, that will come at the expense of motorists, the community and the workforce.

This government is more interested in providing a fat contract for the private sector than looking after the needs of the community.

Mati English
Sydney

Capitalism and climate change

Capitalists label climate change a "communist conspiracy". We should proudly wear that title as a badge of honour although they are wrong to use the word conspiracy because climate change is a reality. Why do they associate us with climate change rather than environmentalist? Because they know as we do that there are only two types of means of production.

One is based on a scientific planned economy where everyone's needs are calculated and then delivered based on a sustainable future that includes the future generations. This is not a wish list using unattainable nice words but a reality that existed in the USSR for over half a century.

The other path is the hell that the

capitalist dictatorship is taking us. It is an anarchical world where individual capitalists produce whatever they desire without any thought for the future. Their sole job is to flog their "product" sometimes using half their costs in advertising to manipulate people into feeling that this product will fill the emptiness that exists in the alienated capitalist world. This unsustainable world has heated up the planet by one degree and counting.

Environmentalists have been trying to tame capitalism for 60 years with not much success. They have won minor issues that do not affect monopoly capitalism such as saving the Franklin River, whale hunting and sand mining on Fraser Island but that is their limit.

They cannot stop capitalism heating up the planet because it is an untameable beast that has a thirst for profit and it uses its war machine internationally and its monopoly on the propaganda machine domestically to make sure nothing is allowed to get in its way.

Helen Brown
Vic

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Remembering a titanic struggle



Ask any American to name the turning point in WW2 and he will probably say the D-Day landings in Normandy. That is partly because Americans are taught to think of the USA's contribution to the virtual exclusion of everybody else. In fact, I suspect most Americans would be hard pressed to name any of the other main combatants.

And since Australia these days takes its lead in all things from the powerful and mighty USA, if you asked Australian kids who fought whom in WW2, I suspect the answer would be as ill-informed as those from any group of Yanks.

It was not always thus, of course. During the War, everybody knew that the really big show was happening in Russia. Even American documentaries acknowledged this with awe. In Garson Kanin's excellent feature-length doco *The True Glory*, which follows the war on the Western Front from D-Day to the Elbe, and was made just as the War ended, US soldiers are shown meeting the Soviet army on the banks of the Elbe and being gobsmacked as the Russians unfold a huge banner "Greetings to the Heroes' Army of the USA". As one US soldier says: "I mean, we did pretty well, but I hate to think where we'd have been without them!"

But that was then. Nowadays, I suspect a poll of American students would probably have most of them putting the USSR on the side of the Nazis, that is if they realised the Soviet War was even in the War.

After all, how would they find out? Very few films are made in the US – or indeed in any capitalist country – about this most titanic of struggles. The American TV documentary series *The Unknown War*, which was adapted with the help of Burt Lancaster from the Soviet TV series *The Great Patriotic War*, had only a couple of episodes screened in prime time before it was shunted into a late-night slot for insomniacs only. Subsequent attempts to obtain it have been met with the advice that it no longer exists (at least in English).

The BBC series *The World At War*, with commentary by Laurence Olivier, devoted only one episode to the Russian Front, and gave at least as much coverage to side shows like Burma or North Africa.

The Russians are understandably pissed off by this cavalier dismissal of "the war on the Eastern Front". Western commentators don't ignore the Russian theatre, but they practice a kind of deceitful "equivalence", saying in effect "We fought Hitler here, and you fought him there."

But they were not equivalent. Anything but, in fact. Really it is a case of "We fought a tiny fraction of Hitler's forces here, and you fought 20 times that number there, and there."

The Battle of Kursk, for example, involved over four million officers and men. In the course of the battles fought in the summer and autumn

of 1943, Hitler's losses in his land forces fighting on the Soviet-German front totalled 1,413,000 officers and men. As military historian Boris Solovyov says: "The aggressors never recovered from this blow."

It is worth quoting Solovyov on another aspect of the Second World War: "The armed forces of the USA and Great Britain conducted operations in areas far removed from the vital centres of Germany and Japan. They held down negligible forces of the fascist bloc. Anglo-American forces won their most impressive gains in the Mediterranean theatre of operations. The leaders of the fascist bloc were unable to reinforce their troops operating there because the bulk of their forces was pinned down on the Soviet-German front, the main front of the Second World War."

"It was precisely here that the fascist bloc suffered its heaviest losses in the course of fierce battles whose giant jaws devoured its manpower and materiel."

Solovyov points out another interesting fact: the Germans had more divisions fighting the Soviet partisans than they did opposing the Anglo-US regular army forces that invaded Italy.

