



# Single parent welfare cuts impose crippling burdens

Peter Mac

On February 5 single parents held a protest outside federal parliament against new welfare requirements. Protests were held simultaneously in major cities around the nation. Under the new regime, approximately 100,000 single parents who have been receiving the threadbare Parenting Payment welfare support since 2006, and whose youngest child is between eight and eleven years old are no longer eligible for that payment. Most of them have been transferred to the Newstart allowance (better named "Newstarve"), whose appallingly inadequate benefits haven't been increased for almost 20 years.

For parents who rely fully on social security payments, (about 90 percent of whom are single mothers) there have been some minor improvements in the family tax benefits and the Schoolkids Bonus.

However, according to the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS), under the new arrangements for the 2006 group, the overall loss of income for a sole-parent family with no earnings and one high school-age child is \$33 per week, while a similar family with a primary school age child has lost \$41 per week.

A sole parent family with no earnings who is studying and has one high-school aged child has lost \$65 per week, and a similar family with a primary-school aged child has lost \$73 per week.

Those formerly on the Parenting Payment who have managed to find part-time work are particularly disadvantaged by the Newstart income test, which allows them to earn only \$31 per week before they start to lose a proportion of the payment, as opposed to \$88 per week under the Parenting Payment scheme.

The government claims it wants to help single parents find a job. However, the new arrangements will have the opposite effect, because of the cuts to benefits and the loss of other entitlements, including the pensioner education supplement, which is not available under Newstart.

The government also claims that being on Newstart will motivate single parents find work, but parents receiving Parenting Payment benefits have always been required to seek work.

## Welfare horror stories emerging

Terese Edwards, CEO of the National Council of Single Mothers, said that many sole parent families did not realise how much pain and loss the impact of the new policy would cause.

One mother of three children who does social work 12 hours a week and is studying



to get a university degree to help her work, told ACOSS:

"... I will lose \$280 a fortnight even though I am doing what the government wants with regards to working and studying to fulfil my mutual obligations. A combination of reduced benefit amount and a harsher income cut-off point, coupled with losing my pensioner education supplement, will do this to me. I don't understand how the government can justify these changes."

Another mother with minimal family support (and none from her husband) said she wanted to study nursing but found her way blocked:

"I knew the chance of studying was out, since I had barely enough money to pay the rent and feed my children, let alone pay for textbooks, uniforms and any fees that the VET system doesn't cover. Also I had no one to pick the kids up for me or help me out during the proposed vocational placement ..."

"So I waited until both my children were in school to study, but even then by the time my course is finished my boys will be well over eight!"

One single mum described her welfare experience as follows:

"It meant no specialist care for my child when she was diagnosed with a disease. It meant waiting for any healthcare for a long time. It meant no dental work whatsoever for any of us. It meant lack of opportunity for my

children to partake in extra-curricular activities or to go to events or join a sports team or even visit the museum. It meant being around other kids from families with no money and exposing my children to all the behavioural problems [that the] economic distress ripple effect has.

"It has meant crummy run-down houses usually filled with mould and damp because that was all I could afford. This resulted in sickness and moving again and again, in fact three times in one year with a two year and a seven-year-old. The cycle perpetuates itself. It meant shame when my children had holes in their clothing and I couldn't afford to buy new proper shoes for my growing children. It meant feeling trapped, like I wasn't able to mean anything in the world. I was held back, tied down, surrounded by nothing but the burden of being powerless. It's a vast feeling that surrounds your daily life ..."

As one single mum told ACOSS: "... I think any decision that (offers) a lower amount of support is just going to create not only more stress and hardship, but also more homelessness and starving families ..."

In many cases families cannot help their children who become single parents because they themselves have their own problems, including disability, lack of education or job opportunities, and/or many other difficulties. Often single mothers have been the victims of domestic violence, or the fathers refuse to

provide support, and in some cases there are simply no family members to turn to.

Last month, after the transfers had taken place, charities noted a sharp rise in the number of single parents seeking their help.

However, charities have limited means, and the owner of one brothel reported with evident satisfaction that some desperate single mothers were now taking the terrible decision to seek employment as sex workers in order to feed their families.

## Labor policies worse than Howard government's

A wealthy country like Australia could well afford to support single parents, but the Gillard government appears to believe that the way to go is to lump the problem onto families or charities.

In fact, in 2006 the Howard regime introduced the policy of diverting the existing Parenting Payment recipients onto Newstart when their oldest child turned 16, and transferring all new single parent welfare applicants from the Parenting Payment to Newstart when their oldest child turned eight.

The federal Labor Party, then in opposition, vigorously opposed all transitions to Newstart payments because the policy would leave sole parents who applied for welfare support after 2006 with lower payments, without improving their job prospects.

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## Guardian

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The one way  
industrial relations street

The Australian Financial Review has conducted a survey of 12 Australian company chairmen to find out what they would like to see changed coming up to the federal election. The list is long and predictable. An end to federal/state wrangling, a shake up of how services are delivered to the public (more privatisation), less red tape and regulation in general were among the issues raised. Top of a lot of the lists was industrial relations "reform". More "flexibility", an end to what many big wigs imagine is unfettered access by unions to workplaces, limiting of the role unions have in establishing agreements for greenfields projects and so on and so forth. Individual contracts are favoured by some.

A number of the chairmen were talking tough. They want to put maximum pressure on Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott to deliver more than has already been delivered in the area of industrial relations. Among the toughest talkers was National Australia Bank chairman Michael Chaney. "What is needed is a willingness to crash through at the risk of getting some noses out of joint," he said. Of course, he's talking about workers' noses.

Increased productivity and industrial relations "reform" are seen as pretty much the same thing. The impression given is that Australian workers get about their tasks more slowly than workers in other countries or in other times. Mr Chaney was nostalgic for the good old days when workers erected the Empire State Building in just 15 months. "What an unfortunate comparison," said ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver in response. "This highlights the inability of business leaders to come up with genuine solutions to productivity. As usual it's the worker who cops the brunt. Five people died during the building of the Empire State Building so pinning this as a model for the construction industry today highlights their lazy management style."

Australian building sites are still tough, hazardous places. The less union representation there is, the more dangerous and substandard they are. On average a worker dies at work every week in the industry. In spite of this and other unpleasant realities, Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry chief executive Peter Anderson and others maintain that industrial relations is a "one way street" running against business interests.

The particular comment was made following the Prime Minister's announcement of proposed changes to the Fair Work Act that she claims will deliver more "family friendly" workplaces. The changes would require bosses to give more notice of drastic roster changes and written reasons in the event leave is refused to workers needing to care for pre-school children, disabled children under 18 years of age and elderly parents. The call will go out for part-time work to be made available to parents returning from parental leave. All of these requests can be refused on "reasonable business grounds" – reasonable in the eyes of the employer, that is.

These are hardly earth shattering changes and do little to change the flow of traffic on industrial relations street. The ACTU has called for some meaningful dispute handling mechanism but that won't be achieved without concerted action by workers and communities. It has always been that way and will remain so as long as we have capitalism.

And while the debate rages around the rather inconsequential tweaks to the so-called Fair Work Act, employers are going in boots and all to maintain their advantage. As The Guardian goes to press, Lend Lease subsidiary Abigroup and the Queensland government are pursuing community activist Bob Carnegie through the courts for his support of workers in dispute at the Royal Children's Hospital site in Brisbane. The dispute was resolved last year but clearly the company and the government want to dole out an ideological lesson. In Victoria, the AMWU may be fined for costs including that of helicopters that have flown guest type 457 visa workers into City West Water project at Werribee over the heads of a community picket. Protesters are outraged that unemployed local tradespeople weren't taken on for the project. It's all a long way from the image company CEOs like to project of the leisurely life enjoyed by Australian workers.

## PRESS FUND

Capitalism seeks to suppress non-conservative views on history, but it can't resist the temptation to make a buck. As we noted recently, commercial TV networks have declared that Burt Lancaster's magnificent TV documentary series *The Unknown War*, which told the real story of the German-Soviet battles in WW2, is no longer available. Meanwhile, mail order company Entertainment Masters, which specialises in DVDs for the older generation, has been quietly selling the series. And good luck to them! Good luck also to those who contribute to the Press Fund, we certainly need your help, so please send us in something for the next issue if you possibly can. Special thanks to this week's contributors, as follows:

Charlie Henry \$50, "Round Figure" \$10

This week's total: \$60 Progressive total: \$280

TSl health cuts  
attacked

Rudi Maxwell

The Queensland government has been widely criticised for slashing 35 frontline health positions in the Torres Strait.

Last year, state Health Minister Lawrence Springborg and Premier Campbell Newman assured the public that no "frontline" health positions would be lost when the decision was made to massively reduce the health budget.

However, the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Hospital and Health Service announced last month the positions it would cut included 13 Aboriginal health workers, 13 nursing and two midwife positions.

Union Together northern lead organiser Kevin O'Sullivan said Indigenous people deserved better.

"Unless these cuts are stopped or reversed, health services will be hit at remote communities in the Torres Strait and the Cape, where people are paying \$10 for two litres of milk and a loaf of bread," he said.

"Since before the September 2012 Queensland budget, the Newman government made it very clear they were going to put the axe through Queenslanders' health services by axing more than 4,000 health workers without properly consulting workers or communities."

Mr O'Sullivan said the government health cuts would not help to "close the gap" on health for Indigenous peoples, who die up to 17 years younger than other Australians.

Together health delegate Dr Sandy Donald said it was a "matter of public record" that the Newman government had already slashed \$3 million from Indigenous health services.

"Slashing 10 percent of the entire workforce for the Torres Strait region is a savage cut," he said. "Do ten percent of the Torres Strait workforce really contribute nothing to health care?"

"There's no doubt this will have a dramatic effect on the Torres Strait community and economy of losing so many salaries that may well spark an exodus of those workers' families.

## "What consultation?"

"What clinical evidence is there to support these cuts, what consultation has been done with local health workers, what consultation has been done with local representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?"

"Additionally, the impact of losing this health education and prevention workforce for Torres Strait Islander peoples will cascade through our community for decades."

Shadow Health Minister Jo-Ann Miller said Mr Springborg was "widening the gap" in Aboriginal and Torres Strait health outcomes.

"In last year's budget, Mr Springborg cut \$2.4 million from the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula board, which has resulted in these cuts to the smallest and most remote health region in the state which

covers the Thursday Island and Bamaga hospitals," she said.

"The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population already suffer a disproportionate burden of illness, by slashing health services the LNP government is only going to further disadvantage this community.

"The board was responsible for providing a range of primary and community health services, including chronic disease management, maternal and child health services, men's and women's health services, oral health, post-acute rehabilitation aged care, general home and community care services and family support for 11,000 people.

"With these savage cuts, Mr Springborg and the LNP Government is widening the gap in Indigenous health and pushing Queensland backwards."

Mrs Miller said one of the key local positions to be cut was the clinical nurse consultant for rheumatic heart disease.

"This is outrageous as remote Indigenous communities are among the highest sufferers of rheumatic heart disease in the world," she said. "These latest health cuts by Mr Springborg are an international disgrace and a shameful example of how this LNP government treats Queenslanders in remote communities."

Mr Springborg's office did not respond to calls and emails.

Koori Mail ☼

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They were right! However, when Labor took office in 2007, it retained the policy. Moreover, last year the government introduced legislation to reduce the "grandfather" period so that families who were receiving Parenting Payment in 2006 would lose their entitlements to it when their youngest child turned 12, not 16.

And now under the latest policy change the age limit has been reduced further to eight years, so that sole parents whose youngest child is between 8-11 years old have now lost their Parenting Payment entitlements.

And just to add salt to the wound, members of this group will no longer have access to extended entitlements if they have another child.

The Gillard government's policies are even more savage than those of the Howard government's.

They're also remarkably short-sighted from a national viewpoint. Children in families forced into extreme poverty by such policies will suffer severe difficulties in development and will be at greater risk of mental health breakdowns, depression, poor schooling outcomes, obesity and criminal behaviour.

The controversy over the government's treatment of single parents has recently focused on the sole parents who in 2006 were promised the Parenting Payment until their youngest child turned 16, but who have now been double-crossed.

However, the essential problem that all sole parents now face is the limitation of their entitlements to Newstart. The report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, which was released last year, expressed deep concern about the policy's impact on sole parents.

It recommended a delay in the implementation of the policy until after completion of an inquiry into Newstart. It also concluded that by implementing the policy the government risked being in violation of the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Nevertheless, the government ignored the inquiry's findings.

The biggest single problem facing the unemployed is the lack of job prospects. That's a chronic problem under capitalism, especially where governments look to the private sector to solve social problems such as unemployment.

The solution to the immediate problem that sole parents face is the replacement of Newstart with a program that provides decent entitlements, and the introduction of work transition and employment programs, including opportunities to work in government enterprises.

Alas, that's not likely to happen under the Gillard government, and certainly not under the ultra-conservative Liberal/National coalition if they win this year's elections, unless they're subjected to absolutely crushing public pressure, and that's something we should set our minds to achieving. Mind you, an even better solution would be to replace them with political forces that will finally do the right thing. ☼

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# Is super next for gov't cuts?

Anna Pha

**It's that time of the year again – the lead-up to a federal budget with a government frantically looking for spending cuts. There are the usual leaks to the media to test the water. Superannuation tax concessions are in the firing line, especially the “out-of-sight” taxation of earnings in funds.**

When the compulsory superannuation guarantee scheme was introduced by the Keating Labor government in 1992, it had a number of aims.

Its budgetary aim is to gradually replace the age pension by self-provision of retirement incomes through superannuation savings. This would, in line with neo-liberal economic policy, enable the government to retreat from its social responsibility to provide an income for retirees out of central revenue.

The roll-back of age pension costs would fund future tax cuts for the rich and the private sector – mining companies, banks, insurance companies, etc – also a central platform of neo-liberal economics.

A third aim of what constitutes the privatisation of workers' retirement savings is to provide financial institutions with a vast pool of ever-increasing capital to invest. The power these institutions exert is enormous. The \$1.5 trillion in superannuation savings plays a major role in the structure of capital investment in Australia. They can lead to consortia buying up government utilities, manipulate stockmarkets with their purchasing power and look after their other interests.

Regardless of whether they lose billions or make billions for the workers whose savings they gamble with, the fees roll in. Workers take all the risk, as seen by the massive losses during the recent global financial crisis. The average worker's superannuation savings have still not fully recovered from this crisis.

Successive governments have introduced various concessional taxation schemes to attract personal contributions to superannuation funds, over and above the compulsory employer contributions. These tax concessions include a flat rate of 15 percent on all earnings in a fund; tax-free withdrawal of superannuation savings if over 60 years of age; and the 15 percent tax rate on contributions up to a certain limit (recently reduced to \$25,000 pa).

There is a low-income superannuation contribution from the government of \$500 to compensate for the fact that people on low incomes are paying 15 percent tax on their superannuation income (in the fund). If the money had not been earned in the fund they would have paid a lower rate or possibly no tax at all.

There is also a superannuation co-contribution from the government for workers on low and middle incomes of up to \$1,000 depending on their income and how much they contribute.

The main aim of these payments is to encourage personal contributions and to boost the accumulated savings of those on lower incomes to ensure they are sufficient for self-provision on retirement.

## Snouts in the trough

The rich were drawn like bears to a honey pot with the 15 percent tax on earnings. It is less than one third the marginal rate of 46.5 percent (including Medicare levy) they pay on other income.

The whole system is skewed to the rich who in the years to come will pocket more in tax concessions than the government would ever have paid them in a universal age pension. According to the Australian Council of Social Service, almost half of these tax concessions are being accrued by the top 12 percent of taxpayers.

Labor is looking at targeting them in the budget. It is extremely concerned at the rising cost of superannuation tax concessions which Treasury estimates will total \$32 billion in 2012-13. This figure is set to rise to \$45 billion by 2015-16 – equalling or passing the amount spent on the age pension!

The question the Treasurer is asking is how can that figure be reduced. What can be cut with minimum fallout in an election year?

Over recent years a number of measures have already been taken such as capping the amount of annual contributions and limiting the amount of contributions taxed at the concessional rate. The government last year raised the 15 percent tax on contributions to 30 percent for people on over \$300,000 a year.

These changes have angered the superannuation funds, the wealthy and the financial institutions. They want maximum concessions and certainty about rules.

One of the early leaks was a proposal to tax withdrawals from



***It is suggested that a worker needs to accumulate between \$800,000 and \$1,000,000 for retirement to be able to sustain a basic standard of living. How does a hotel cleaner, shop assistant or community worker on \$35,000 to \$45,000 per annum or less achieve such savings!***

superannuation funds. The outcry from the industry was so strong the government quickly pulled its head in for the time being.

Now rumours are floating that the 15 percent tax on fund earnings will be increased for those with larger sums in their fund or that the 30 percent tax on personal contributions will be extended to people on more than \$180,000 per annum in line with the Henry tax review's recommendations.

Whichever way the government opts in this budget, there is one certainty, it won't stop there. Once money has been deposited in a superannuation fund, it is basically locked in until age 60 – an age limit that is likely to be raised. There will be ongoing erosion of tax concessions, more changes and uncertainty regarding future rules and no guarantees of income upon retirement.

The system also perpetrates the inequalities of the wages system. The higher your income during your working life, the larger your savings on retirement. Women, in particular, are disadvantaged. They are on average subjected to lower wages, are more likely to have worked part-time and taken breaks in their working lives to raise families or as carers.

The discrepancy in payouts is enormous. The average superannuation payout for women at present is 60 percent of that for men.

It is suggested that a worker needs to accumulate between \$800,000 and \$1,000,000 for retirement to be able to sustain a basic standard of living. How does a hotel cleaner, shop assistant or community worker on \$35,000 to \$45,000 per annum or less if part-time or casual achieve such savings!

In addition, there are no guarantees what will be in the fund at the time of retirement. It all depends on the gyrations of casino markets in a boom-bust cyclical capitalist economy.

The present superannuation system provides few guarantees for workers. In their pursuit of a neo-liberal economic agenda, Labor and Coalition governments have been winding back social security and reducing the taxation of corporate profits and high incomes.

The inequalities will continue to increase until such time as there is a

return to a more progressive taxation system, which really taxes those on higher incomes at a higher rate.

Public health services, public education, retirement incomes, unemployment benefits, sickness and disability benefits should be funded centrally through the taxation system and be universally available. Means and assets testing might appear fair on the surface, but in reality they create further inequalities, layers of bureaucracy and pain for those involved. It lets the big end of town off paying their share of taxes.

The present superannuation system puts workers' savings at risk. The paid benefits schemes, which provided retirees with a guaranteed level of income for the rest of their life, have been almost phased out. Workers pay taxes all their lives and are entitled to retire in dignity with an adequate income.

The Communist Party of Australia is calling for the abolition of means and assets testing on age pensions and for the establishment of a National Superannuation Fund which workers could join on a voluntary basis. This Fund would offer a paid benefits scheme to members (regular fortnightly payment) and invest its savings in socially beneficial projects such as public transport, public housing and alternative renewable energy development and production. ✪

Pete's Corner



DO YOU  
HAVE  
SOMETHING  
TO SAY?

Letters to the Editor  
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# TJ Hickey: What do nine years mean?

For nine long years Gail Hickey and her Family have indefatigably campaigned for Justice in the death of their son, TJ Hickey, an Aboriginal man just 17 years old. He died as a consequence of the Redfern police pursuit that ended with his death the following day.

For nine long years Gail, the Family and their supporters have been telling and re-telling the history. His bike was rammed by a police car; he was thrown in the air with great force, and landed on the spiked fence line, again with great force.

Instead of ensuring proper medical attention was given by the first police officer on the scene, then-Constable Michael Hollingsworth, TJ was roughly pulled off the spikes and thrown to the concrete, then searched, whereby he bled very heavily despite the alleged assistance by Hollingsworth. Basic first aid rules, as all police are trained for, insist that impaled victims must be left in situ or to remain impaled until the Police Rescue Unit is called to assist.