It is fashionable in Western circles to belittle the Soviet effort in WW2. References to the Battle of Kursk, for example (the definite turning point of the war) is met with dismissive comments like "Hitler telegraphed his punches", so that Western military "experts" can avoid

admitting that the Soviet generals were in fact talented. (A lingering reflection of the Cold War mentality.)

Stalin summed it up: "If the Battle of Stalingrad presaged the decline of the German Fascist army, the Battle of Kursk brought it to the brink of disaster." And yet, how many young people in the West have even heard of it?

American losses in WW2 are measured in the tens of thousands. Soviet losses are measured in the millions (26 million, in fact). And that is just the people who perished. There are countless millions more who suffered – during and long after – from the enormous, almost unimaginable destruction that accompanied those deaths.

When the War began, the USSR was just beginning to reap the benefits of the first two Five Year Plans. The third barely had time to get under way when it had to be converted to war production and a life and death struggle. Faced with the Nazi horror that was coming towards them, the Soviet Union had no choice but to turn their economy to war.

However, war does not make money for a socialist economy. It is production that does not flow on to the rest of society. It is nothing but a burden. Even under capitalism it benefits only a handful of companies, siphoning capital and resources into the hands of a relatively tiny group whose lust for profits is never satisfied.

And as Solovyov points out, it leads to death and destruction on a titanic, horrifying scale. ☹



Sunday February 17 –
Saturday February 23

History *Cold Case* this week is called *Mummified Child* (SBS ONE Sunday 17 February at 7.30pm). The forensic team from the University of Dundee has been presented with a gift: the mummified skeleton of a child, with its blood vessels filled with bright red wax. The skeleton used to hang on the wall of a famous surgeon and anatomist. The top of the head has been sawn off and the brain removed.

In fact, the skeleton is a couple of hundred years old, an anatomy teaching aid of some sort. But where is it from, who is it, and how did the youngster die?

The team at first believe it dates from the early to middle 19th century and is probably the skeleton of a work-house child. A law passed in 1831 allowed the dead bodies of work-house inmates to be sold to hospitals for anatomy classes.

But some clever scientific detective work leads to the startling discovery that the skeleton was not that of an underfed work-house brat but a well-nourished child. The skeleton predates the 1831 act and the body was probably acquired from a team of "resurrectionists", aka grave robbers. This seems to offend the team's sense of right, and after they have investigated the case as far as they are able, they decide his skeleton should be buried at last to restore to the dead child his dignity.

This series is a handy antidote to

the glib smart-aleck content of such fictional forensic programs as *Bones* or *Cold Case*.

The topical program of the week is episode two of *Masters Of Money* (SBS ONE Wednesdays at 9.30pm). Last week's episode dealt with John Maynard Keynes, who supported a sort of "regulated capitalism": when capitalism messed up, as it inevitably would, Keynes believed the government had to step in and create jobs and income for people. He supported the funding of massive public works projects as the best way to do this. He did not believe that in times of economic crisis ordinary people should be left to fend for themselves, like the notorious free marketeer Milton Friedman did a generation later.

However, this week's episode is devoted to another free marketeer, Friedrich Hayek, who was even more opposed to government "interference" in the economy than Friedman. Hayek, an Austrian, was the poster boy for those who believed in non-regulation of the economy. If the economy goes into a recession, leave it alone and it will fix itself, was his credo. It did not matter to Hayek how many people were thrown out of work, how much human misery the recession (or its recovery) caused. Any interference would only make things worse!

Masters Of Money is presented by the BBC's economics editor, Stephanie Flanders, so don't expect anything radical. This is bog-standard, "liberal" thinking about the economy that never questions the desirability of capitalism, only some of the theories about it. Early in the episode Ms Flanders raises the question of why people are looking again at the theories of economists like Keynes and Hayek. Because, she says, "we've tried all the usual tricks for fixing the economy." To relegate the profound ideas of Marx to "tricks for fixing the economy" is to epitomise just how superficial this series essentially is.

Even next week's episode, which is about Marx, doesn't really get a chance to put forward the alternative.



Friedrich Hayek – *Masters Of Money* (SBS ONE Wednesdays at 9.30pm).

Oh, she raises them, of course – you cannot really do Marx and not raise socialism – but she neatly manages to simultaneously run with the hare and hunt with the hounds by the simple expedient of praising Marx's ideas and condemning "the crimes" of his followers.

But this week it's Friedrich Hayek, favourite of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Hayek believed that "the market" had evolved as a "natural wonder" that was "driving civilisation forward". He saw the market (which he seemed to equate with capitalism itself) as some great self-regulating instrument for good. He saw nothing whatsoever wrong with the pursuit of private profit, instead agreeing with Michael Douglas' character in the movie *Wall Street* that "Greed is good".