When the Police Rescue Unit did arrive with medically trained and competent staff, Hollingsworth sent them away. Finally two ambulances arrived and took over but instead of taking him to the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, the closest, he was transported to the Prince of Wales hospital at Randwick. He died early next morning.

For nine long years we have witnessed the history of every police Death in Custody repeated in this case: The innocents were convicted and jailed and the guilty got away and promoted in their ranks. How so? That Sunday night the many youth who knew TJ and/or others who blamed the Redfern police for the death of TJ became involved in the so-called Redfern riots. These young people were angered by the police driving through and around the Block telling Aboriginal kids that they would be next and also disrespecting the Hickey Family in their grief by pointing to them and laughing. Family complaints were ignored by the senior police of the time and their rightful anger was later vented.

But the aftermath of these events



Photo: Brami Jegon

were really bizarre: the police officers involved were promoted, the fighters for justice were arrested, some convicted and even did some time in jail. The Carr government concerned with other reactions offers a "Taj Mahal" in Redfern building the Redfern Community Centre in the Block as a tokenistic act to calm the Aboriginal people.

Nine years ago ISJA (Indigenous Social Justice Association) became involved and offered Gail Hickey the services of a solicitor and a barrister whom were expected to have a vigorous fight for justice for the Hickey Family. The police and the Carr government however had other ideas and talked Gail into accepting a government-and-police-sponsored legal team that did very little in representing the Family in their fight for justice.

Nine years ago the NSW Coroner, John Abernethy, firmly restricted the scope of the Coronial inquest. The allowable evidence was restricted also. Normal legal and Coronial procedures and practices were not followed, like presenting the Final Autopsy Report.

This report would have confirmed that TJ was thrown with a massive force on to the fence line, denying the argument of a bike accident. Also TJ's bicycle was not presented in court as evidence but remained as "evidence of a police investigation". Perplexingly, when the bike was handed back to the Family, they noticed that both bike wheels had been replaced by new ones

and did not show any damage caused by the ramming to the rear wheel as was shown in one of the TV news bulletin on that fateful Saturday evening.

The court also blocked two witnesses (found by ISJA), that saw the Police Rescue Unit arrive and leave as instructed by Hollingsworth. The Coroner himself stopped the participation of a medically qualified Forensic Consultant, Dr Carl Hughs, (also connected to ISJA) appearing for the Family. Despite the threat by the Counsel Assisting the Coroner to summon the mobile phone communications between the four police officers involved in the incident, it never happened.

Also a police officer, who was a direct participant in the incident, was moved immediately from Redfern police station that weekend for his own safety, allegedly from the Block Community. He gave his testimony and after that he disappeared to an unknown destination. Coroner Abernethy was scathing of the Community in their attitude to this officer.

Now, nine years later still there are serious concerns about processes and outcomes of the police investigation, that amounted to a cover up, (again very common in Deaths in Custody), and also to the legal farce of the arranged Coronial inquest. So, for the ninth time, Gail, the Family, the Communities where TJ lived, ISJA and other supporters, continue to call for justice, the reopening of a wider investigation into the facts, the non-appearance of witnesses and all other withheld evidence, to allow for a full forensic examination of the facts to reach an honest and Just conclusion.

Now, nine years later, we have reissued the petition calling for Justice

for TJ and his Family. We need as many signatures as possible. You can download a copy from the ISJA site on Facebook, Stop Black Deaths in Custody Rally for 9th Anniversary of TJ Hickey 2013.

We need to put together as many signatures as possible and for many to join the march to the NSW Parliament House, headed by Gail Hickey and the Family on February 14, 2013.

Nine years is just too long to call for real justice although other Deaths in Custody Families have fought for over 30 years. We have personally seen the physical and mental damage done to these Families and it is nothing but state-sanctioned torture by governments and their police forces to allow these injustices to continue.

Many more than nine years of struggle gives to Ray Jackson, president of ISJA, the right to demand to Julia Gillard, who is talking about Aboriginal recognition, "What about recognising over 400+ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Deaths in Custody since January 1, 1980 and including those suicides/deaths in her racist NT Intervention?"

Nine years ago we saw the TJ death as a continuation of the racist police action towards Aboriginal people in this country. Today we know that as it was true at the time, so was it in the Mulrunji, Mr Ward, Mr Briscoe cases, among so many others. What we also came to realise was that behind the protection of their police "no matter what" by governments and courts, the continuous enactment of laws empowering police, the provision to the forces with new weapons (like water cannon, capsicum spray, Tasers) and the development of new tactics of crowd control, a riot squad, internet vigilance, engagement of

some Community Organisations and Community Individuals, was a perfectly but anti-social orchestrated plan.

This plan, aimed against our most elemental democratic and human rights, was enacted to stop active social dissent, to attack Aboriginal people, migrant and religious minorities first, and to also include ethnic solidarity organisations, anti-war groups, and broader protest groups like Occupy and workers like the Grocon protests in Melbourne and others who were deemed to be non-compliant/different and therefore dangerous to the establishment.

Now on the ninth anniversary of TJ's death we have to hugely multiply our efforts to get the broadest participation possible to allow us to neutralise the waves of police brutality and their indiscriminate and torturous use of Tasers and pepper spray.

Confronting us, however, is a particular sense of immunity instilled in the police by the lack of public and independent investigations of any incidents where police were involved that resulted in damages, injury or even death of people. The struggle for justice for TJ and for Deaths in Custody is totally entangled in that constant battle between the oppressors and the oppressed. This battle is happening everywhere and it is very important that we must win it. Every win counts because every step forward brings the possibility to recover our diminished rights. Gail Hickey, the Family and their supporters don't want to have a tenth anniversary without justice.

Join the struggle to make this a reality.

Ray Jackson & Raul Bassi ☪

Sydney

Rally 9<sup>th</sup> 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  
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14 FEB

CNR GEORGE  
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## Statement in support of the rights of Bob Carnegie

The Communist Party of Australia expresses its full support for the rights of community activist Bob Carnegie and pledges solidarity with efforts to maintain those rights in the face of an outrageous attack.

The actions of multinational corporation Lend Lease subsidiary AbiGroup, in bringing 54 counts of contempt of court against the veteran activist, are rightly viewed by the public as an act of spite arising out of the success of a campaign to defend appropriate conditions for workers at the Royal Children's

Hospital site in Brisbane.

The Newman government stands condemned for joining in this assault on people's basic rights of association and free speech. The use of a private firm to spy on activists protesting in support of workers and other acts of intimidation underscore the sinister nature of the attack on concerned members of the community and their support of rights in the workplace.

The CPA condemns these attempts to criminalise dissent in Australia; they are part of the

broader agenda of the most draconian parts of WorkChoices kept in the Fair Work Australia legislation that was introduced by the Rudd and Gillard governments.

Bob Carnegie's case has already attracted nationwide and international attention. Support will continue to snowball. The CPA endorses the call for the immediate withdrawal of all legal proceedings against Mr Carnegie.

Yours in solidarity,

Vinnie Molina  
CPA President

# COAG sharpens clash over schools funding

Bob Briton

**The Australian Education Union (AEU) placed ads in the major dailies last week carrying an open letter to the Prime Minister, state premiers and territory chief ministers. Crunch time is looming; decisions will have to be made about the future of schools funding and the deadline appears to be the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting in April. Of course, while the AEU represents teachers in public schools where funding problems are the most acute, it is not the only body pressing for major change in the way state and federal education dollars are spent.**

The AEU open letter was signed by a host of prominent Australians – former Australian premiers and former PM Bill Hayden, former Greens leader Bob Brown, Professor Mick Dodson, Mandawuy Yunupingu, World Vision's Tim Costello and many others. The campaign to secure the extra \$6.5 billion for struggling schools recommended in the Gonski Review of schools funding has been taken up a notch. The AEU has been arguing the case for the funding boost since the Review's release in February last year. Most Australians agree with the union about the need for a dramatic turnaround from current arrangements that favour private schools including elite institutions for the children of the very wealthy.

"If there is no agreement between state and territory governments and the Commonwealth on Gonski, not only will schools miss out on the additional funding that is urgently required, they will be hit by massive cuts," AEU federal president Angelo Gavrielatos said recently. The union

predicts public schools will lose up to \$5.4 billion in funding over the next five years if current arrangements are maintained.

"Cuts of this magnitude would mean the loss of thousands of teaching jobs, larger class sizes and severe cutbacks in education programs," Mr Gavrielatos said.

The federal government has paid lip service to the Gonski Review's recommendation but has hinted heavily that the \$6.5 billion figure is too lavish. It has not come clean about its pursuit of the neo-liberal agenda to blur the lines between public and private education to the advantage of the private sector. The ultimate aim is for public education to become simply a "safety-net" for those unable to pay to choose from the options available on the education "market". The Coalition doesn't even pretend it will increase funding to public education.

The Gillard government and the Opposition sing from the same song sheet about the need to measure and rate teachers' performance and in other ways blame them for the worrying decline in educational outcomes over the past decade. They both want more "autonomy" for schools in spending matters, including the hiring and firing of teachers. They both see an increased role for corporate "partnerships" with schools and the tailoring of curricula to the needs of various industries. Both would like to see more education dollars flowing to public education from philanthropic sources (see *Education and "philanthropy"* in last week's *Guardian*).

Columns are appearing in the press supporting the argument that the problems besetting our schools won't be fixed by "throwing dollars"

at them. Jennifer Hewett argued in *The Australian Financial Review* last week that teaching methods are the key issue and that the current, parlous situation won't change until governments stop making "...discredited policy choices because they are backed by the teachers' unions."

TAFE isn't spared, either. Claire Field is the chief executive of the Australian Council for Private Education and Training. She started a column in a recent issue of *The Age* suggesting that TAFE has a bright future doing what it does alongside what she claims are the smaller, more flexible, industry-sensitive private providers. It goes on to question what state governments are doing by providing skills training at all when the private sector could do it better, according to the author. After all, we don't miss the role played by government when it owned Qantas, Telstra and the Commonwealth Bank, do we? Maybe, just maybe, there's a role for TAFE in "...remote locations or specialist industries where it is uneconomic for independent providers to operate".

Actually, Australians do miss having a sizable sector of the economy carried on by public enterprise. Utility bills are a stinging, quarterly reminder of what has been lost. The recent decades of privatisation and whiteanting of what's left of the public sector have witnessed soaring charges and declining standards. Education is a glaring example. The community must get behind public school and TAFE teachers and insist that government stop making "discredited policy choices" that are banged on the table by big business. ☘



Michael Chaney, the National Australia Bank chairman and former president of the Business Council of Australia is claiming that workers have to be made to be more productive. He compared current "slow" construction to the building of the Empire State Building which was completed in 15 months. "What an unfortunate comparison. This highlights the inability of business leaders to come up with genuine solutions to productivity. As usual it's the worker who cops the brunt," commented ACTU secretary Dave Oliver. Mr Oliver reminded that five people died during the building of the Empire State Building and many were injured. "Michael Chaney and his colleagues are proposing a return to the dark ages of industrial relations where scores of workers were injured or killed while at work. As usual they want to take the low road and ride on the backs of workers rather than the high road where innovation and infrastructure improve productivity," said Dave Oliver.

The Australian Electoral Commission has revealed that advocacy group GetUp! had accepted almost \$120,000 in donations from a venture capitalist with connections to internet gambling while campaigning against the poker machine operations of Woolworths and Coles. This was a golden opportunity for the opposition leader in the Senate Eric Abetz to slam both GetUp! and the Greens for being "conflicted" in accepting the money and waging a campaign at the same time. Senator Abetz described the Greens as "GetUp's largest political beneficiary" and called on them to condemn the acceptance of the funds. GetUp! spokesman Rohan Wenn said GetUp! supporters decided its campaign priorities and this donation was not used in the anti-pokies campaign.

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) has expressed concern over the proposal by the Opposition to relocate public sector jobs to tropical centres such as Karratha, Perth, Darwin and Cairns. The proposal, contained in a leaked Opposition policy document, Vision 2030, reveals that if elected the Opposition planned to "relocate substantial and relevant components of federal departments and commonwealth agencies, such as the CSIRO, to key urban zones in Northern Australia". National Secretary of the CPSU, Nadine Flood, said most Australians would support sensible, properly planned moves to boost regional employment in the north, but she was worried Vision 2030 failed the credibility test. "Forcing tens of thousands of public servants to move thousands of kilometres to work in small developing towns like Karratha is an astonishing idea," she said.

Victoria's unemployment rate has jumped to the highest level since the global financial crisis, with the loss of 30,000 jobs from the state economy in January. Opposition employment spokesman Tim Pallas said the drop was equivalent to almost 1,000 fewer Victorians in work each day. "Victoria is coming to a standstill, with thousands of construction jobs lost and thousands more at risk as big infrastructure jobs finish, with no future plans by the Baillieu government for major projects," he said.

## Hospira takes union's medicine

**Strong leadership by delegates at Australia's main facility for making cancer drugs has forced management to improve wages but also recognise the right of its research scientists to be represented by the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU).**

Multinational giant Hospira strung out negotiations for six months last year, but finally took its medicine the night before prescribed industrial action earlier this month, which could have disrupted production of vital pharmaceuticals, was due to start.

Delegate Amanda Reaper said the resulting enterprise agreement vindicated the solidarity among about 115 AMWU members across diverse occupations, in the face of persistent tactics by Hospira to divide them. Ms Reaper said it ended three years of frustration for 15 people in the research and development department.

In that time, Hospira refused to recognise her as a delegate and

the industrial rights of the AMWU members who elected her. "They had the irrational notion that professional scientists could not be represented by the AMWU, they've tried to ignore us. I think they had a fear that unionism in the R&D area might impact on investors, it was ridiculous," she said.

"But in true AMWU style, the harder they pushed us, the more we united. The support from other members, delegates, from our officials has been incredible."

Ms Reaper paid tribute to maintenance workers who supported their AMWU comrades in laboratories by planning strike action which caused the US-owned company to plead it was against the "national interest."

Organiser Dinh Nguyen took a strong line with management on members' determination to take the action, which convinced Hospira to settle most EBA terms in a marathon meeting on the eve of the strike.

Hospira staff won a two-year agreement expected to be approved by Fair Work Australia in the next few weeks. It includes a new dispute resolution clause recognising the AMWU's role, with annual pay rises of four percent, backdated to October.

It also introduces improved redundancy provisions for all categories of staff and a process to settle on a new grading system properly reflecting the work value of technical staff.

Fellow delegate Daniela Chircop, a microbiology analyst, said a refusal by management to allow a lunchtime stop work meeting at its Mulgrave complex in Melbourne's east had also backfired badly.

"As we stood in the street outside work, it became clear to many members the company only wanted their side of the story told – they were trying to play mind games," she said. ☘

# UN report calls on Israel to cease

Anna Pha

**On January 31, the UN's International Fact-Finding Mission on Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) published its findings on the impact of Israeli settlements on the Palestinian people. The report outlines a multitude of systemic breaches of international law and horrendous violations of human rights. It also calls on UN Member States to take action to restore the human rights of Palestinians in the OPT. Needless to say it did not make the front pages of the Australian mass media. The *Financial Review* buried it in less than 30 words on page 13. Murdoch's *Australian* newspaper featured the Israeli government's attack on the report, not the details of it. If it had been Iran or the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (North Korea) such abuses would have filled news headlines for days.**

The Mission was the result of a decision at the 19th session of the Human Rights Council (HRC) on March 22, 2012, to "dispatch an independent international fact-finding mission ... to investigate the implications of the Israeli settlements on the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the Palestinian people throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem."

Its members are Christine Chanet (chair) from France, Asma Jahangir of Pakistan and Unity Dow of Botswana.

Their findings will be presented to the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on March 18. Israel refused to co-operate. It denied permission for the Mission to enter Israel or Palestinian territories to carry out their inquiry. This refusal is indicative of Israeli control over the OPT and the contempt it shows towards the UN and international law. Instead, the members met in Jordan with more than 50 people affected by the settlements or working as NGOs in a relevant field.

On releasing their report, Ms Chanet told a press conference that, "Israel must cease all settlement activities without preconditions," in compliance with Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

"We are today calling on the government of Israel to ensure full accountability for all violations, put an end to the policy of impunity and to ensure justice for all victims," Ms Jahangir said.

"The magnitude of violations relating to Israel's policies of disposessions, evictions, demolitions and displacements from land shows the widespread nature of these breaches of human rights. The motivation behind violence and intimidation against the Palestinians and their properties is to drive the local populations away from their lands, allowing the settlements to expand," Ms Dow said.

The Mission found that "the violations are all interrelated, forming part of an overall pattern of breaches that are characterised principally by the denial of the right to self-determination and systemic discrimination against the Palestinian people which occurs on a daily basis."

## Israel in full control

It states in its conclusions that "the State of Israel has had full control of the settlements in the OPT since 1967 and continues to promote and sustain them through infrastructure and security measures." The transfer of Israeli citizens into the OPT, prohibited under international humanitarian law and international criminal

law, is a central feature of Israel's practices and policies.

In the West Bank alone, including East Jerusalem, 250 settlements have been established since 1967 either with or without government authorisation. The number of settlers is estimated at 520,000 (200,000 in East Jerusalem and 320,000 in the rest of the West Bank).

The settlements are established and developed for the exclusive benefit of Israeli Jews. "They are maintained and advanced through a system of total segregation between the settlers and the rest of the population living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This system of segregation is supported and facilitated by strict military and law enforcement control to the detriment of the rights of the Palestinian population."

The existence of the settlements has had a heavy toll on the rights of the Palestinians. Their rights to freedom of self-determination, non-discrimination, freedom of movement, equality, due process, fair trial, not to be arbitrarily detained, liberty and security of person, freedom of expression, freedom to access places of worship, education, water, housing, adequate standard of living, property, access to natural resources and effective remedy are being violated consistently and on a daily basis.

## Right to self-determination

The Mission recalls General Assembly Resolution 67/19, which "reaffirms the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to independence in their State of Palestine on the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967".

It notes that "despite all the pertinent United Nations resolutions declaring that the existence of the settlements is illegal and calling for their cessation, the planning and growth of the settlements continues both of existing as well as new structures."

"Neither the Palestinian Authority nor local Palestinian communities have any control over the governance, administration and planning of these areas."

It highlights the lack of control Palestinians have over their water resources, extraction of natural resources and fertile agricultural land. For example, "Eighty-six percent of the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea is under the *de facto* jurisdiction of the settlement regional councils," not Palestinian authorities.

The ongoing creeping annexation prevents the establishment of a contiguous and viable Palestinian State and undermines the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

## Inequality and discrimination

Information presented to the Mission demonstrates that distinct legal systems exist in the OPT and are applied separately to Israeli settlers and Palestinians.

Palestinians are routinely subject to arbitrary arrest and detention, including administrative detention and mass arrests and incarceration. It is estimated that over 700,000 Palestinians, including children, have been held in Israeli military detention since the beginning of the occupation, many in prisons located within Israel.

Concern is expressed over the high number of children who are apprehended or detained, including for minor offences. "They are invariably mistreated, denied due process and fair trial. In violation of international law they are transferred to detention centres in Israel. Children

suffer harassment, violence and encounter significant obstacles in attending educational institutions, which limits their right to access education.

"Israel, the occupying power is failing in its duty to protect the right to access education of the Palestinian children and failing to facilitate the proper working of educational institutions."

Attacks and intimidation by settlers against Palestinians often are carried out in daytime and in the presence of Israeli army or police personnel, who frequently do not stop the violence or are ineffective.

Palestinians in the OPT suffer discriminatory application of a military court system that does not comply with international standards of fair trial and administration of justice.

## Violence and intimidation

All spheres of Palestinian life are being significantly affected by a minority of settlers who are engaged in violence and intimidation with the aim of forcing Palestinians off their land.