Leave the market completely alone and any crises will correct themselves over time. That was his credo, and if the common people did not understand why that meant they should lose their jobs and have to rely on charity to feed their kids, then they needed to study his works.

Naturally, he was a strongly vocal critic of the New Deal in the USA in the 1930s. The Depression was a "necessary correction" and should be allowed to take its course, he said. Faced with a catastrophe like the Great Depression, any government or political party that advocated such a course would be swept from office in the blink of an eye. But, as Franklin Roosevelt dealt with the Depression using Keynesian economic policies, Hayek was able to sit back and tell

other right-wingers: "They should have listened to me".

And if he was opposed to the New Deal, you can imagine what he thought of the Soviet Planned Economy! According to one of the talking heads in this series, "Hayek's most important insight is that Central Planning of the economy must fail, because the economy is just too complex to understand and regulate effectively."

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the series is the chaotic picture it presents of the global capitalist economy as it struggles to cope with falling production, loss of purchasing power, the declining rate of profit, recurring crises of overproduction, and constant wars. But no doubt there's a trick that will fix it. ☺



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Editorial Office
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010
Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833
Email: guardian@cpa.org.au

Editor: Tom Pearson

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February 8

GAZA & BEYOND – HELLFIRE OR RESOLUTION?

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

February 15

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

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

February 22

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

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

March 1

OBAMA'S SECOND TERM – WHAT CAN WE EXPECT?

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

March 8

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

David Goodman, Professor, China Research Unit, UTS;
Kerry Brown, Professor, Professor Chinese Politics & Director China
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Film review by Deepa Kumar

Zero Dark Thirty

The film *Zero Dark Thirty* has sparked debate on its justification of torture, its misuse of facts and its pro-CIA agenda. The main focus of the debate so far has been on whether torture was necessary to track Osama bin Laden and whether the film is pro- or anti-torture.

This focus on torture, while important, has sidelined the larger and more significant message of this film: that extra judicial killing is good. The film teaches us that brown men can and should be targeted and killed with impunity, in violation of international law, and that we should trust the CIA to act with all due diligence.

Its main propaganda triumph, in my view, is that it sells targeted killing at a time when this has become the key strategy in the "war on terror", with little or no pushback. We are being trained to amuse ourselves to death and not ask critical questions of our government.

Re-branding the killing machine

The film has very clear cut "good guys" and "bad guys." The CIA characters, in particular Maya and Dan, are the heroes, and brown men are the villains.

The first brown man we encounter, Omar, is brutally tortured by Dan as Maya (played by Jessica Chastain) watches with discomfort. We soon learn, however, that Omar and his brethren wanted "to kill all Americans" thereby dispelling our doubts, justifying torture and establishing his villainy.

A clear "us" vs "them" mentality is established where "they" are portrayed as murderous villains while "we" do what we need to keep the world safe.

Pakistan, the country in which the majority of the film is set, is presented as a hellhole where all Americans are the targets of violent attacks. In one of the early scenes, Maya is asked by a colleague what she thinks of Pakistan. She replies, "It's kind of fucked up."

Other than violent attacks, a part of what seems to make Pakistan "fucked up" is Islam. In one scene Maya is disturbed late at night from her sleep by the Muslim call to prayer. Disgusted, she grunts "oh God," before rolling back to sleep.

The film rests on the wholesale demonisation of the Pakistani people, who are constantly referred to as "Paks," a term not dissimilar to previous racist epithets like "gooks" and "japs." If we doubt that the "Paks" are a devious lot, the film has a scene where Maya's colleague and friend is ambushed and blown to bits by a suicide bomber.

Even ordinary men standing by the road or at markets are suspicious characters who whip out cellphones to inform on the CIA. It is no wonder then that when Pakistanis organise a protest outside the US embassy, we view them with contempt through the eyes of Maya, from inside the embassy.



Jessica Chastain as Maya.

For a filmmaker of Kathryn Bigelow's talent, it is shocking to see such unambiguous "good guys" and "bad guys." The only way to be brown and not to be a villain in her narrative is to be unflinchingly loyal to the Americans, as the translator working for the CIA is. The "good Muslim" does not question, he simply acts to pave the way for American interests.

The racist dehumanisation of brown men allows Maya and her colleagues to routinely use the word "kill" without it seeming odd or out of place. After Maya has come to terms with the anguish of her friend's death she states: "I'm going to smoke everybody involved in this operation, and then I'm going to kill Osama bin Laden." When talking about a doctor who might be useful in getting to bin Laden, she says that if he "doesn't give up the big man ... we kill him."