"There is a consistency in the testimonies as to the following facts: the attacks and intimidation regularly take place during daylight hours; the identity of perpetrators are well known or could easily be identified; the frequent presence of police and army at the scene; the involvement and presence of settlement security officers; the frequent existence of video and photographic footage of the incidents; the lack of accountability for the violence."

The Mission heard numerous testimonies on violent attacks by settlers, including physical assaults on the person, the use of knives, axes, clubs and other improvised weapons, as well as shootings and throwing Molotov cocktails. They also heard about the psychological impact of the intimidation from armed settlers trespassing on Palestinian land, at Palestinian water springs or in the midst of Palestinian neighbourhoods in Hebron and East Jerusalem.

Some testimonies described years of violence and intimidation directed at the same Palestinian family living in proximity to settlements which have pushed it to abandon its properties.

The violence and intimidation affects the livelihoods of Palestinian farmers: "preventing Palestinians accessing their land close to settlements through violence and intimidation; burning, uprooting and attacking Palestinian crops; settlers taking over the land and planting their own crops; fencing off and constructing on Palestinian agricultural lands."

"Violence, verbal and physical abuses, inhumane and degrading treatments, forced evictions, land and property grabbing, destruction of property and housing and many of the issues for which testimonies and information was gathered gravely affect the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health."

Depression, anxiety, symptomatic stress, mood disorder, behaviour problems and post traumatic stress disorders are some of the most current conditions reported by specialists. As settlers act with impunity, the feeling of injustice, the recurrence of events and the anticipation of renewed abuses, especially on relatives and children, lead to a worsening of these conditions.

## Dispossession and displacement

"Dispossession and displacement featured in most of the submissions, reports and testimony



Palestinians at a rally chant slogans supporting Palestinian

put before the Mission.... Since the beginning of the occupation, Palestinians have seen over a million *dunums* [approx. 250,000 acres] of their land seized ... Seized lands are placed within the jurisdictional boundaries of local and regional settlement councils, used not only for urbanisation, but also as buffer zones surrounding settlements or turned into recreational and nature areas which cannot be accessed by Palestinians."

Bedouin communities in general are particularly vulnerable to displacement and dispossession. Eighty percent of them live in the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea area and around Hebron. Many of these communities have already experienced multiple displacements.

They experience food insecurity, lack basic services including electricity. Over 90 percent face water scarcity, living with less than one-quarter of the World Health Organisation (WHO) minimum standards.

The Israeli army routinely demolishes their shelters and property, including those provided by or built with the assistance of aid agencies and international donors. In the South Hebron hills, eight villages are at risk of eviction to make way for a new firing zone.

In East Jerusalem, multiple factors such as the discriminatory building regulations, high number of demolition orders, residence permit restrictions, the acute housing shortage and violence and intimidation from settlers place enormous pressures on the city's Palestinian population.

Cases of forced eviction in East Jerusalem, such as in *Sheikh Jarrah* neighbourhood were

***In the West Bank alone, including East Jerusalem, 250 settlements have been established since 1967 either with or without government authorisation. The number of settlers is estimated at 520,000 (200,000 in East Jerusalem and 320,000 in the rest of the West Bank).***

# Use all settlement activities



inmates hunger striking in Israeli jails.

Photo: Majdi Mohammed

also reported to the Mission. Numerous testimonies speak of settlers taking over individual houses within the Old City.

Absence of proof of registration – land registration was discontinued by military order in 1968 – makes it extremely difficult for Palestinians to obtain recognition of tenure or permits.

Building permits are rarely if ever granted; in the last 20 years, 94 percent of permit applications were denied. Building without a permit is an offence under military orders, and a demolition order is accompanied by a high fine. The mission heard about residents demolishing their own houses to avoid paying fines – “self-demolitions” are not recorded in demolition statistics.

Many Palestinians are under the constant threat that their homes and property may be demolished. In East Jerusalem alone, where 33 percent of Palestinian homes lack building permits, at least 93,100 residents are potentially at risk of being displaced.

## Restrictions on freedom of movement

The vast majority of restrictions on the freedom of movement seem to be directly linked to the settlements and include “restrictions aimed at protecting the settlements, securing areas for their expansion, and improving the connectivity between settlements and with Israel itself.”

The restrictions themselves come in many forms including settler-only roads, a regime of checkpoints and crossings (closure obstacles), impediments created by the Wall and its gate and permit regime as well as administrative restrictions.

The Mission notes that restrictions on freedom of movement have a detrimental impact on Palestinian access to their land with direct consequences for their ability to work and earn their livelihood.

“Discrimination is particularly evident in the movement restrictions in Hebron and the Jordan Valley where large Palestinian populations are subjected to permit regimes and areas off limit to traffic and in some cases to even walk through. In the H2 area of Hebron there are 123 movement obstacles which are in place to facilitate the movement of approximately 550 Israeli settlers in Hebron and 7,000 in the nearby settlement of *Kiryat Arba* at the expense of the Palestinian population (170,000).”

The presence of these settlements directly impacts on Palestinian livelihoods as military orders have led to the closure of 512 Palestinian businesses, and at least 1,100 others closed due to the restricted access of customers and suppliers.

## Restrictions on peaceful assembly

Settlements, including the Wall, are the subject of Palestinian demonstrations in places such as *Bili'in* and *Nabi Saleh*, where the vast majority of demonstrators are reported to be acting in a non-violent manner. “The Israeli authorities often respond to these demonstrations with restrictions on assembly, declaring areas closed military zones, as well as employing violent means to suppress demonstrations by firing tear gas, rubber bullets and, on occasion, live rounds.”

The Mission heard that since 2009, residents of *Nabi Saleh*, a village of 600 people, have protested every Friday against the takeover by nearby settlers of the village’s water spring. The witness described a litany of violent attacks by the Israeli army on peaceful demonstrators which have resulted in one person being killed and over 400 people injured, including 195 children.

On some occasions the army has reportedly stopped demonstrations before they have begun by firing tear gas inside the village forcing all villagers to flee. The Mission was informed that Israeli politicians, academics and civil society actors voicing criticism of the settlements are discredited in public discourse. An example of this includes the targeting of veteran combatants who have served in the Israeli military in the OPT and who voice dissent with the official line of the establishment.

The report acknowledged “the valuable contribution made by members of Israeli civil society in highlighting the denial of human rights to the Palestinians due to the presence of the settlements.”

## Restrictions on right to water

Israel has predominance in the allocation of West Bank water resources, of which it withdraws 90 percent.

The Palestinian Water Authority’s ability to transfer water to areas facing water shortages is severely inhibited by the territorial fragmentation. In the Jordan Valley, deep water drillings

by the Israeli national water company *Mekorot* and the agro-industrial company *Mehadrin* have caused Palestinian wells and springs to dry up. Eighty percent of the total water resources drilled in the area is consumed by Israel and the settlements.

Palestinian villagers must travel several kilometres to get water when closer water resources serve neighbouring settlements. Settlements benefit from enough water to run farms and orchards, and for swimming pools and spas, while Palestinians often struggle to access minimum water requirements.

Some settlements consume around 400 l/c/d whereas Palestinian consumption is 73 l/c/d, and as little as 10-20 l/c/d for Bedouin communities which depend on expensive and low quality tanker water. In East Jerusalem houses built without a permit cannot connect to the water network.

Water shortages are further exacerbated by restrictions on movement, destruction of infrastructure, expropriations, forced evictions and settler violence.

The denial of water is used to trigger displacement, particularly in areas slated for settlement expansion, especially since these communities are mostly farmers and herders who depend on water for their livelihoods. A number of testimonies highlighted that the cutting off from water resources often precedes dispossession of lands for new settlement projects.

## Impact on economic rights

“The agricultural sector, considered the cornerstone of Palestinian economic development, has not been able to play its strategic role because of dispossession of land and the denial of access for farmers to agricultural areas, water resources and domestic and external markets. This has led to a continuous decline in the share of agricultural production in GDP and employment since 1967.”

Israel’s ban on the import of fertilisers for Palestinians into the West Bank has resulted in a reduction in productivity.

Besides demolitions carried out by the authorities, villagers suffer recurrent attacks from nearby settlements – especially during the olive harvest season – the destruction of trees, water installations and livestock, creating additional pressure to relinquish agricultural activities.

The Wall has divided villages, cut off farmers from their lands and water and curtailed trade with traditional markets, stifling the local economy. This is illustrated by the example of the village of *Nazelt Issa*, where half of the businesses existing before were destroyed to build the Wall while other activities closed down, given that most of their trade was with neighbouring villages now cut off by the Wall.

The Mission was informed that “Israeli settlement agriculture is blooming”.

With few income-generating prospects left in the village, unemployment is high, and young people leave to seek work.

A stringent system of permits and quotas continues to determine employment in Israel and the settlements, which lends itself to abuse by contractors and middlemen. Palestinians employed in the settlements work primarily in the manufacturing industry and the construction sectors. Women are mostly engaged in domestic work and agriculture.

While wages might be higher, employment conditions in the settlements remain precarious. Workers claiming their rights are easily dismissed, and supervision of employers by the Israeli authorities in the settlements remains largely absent.

Employment conditions of Palestinian workers in settlements are subject to a system characterised by legal uncertainties. Palestinians are contracted under the far less favourable pre-1967 Jordanian labour laws while Israeli citizens in the West Bank are employed under Israeli labour laws.

This “cheap labour” from the numerous Palestinian villages in convenient commuting distance represents an additional incentive for enterprises to move to the settlements.

The report also describes how private businesses are profiting from the demolition of Palestinian homes and businesses and from the construction and growth of settlements: supply of equipment and materials, surveillance and identification equipment for settlements, supply

of security services, provision of services and utilities, banking and financial operations, use of natural resources (water, land), the dumping and transfer of waste to Palestinian villages, etc.

Some businesses, however, have pulled out of settlements because it harms their image and might entail legal consequences.

“Israel labels all its export products as originating from ‘Israel’, including those wholly or partially produced in settlements. Some companies operating in settlements have been accused of hiding the original place of production of their products.