A top CIA official blasting a group of agents for not making more progress sums up the role of the CIA as a killing machine: "Do your fucking jobs, and bring me people to kill." By this point in the film, the demonisation of brown men is so complete that this statement is neither surprising nor extraordinary.

It is a clever and strategic choice that the resolution of the film's narrative arc is the execution of bin Laden. After all, who could possibly object to the murder of this heinous person other than the "do-good" lawyers who are chastised in the film for providing legal representation for terrorists.

Here then is the key message of the film: The law, due process and the idea of presenting evidence before a jury should be dispensed with in favour of extra-judicial killings. The

film not only uses the moral un-ambiguity of assassinating bin Laden to sell us on the rightness and righteousness of extra-judicial killing, it also takes pains to show that this can be done in secret because of the checks and balances involved in targeted killings.

Maya is seen battling a male-dominated bureaucracy that constantly pushes her to provide evidence before it can order the strike. We feel her frustration at this process, and we identify with her when she says that she is a 100 percent sure about bin Laden's location. Yet, a system of checks and balances that involves scrupulous CIA heads, and a president who is "smart" and wants the facts, means that due diligence will not be compromised.

This, in my view, is the key propaganda accomplishment of the film: the selling of secret extra-judicial killing at a time when this has been designated the key strategy in the "war on terror."

The disposition matrix

As I have argued in my recent book, the Obama administration has drawn the conclusion, after the failed interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, that conventional warfare should be ditched in favour of drone strikes, black operations and other such methods of extra-judicial killing.

Greg Miller's piece in *The Washington Post* outlines the systematisation of extra-judicial killing through the development of a "disposition matrix". The matrix brings together the separate but overlapping kill lists from the CIA and the Joint Operations Special Command into a master grid and allocates resources for "disposition".

Miller notes that John Brennan has played a key role in this process of "codify[ing] the administration's approach to generating capture/kill lists." Based on extensive interviews with top Obama administration officials, Miller reports that such extra-judicial killing is "likely to be extended at least another decade." Brennan's nomination to the CIA directorship no doubt will ensure such a result.

In short, at the exact point that a strategic shift has been made in the war on terror from conventional warfare to targeted killing, there comes a film that justifies this practice and asks us to trust the CIA with such incredible power.

No doubt the film had to remake the CIA brand dispelling other competing Hollywood images of the institution as a clandestine and shady outfit. The reality, however, is that unlike the morally upright characters in the film, Brennan operates through lies and is a torture advocate (except for waterboarding). He spread the lie that bin Laden engaged in a firefight with the Navy Seals and used his wife as a "human shield."

Zero Dark Thirty, nominated for the "best picture of the year" Oscar award, is a harbinger of things to come. The National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA), signed into law by Obama earlier this month, includes an amendment that legalises the dissemination of propaganda to US citizens.

We can therefore expect not only more such films, but also more misinformation on our TV screens, in our newspapers, on our radio stations and in social media websites. What used to be an informal arrangement, whereby the State Department and the Pentagon manipulated the media, has now been codified into law.

We live in an Orwellian world: The government has sought and won the power to indefinitely detain and kill US citizens, all wrapped in a cloud of secrecy, while it lies to us.

Propaganda is essential to such a system to convince the citizenry that they need not be alarmed, they need not speak out and they need not think critically. In fact, they need not even participate in the deliberative process essential to a democracy. We are being asked, quite literally, to amuse ourselves to death.

Truthout ✚

**Here is the key message of the film:
The law, due process and the idea of presenting evidence before a jury should be dispensed with in favour of extra-judicial killings.**



Communist Party of Australia

Website: www.cpa.org.au
Email: cpa@cpa.org.au

Central Committee:
General Secretary: Dr Hannah Middleton
Party President: Vinnie Molina
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010
Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833
Sydney District Committee:
Brian McGee
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010
Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833

Newcastle Branch:
PO Box 367
Hamilton NSW 2303
Ph: 02 4023 8540 / 0401 824 386
newcastle@cpa.org.au
Riverina Branch:
Allan Hamilton
2/57 Cooper St
Cootamundra 2590

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

Brisbane Branch:
PO Box 33, Camp Hill, Qld 4152
Ph: 0449 202 189
cpabris@live.com.au
South Australian State Committee:
Bob Briton, PO Box 612, Port Adelaide BC,
SA 5015 Ph: 0418 894 366
www.adelaidecommunists.org
Email: sa@cpa.org.au

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