“This situation poses an issue of traceability of products for other states wishing to align themselves with their international and regional obligations. It also poses an issue in relation to consumers’ right to information. ... these issues are increasingly being addressed by states, regional organisations and some private businesses, the report notes.

## Recommendations

The Mission put forward the following recommendations:

Israel must, in compliance with article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, cease all settlement activities without preconditions. In addition it must immediately initiate a process of withdrawal of all settlers from the OPT.

The Mission further urges Israel to ensure adequate, effective and prompt remedy to all Palestinian victims for the harm suffered as a consequence of human rights violations that are a result of the settlements in accordance with Israel’s international obligation to provide effective remedy. Where necessary, steps must be taken to provide such remedy in concurrence with the representatives of the Palestinian people and with the assistance of the international community.

Israel must put an end to the human rights violations that are linked to the presence of settlements.

The Mission calls upon the government of Israel to ensure full accountability for all violations, including for all acts of settler violence, in a non-discriminatory manner and to put an end to the policy of impunity.

The Mission urges Israel to put an end to arbitrary arrest and detention of the Palestinian people, especially children, and observe the prohibition of the transfer of prisoners from the OPT to the territory of Israel, according to Article 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The Mission calls upon all Member States to comply with their obligations under international law and to assume their responsibilities in their relationship to a State breaching peremptory norms of international law – specifically not to recognise an unlawful situation resulting from Israel’s violations.

Private companies must assess the human rights impact of their activities and take all necessary steps – including by terminating their business interests in the settlements – to ensure they are not adversely impacting the human rights of the Palestinian People in conformity with international law ...

The Mission calls upon all Member States to take appropriate measures to ensure that business enterprises domiciled in their territory and/or under their jurisdiction, ... that conduct activities in or related to the settlements respect human rights throughout their operations ...

*The Guardian urges all readers to promote this report, its recommendations and to lobby their MPs to pressure the government and Opposition to implement them. Australia’s seat on the UN Security Council gives it an excellent opportunity to press for their international implementation.*

*The full text of the report is available on the UNHRC’s website, follow the links from the 19th Session. See also last week’s Guardian (#1580, 06-02-2012) on Israel’s refusal to co-operate with the UNHRC Universal Periodic Review procedure where UN member states have their human rights record evaluated every four years.*

Footnote:  
On November 29, 2012, the UN General Assembly voted for Palestine to become a non-member state with observer status. The next day, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu authorised the building of 3,000 new housing units in East Jerusalem and the West Bank ❄

# Has Scotland Yard name become toxic?

Yvonne Ridley

**People think I'm anti-police. I'm not ... but I do despise corrupt coppers who think they are above the law. And when it comes to the guardians of the law in the UK the main target of my criticism is usually the world famous Metropolitan Police and with good reason. My first memories of their bad behaviour stem from the 1980s when I was working as a regional journalist.**

Coming from a coal mining community in the North, I will never forget how the "London Filth", as they were referred to by strikers, waved their payslips and overtime bonuses at the pitmen on the picket lines during the Miners' Strike of 1984.

They goaded the heroic colliers, especially during the Battle of Orgreaves which is soon to be the subject of an investigation into claims of fabricated and co-ordinated police evidence. A public inquiry will probably be too little, too late but like Hillsborough, the liars need to be exposed and justice needs to be delivered.

But back to the reputation of the Met; during the Miners' Strike not even their own police colleagues bussed in from other outside forces felt at ease sharing their South Yorkshire billets with the London cops, such was their reputation for dishonesty. I remember one Durham policeman telling me how he and his fellow officers had "set about" the men from the Met warning them if any cash went missing from wallets and lockers they would be the chief suspects!

Sadly, three decades on and nothing much has changed. Not a week goes by when someone further tarnishes the image of the world famous Scotland Yard through greed, corruption, lies and sleaze.

Last week an anti-terror cop was

sent down for 15 months for trying to flog a story to the *News of the World*. April Cashburn wasn't some lowly grunt at the bottom of the pile, she was a detective chief inspector involved largely in counter terrorism.

I wonder how many so-called Muslim terrorists are languishing in prison on her evidence and say so ... a woman of integrity she's not, as her own trial revealed. Some of the convictions brought about by her work must now be regarded as unsafe.

In fact the Yard's counter terrorism activities leave much to be desired as a catalogue of incompetence and flawed intelligence emerged during the shooting of the innocent Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes, who was mistaken for a suicide bomber in 2005.

And who can forget the fiasco of the Forest Gate raid in which hundreds of officers swooped on an East London street claiming one of the homes was a base for the manufacture of deadly chemicals? During the raid Mohammed Abdul Kahar was shot at close range inside his home in June 2006.

As they frantically back-pedalled when not even so much as an aspirin was found, police had plenty of words to say about the shooting of an innocent man but "sorry" was not one of them until officers were ordered to apologise for the botched raid.

There have been plenty more cock ups and bungled ventures emanating from the so-called elite squads housed in Scotland Yard but perhaps one of the most revolting emerged last week when we learned that undercover detectives, employed on a secretive but now disbanded unit, stole the identities of around 80 dead children.

The sickening revelation emerged in an investigation by the UK *Guardian* newspaper. Its reporters revealed how police infiltrated



protest groups for three decades using the identities of dead children, without informing or consulting their parents.

Keith Vaz, chair of the home affairs select committee has said he is "shocked" at the "gruesome" practice. I am shocked Mr Vaz is shocked – surely he has become hardened to the excesses of the Met, mired with institutional racism, Islamophobia and corruption.

Only last month Mr Vaz was "shocked" when it emerged undercover cops were "sleeping with the enemy" as revealed in this article on the Cageprisoners website. ([www.cageprisoners.com/our-work/opinion-editorial/item/5819-the-sexual-exploitation-of-women-by-undercover-police](http://www.cageprisoners.com/our-work/opinion-editorial/item/5819-the-sexual-exploitation-of-women-by-undercover-police))

Not only did they have sex with their unknowing targets but they even fathered children and then abandoned their offspring. If this had happened in America the offending officers could face rape charges for tricking their way into a target's bed.

But today, just when you thought the Met reputation couldn't sink any lower it slithers beyond the gutter

and in to the sewers. We now know undercover cops ruthlessly harvested the identities of dead children without the permission of their parents.

I worked as an undercover journalist for nearly 30 years and assumed all sorts of identities using subterfuge to achieve this while striving to work within the confines of the law. I find it incredible that veteran detectives chose identity theft to achieve their cover; there really are far simpler options.

Commenting in the *Guardian*, Ken MacDonald, one of the most respected figures to have emerged from the Crown Prosecution Service in years, described the identity theft as: "a careless and bullying intrusion into the most shattering human grief. The crassness and cruelty of this quite unnecessary technique is beyond belief – and that undercover officers have employed it persistently, presumably at the behest of their commanders over many years, should be a matter of deep shame for British policing."

"It also raises the most serious questions about the planning and

execution of undercover police work in this country."

While making several astute observations perhaps the most damning is this: "Of course undercover work is intrusive, that is its whole point. But the state is not entitled to assume ownership of people's souls, even in the face of grave crime. Clearly, the police service has not always understood this."

While dismissing the effectiveness of Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) he believes the time has come for a public inquiry into what he describes as the "steady drip of exposure and seediness".

But this is where I part company with the former Director of Public Prosecutions, a man I much admire and respect. What needs to be done is to dismantle the Metropolitan Police Force from top to bottom. It has become toxic, (this is the same word a former *News of the World* executive used when explaining the decision to close Britain's largest circulation newspaper).

Information Clearing House ✪

## The people want dignity

### Statement, Egyptian Communist Party

**The Egyptian Communist Party participated with other parties and political forces in the call to the Egyptian people to rally in Tahrir Square on the Friday of Dignity, February 8, 2013 in order to condemn the regime and protest against the repressive and brutal practices of killing, lynching, detention, torture and harassment and rape of Egyptian free women... and attacking the peaceful demonstrators as exercised by the Ministry of Interior in the government of the Muslim Brotherhood.**

The Party holds Morsi and his group responsible for these crimes and demands the trial of all those responsible for them. The Party further confirms that these demonstrations are a continuation of the revolutionary wave demanding downing the rule of the

Muslim Brotherhood, restoring the hijacked revolution and struggling to achieve the goals of the January 25 Revolution by continuing demanding achievement of its goals (Freedom and Human Dignity and Social Justice).

Actions for social justice, the most important of which are wage increases to match the horrible increase of prices, as well as the right to work, housing and health. Besides, the Party also emphasises the demands of the people to down the false distorted constitution and the formation of a government of national salvation and calling for early presidential elections.

Long live Egypt ... Long live the Revolution...

Long live the struggle of the Egyptian People  
The Egyptian Communist Party  
February 7, 2013. ✪

## Riots erupt as Tunisia mourns Belaid's death

**Tens of thousands of Tunisians chanting anti-government slogans descended on the Jellaz cemetery in Tunis for the funeral of left-wing opposition leader Chokri Belaid last week. Mr Belaid's funeral passed into the cemetery amid a scene of chaos, with gangs of young men throwing rocks at police, who responded with tear gas, claiming the men were attempting to steal the cars.**

TV images showed the youths pushing cars into the street and the cars bursting into flame.

Black smoke spiralled from burning vehicles into the sky and clouds of tear gas floated over the cemetery.

Over 50,000 took to the streets across the country to honour his memory.

The murder of Mr Belaid, a severe critic of the Islamist

government, sparked days of rioting by his supporters, who hold the ruling Ennahda party complicit in his death.

The nation was largely shut down due to a general strike called by the country's largest trade union, the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGGT).

As one of the most organised groups in society and with a left-wing leadership, the UGTT has long been in prominent opposition to Ennahda.

Before the body arrived, there was a brief scuffle when officials identified as being with the governing coalition were stopped by the crowd from entering.

The army, one of the few state institutions still holding people's respect, provided security for the funeral march, replacing the deeply distrusted police force.

Near Mr Belaid's parental home where the funeral procession began, opposition politicians and lawyers in black robes gathered with thousands of other mourners, chanting: "Stop the violence" and "we are all Chokri Belaid."

More than a dozen offices of the Ennahda party were attacked overnight in towns around the country.

Schools, shops, banks and other institutions were all shut following the general strike. The Ministry of the Interior urged calm, but the police force itself has been a major target of protesters over the past few days. The ministry building was ringed by iron barriers and barbed wire, extending across the capital's Bourguiba Avenue.

Morning Star ✪

# The birth of a new far-right party

Matthew Collins

**BRITAIN:** Andrew Brons – a former chairman of the National Front (NF) and until recently one of the British National Party's MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) – launched a new party last weekend, one he and his supporters hope will finally kill off the BNP.

The British Democratic Party (BDP), which was launched in a small village just outside Leicester, presents itself as a “modern” alternative to the British National Party. But it will, if anything, be even more extreme.

The BDP brings together veteran Nazis, Holocaust deniers, English Defence League (EDL) thugs and even racists from the NF. Security for the meeting was provided by EDL activists – being bussed in from Newcastle – to provide protection for one of their own, Kevin Scott, a long-term fascist activist from the

north-east who is the BDP's interim leader.

A former BNP regional organiser, Scott has maintained a steady line of attack against what he and Brons's supporters allege is the ongoing corruption and “watering down” of the BNP. Ageing Brons, who is 66 this year, has positioned himself as the new party's ideological mentor and president.

The formation of the BDP comes 18 months after he failed to unseat BNP leader and fellow MEP Nick Griffin in a bitter leadership election. As hundreds of disillusioned BNP members made their way to smaller parties like the English Democrats, Brons waited, believing the perilous financial state of the party would eventually account for Griffin.

Frustrated, Brons finally resigned last October, claiming that he had been “constructively expelled” by what he considered to be merely the “rump” of what was left of the BNP.

Griffin loyalists had already launched a series of claims for unfair dismissal and religious and sexual discrimination against Brons's European office. In over 50 years of far-right activity, Brons has maintained a revolting collection of hard-line admirers.

A speaking tour last year, to discuss the formation of a new far-right party, drew audiences from such groups as the NF, British Movement and Combat 18.

Many of those attendees were former BNP members who had either left or been driven from the BNP during its supposed modernisation over the last decade.

Brons began his political career in the 1960s, when he joined the openly Nazi National Socialist Movement before becoming chairman of the National Front. Under his tutelage the BDP is expected to refocus the efforts of the far-right on promoting “scientific” racism, calling for the compulsory repatriation of non-whites and arguing that the Holocaust is a hoax – some of the core policies Griffin tried to disguise or abandon after he took over the BNP in 1999.

London-based barrister Adrian Davies, who registered the party, is a determined and long-term nemesis of Griffin.

Davies, who has also written the BDP's new constitution, most recently defended – unsuccessfully – a businessman from Northern Ireland with links to loyalist paramilitaries who was accused of sending death threats to Griffin and his family.

John Bean, a former Mosleyite



Andrew Brons – a former chairman of the National Front (NF).

Blackshirt who previously edited the BNP's monthly periodical and was often and openly lauded by Griffin, has now also thrown his weight in with Brons, as has Dr James Lewthwaite, who previously split from the BNP to form his own Bradford-based National Democratic Party in 2010.

Also joining them are the hard-line fascists and Holocaust deniers at Heritage and Destiny, Mark Cotterill and Peter Rushton, who have links to racists and anti-Semites across the world. Nick Lowles of the anti-fascist campaign group Hope Not Hate says the new party will be a serious challenge to Nick Griffin's BNP.

“The BDP brings together the hardcore Holocaust deniers and racists that have walked away from the BNP over the last two to three years. If anything, it is going to be even more extreme than the BNP.

“It and the BNP already have a mutual hatred of each other and it will now be a fight for supremacy. The gloves will be off and it will be very ugly.”

The left has no role in a turf war between fascists. But we must be alert to the danger posed by yet another far-right group.

*Morning Star* ☼

## Five million farmers sue Monsanto

Blake Deppe

**Five million farmers are suing US-based biotech corporation Monsanto for its mistreatment of Brazilian crop growers. Farm workers there say that Monsanto makes an exorbitant profit each year on royalties from “renewal” seed harvests. Renewal crops are those that were planted with seed from the previous year's harvest.**

The company demands royalties from any crop generation produced from its genetically modified seeds, which is patented. It then charges a two percent royalty on each subsequent crop produced.

Jane Berwanger, lawyer for the farmers, clarified, “Monsanto gets paid when it sells the seed. The law gives producers the right to multiply the seeds they buy, and nowhere in the world is there a requirement to pay again.” But in this situation, “producers are in effect paying a private tax on production.”

This is considered by farmers to be outrageous; many of them cannot afford to do this. But Monsanto is essentially arguing that once a

farm worker buys their seed, they have to pay a perpetual yearly fee to the corporation, with no way out.

A Brazilian judge ruled in favour of the farmers, but Monsanto has appealed the decision, arguing that the farmers agreed to pay the royalties by proxy when they first purchased the seed.

Many environmentalists and health advocates strongly detest Monsanto's genetically “enhanced” seed in the first place. The corporation has a long, manipulative criminal history, and is rapidly gaining free reign over agriculture, to the detriment of workers' rights and livelihoods.

Dan Ravicher, executive director of patent watchdog group PUBPAT, remarked, “It's in Monsanto's financial interests to eliminate organic seed so that they can have a total monopoly over our food supply. This is the same chemical company that previously brought us Agent Orange and other toxins, which they said were safe, but [which we] know are not.”

*People's World* ☼

## Residents' protest forces closure of SDF training site

**Japan's Self-Defence Forces' helicopters training field will be closed without conducting a single training exercise in Tahara City, Aichi Prefecture. This was brought about by a 10-year-long tenacious struggle jointly made by local residents, environmental and peace organisations, and the Japanese Communist Party.**

The training site was located on the top of Mt Otto on the Atsumi Peninsula. The mountain is designated as a special area of the Mikawa Wan Quasi-National Park. Breeding habitats of the goshawk and the grey-faced buzzard are on the mountain, and it is also on a flight path for migratory birds.

The site was used as a wireless telegraph facility by the former Japanese Army during the war and as a radio-relay centre by the Ground SDF after the war. In March 2003, the Defence Facilities Administration Agency (now Defence Ministry) announced that it will turn the 1,000-square metre area into a site for landing and takeoff training for helicopters of the GSDF Aviation School.

Following the announcement, local residents launched a signature campaign in protest against the construction plan. In the two districts in which Mt Otto is located, 70% and 73% of households respectively signed the petition.

On March 22, 2004, a local assembly of the former Atsumi Town (merged into Tahara City in October 2005) adopted a resolution opposing the construction of a GSDF facility on Mt Otto.

The Defence Facilities Administration Agency received petitions from 64 organisations throughout Japan, including the Wild Bird Society of Japan and the Nature Conservation Society of Japan, calling for withdrawal of the planned construction.

However, the mayor of Tahara City in September 2005 concluded an agreement with the principal of the GSDF Aviation School to allow a limit of four rounds of helicopter trainings a month at the site. The construction of the training field was then completed in November 2005.

Even after the opening of the training field, residents and nature conservation groups continued their struggles to block flight training. The protestors carried out human chain actions encircling the training site as well as called on the Defence Agency (now Defence Ministry) to research conditions of raptors flying over and breeding on the mountain and have consultations with residents based on its research result.

In response to their request, the Defense Ministry in 2010 began

a year-and-half environmental research project concerning the training site. Then on December 5, 2012, at a meeting with residents' representatives, it announced that it will give up using the site for SDF training based on many problematic issues it recognised, including environmental problems, and that it will return the site to the Finance Ministry.

Tahara City and the GSDF Aviation School will dissolve their 2005 agreement in March.

The JCP has taken part in the local efforts to block the construction plan since it was announced in 2003. At a Tahara City Assembly meeting in March 2004, a JCP representative revealed that a helicopter accident occurred at the GSDF Aviation School in February 2004 and urged the city to cancel the construction plan. A JCP House of Councillors member elected in the prefecture accompanied residents to make representations to the defence and environment ministries.

Anma Sin, a local resident who has led the local struggle, said, “The 10-year-long effort has made our final victory possible. The joint struggle, involving residents, environmental groups, and the JCP, was instrumental in achieving a favourable outcome.”

*Japan Press Weekly* ☼

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## Study law of surplus value

One of the many things I get annoyed about is to see the word “earn” used in relation to the fantastic sums of money acquired by the super rich. The Macquarie Dictionary defines the word “earn” as “to gain by labour or service, to get or preserve as a result of something done”. What did Gina Reinhardt do to earn \$28 billion?

If we remember that money is not wealth, but only represents wealth, it is quite obvious that no human being has the physical or mental capacity to work so hard that they could produce \$28 billion worth of wealth in a single life time.

I recall being told that I was envious of the rich by a religious fundamentalist. When I asked him if Jesus was envious of the rich he said that he did not know.

It is not a matter of envy, it's a matter of understanding how the rich get rich and stay rich at the expense of the poor. The wealth acquired by the rich is stolen from the poor through the operation of the law of surplus value. The workers who say that the rich deserve their wealth should learn about this law to see how it affects them.

Ron Barrett  
Sydney

## Unprecedented attacks

Sometimes in our opposition to the despicable capitalist parties we lose sight of the bigger picture, the bourgeois dictatorship that controls them. For instance the bourgeois establishment is working as one to viscosly attack the ALP because it is seen as not being right wing enough. Although the ALP's politics today are at best conservative Liberalism with such

policies as partially taxing the mining industry, “combatting” climate change and its desire to spend more on public education, these are however seen as a red flag to a bull and so they are going to make sure the ALP is thrown out of office.

Murdoch is leading the propaganda part of the campaign where his mouthpiece journalists turn every issue into a negative for the ALP. For instance ever since Gillard became Prime Minister they have been making unsubstantiated allegations that her leadership is going to be challenged. Yet although it is a clear fabrication they have kept going for three years in an attempt to undermine the ALP.

The ABC and SBS journalists' job description is to be “balanced” (what John Howard forced on them) and so they have to include Murdoch's attacks on the ALP as if it is information for the public rather than a propaganda campaign. The cops and the judiciary as part of the establishment are also playing their part by overplaying the Slipper and Thomson incidents such as six coppers arresting Thomson with the journalists just ‘happening’ to be there to film it.

## DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

Write a letter to the Editor

However in my 40 years of following politics in Australia I have never seen such public vicious attacks on a Prime Minister. In an attempt to oust the ALP the establishment have attacked Gillard on gender grounds. Graham Morris, a prominent conservative commentator who in keeping with such statements as “Gillard should be put in a Hessian bag and thrown out to sea” stated on Sky TV in April last year that “Gillard should be kicked to death” like all disobedient females.

Instead of an outcry in this so called tolerant society there was silence by all the media. Where has all the “liberal journalists” gone over the last 30 years? Morris, who is advocating violence on Gillard's life, even continued to commentate

on the ABC's QA. (Such statements as to incite murder are supposed to be illegal. I certainly would be expecting a visit from the cops if I stated publicly that people such as Murdoch should be kicked to death).

This indicates that the ruling establishment has virtually silenced all middle-class liberals as it continues to drag the world further and further to its Right totalitarian dictatorship. So-called liberals have a cowardly history of melting into the rule of conservatives; the best example was how quickly they put on the Nazi uniform. The future is bleak until the working-class start to counter attack, so hand out more *Guardians*.

Janice Duncan  
Vic

# Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

## Keeping Britain's image white



A display at a UK school of young students portraits of Mary Seacole.

If you scratch a right-winger you pretty soon find a racist hiding inside, like a worm in an apple. Britain's Tory-dominated government has plenty of such worms within its ranks, but with the arrogance of a well-entrenched ruling class that thinks itself invulnerable, they do not see much point in hiding.

In fact, the leaders of British capitalism are well and truly on the attack, just like their counterparts elsewhere in the world. They are attacking working conditions, wages, pensions, union rights, job security, you name it: if it's in working people's interests then they will attack it. They are also attacking working class culture and working class history. As far as bosses are concerned, workers neither need nor deserve culture to be proud of nor history to be proud of.

Britain's Education Secretary, one Michael Gove, is currently enmeshed in a squabble of his own creation, as he tries to prevent British schools teaching children about a woman born to Scottish and Jamaican parents in the 19th century, named Mary Seacole.

At the time of the Crimean War, Mary Seacole was so moved by reports of the suffering of the wounded that she made her own way unaided to the Crimea and provided food, nursing and other basic comforts to the wounded troops.

Unlike the better known Florence Nightingale, who worked at the army base at Scutari in Turkey, Mary Seacole worked in the Crimea itself, very close to the front lines and even on the field of battle. As the *New Worker* notes, “after the war her role was recognised by Queen Victoria, who awarded her a medal and her name became well known to the Victorian public”.

In fact, according to material produced by the group Operation Black Vote: “She was a national heroine on her return to Britain, and a crowd of 80,000 attended a four day fund-raising benefit in her honour in 1857.” The group also notes that “her inclusion on the National Curriculum [for British schools] came as the result of tireless campaigning to recognise someone who had become a forgotten figure in modern times.”

Despite Queen Victoria's high regard for her and her contribution to establishing good nursing as a vital part of medical care especially in wartime, the fact remains that she was “coloured” and definitely not a member of the “establishment”. Teaching British kids about her clearly offended the poohbahs of the British Tory party. But of course they dare not attack her directly, that would be far too gauche.

Instead they attacked the reason for placing her on the National Curriculum at all. They

used that snide trick of labelling it “political correctness”, thereby implying without actually daring to say it, that she wasn't worthy of study and the only reason she was on the curriculum was because she was black.

This is no more than one would expect from a British government that is busy filling the streets with heavily armed police (carrying machine guns, no less, in a country once famous for its *unarmed* police force), which has more video surveillance cameras watching the populace than any other country and absolutely nothing to offer unemployed youth apart from harassment on the dole, neo-fascism or prison.

Under the banner of “attacking political correctness”, reactionaries of all types have joined in the assault on Mary Seacole's status. An outraged Operation Black Vote lashed out: “Her proposed removal [from the national schools curriculum] can only be attributed to a recent backlash against Mary Seacole ... by right-wing media and commentators.

“To remove Mary Seacole ... is tantamount to rewriting history to fit a worldview hostile to Britain's historical diversity.” Add to that the fact that in a poll of the British public, she was voted the Greatest Black Briton.

The antics of Britain's reactionaries today would have puzzled members of the ruling class at the time of the Crimean War. Sir WH

Russell, Crimean War correspondent for *The Times* – in those pre-Murdoch days, very much the voice of the Establishment itself – wrote of Mary Seacole: “Let England not forget one who nursed her sick, who sought out her wounded to aid and succour them, and who performed the last offices for some of her illustrious dead.”

So why doesn't Michael Gove want British youngsters to learn about Mary Seacole? I suspect it has to do with the fact that “the teaching of Black historical figures is widely recognised to be beneficial to the success of Black pupils.... Mary Seacole, as a Jamaican/Scottish figure, is a positive role model.”

In the whole of the British National Curriculum, Mary Seacole is the only Black person not connected to civil rights or slavery.

As the British paper *The New Worker* commented: “[British people] should be taught more Black history, not less.”

And of course, let us never forget that for most reactionaries racism is not just a convenient tool for dividing and ruling the workers. They do actually believe in notions of racial superiority and particularly inferiority. It bolsters their image of themselves to regard the rest of the human race as lesser people, undeserving of the privileges they themselves enjoy. ☹



Sunday February 24 –  
Saturday March 2

Medical science has certainly made astonishing advances over the last half-century or so. I can remember when open-heart surgery was astounding news and heart transplant surgery made international celebrities of the surgeons involved. And I can also remember when that religious fool Malcolm Muggeridge decried such operations as morally and ethically “wrong”. The heart, apparently, was God’s domain and we had no right to interfere in it.

Today such backward ideas would be rightly deemed laughable, except among a few of the more way-out religious cults. Nowhere is this more noticeable than in the BBC medical series *Great Ormond Street* (ABC2 Sundays at 8.30pm). The Great Ormond Street hospital is Britain’s premier children’s hospital. JM Barrie, before his death in 1937, donated the royalties from his famous work *Peter Pan* to the hospital. These proved so valuable that when the copyright in them expired a few years ago, the British government was obliged to enact special legislation to extend their copyright indefinitely.

The present series is the second set of observational documentaries filmed in the hospital. This week’s episode, *Buying Time*, deals with children in need of a heart transplant. It’s a poignant subject of course. Perversely, safer roads mean fewer fatalities and hence fewer

donor organs available. Add to that better intensive care and a society curiously reluctant to donate organs, and we have reached a point where patients awaiting transplants have to wait so long that frequently death gets there first.

This is particularly upsetting where the patient is a child, for they have special requirements. Only a child’s heart will do, an adult’s is no good to them. The documentary team follow several patients and their parents, as they come to grips with the limited options available to them. As some children’s conditions deteriorate while they wait for a suitable donor heart, they are kept alive mechanically by a machine that breathes for them or one the size of a small refrigerator, called a Berlin Heart, that actually pumps their blood for them.

All hospital documentary series have built-in drama, but this series is particularly well done and often has real tension and excitement. Quite moving.

Ken Burns has made the chronicling of Americana over the last 200 years his special domain. So much so that some other filmmakers covering similar historical subjects have begun to imitate his style, especially his distinctive way of handling diary entries and contemporary letters. Among others he has tackled subjects as diverse as the American Civil War, Baseball, Prohibition, Jazz, the West and now, in his latest short documentary series the ecological disaster that was *The Dust Bowl* (SBS ONE Fridays from March 1 at 8.35pm).

Burns acknowledges right at the beginning that the disaster was man-made and – without saying so directly – that the ultimate culprit was the capitalist system. Land development companies had a free hand to sell grazing land for crop-growing, knowing full well that the rainfall was inadequate to sustain that use. With no government assistance or regulation over farming, farmers were at the mercy of “the market” and when prices fell they had no option but to grow more grain in an attempt to



The BBC medical series *Great Ormond Street* (ABC2 Sundays at 8.30pm).

make up their losses. Destitution of the land was inevitable.

The banks repossessed the farms; the ordinary farmers lost all they possessed. The sandy soil of the great plains of the American mid-west is held together by a tangled web of grasses that have evolved over many aeons to hold what little rainfall there is in the region in and to provide nourishment for vast herds of grazing animals (mainly bison). But the railroad companies and the early developers shot out the bison and property companies set about selling the grazing land for small wheat farms. In an unregulated market, wheat was then fetching a high price per bushel so everyone tried to get in on the wheat boom, in what became known as the “Great Plough-Up”, with no thought for the effect it would have on the soil cohesion or moisture retention.

It was followed by a decade-long drought during the 1930s that nearly swept away what had been the breadbasket of the nation. Vivid interviews

with 26 survivors of those hard times, combined with dramatic photographs and seldom seen movie footage, bring to life stories of human suffering and human perseverance. Over the course of the four parts, Burns points a moral about our relationship to the land that sustains us – and notes we ignore it at our peril.

US critics were somewhat mixed in their reviews of the series, although generally favourable. *The Los Angeles Times* said “Though it has the poke pace and flat effect of his other films – for Burns, history is elegy – it is also one of his best works: more tightly focused than usual in time and place, with a clear shape, dramatic arcs and a conclusion that is at once cautionary and moving, topical and timeless.”

*The New York Times* critic wrote “The story of the Dust Bowl is complicated, twisting together ecology, economics and politics, as well as divisions of class and region, and Mr Burns and his writer, Dayton Duncan, have done as careful and admirable

a job as you would expect in laying it out.”

*Variety*’s critic noted that “Unlike a lot of TV documentarians, Burns steadfastly refuses to include dramatic re-creations, relying (as he did in *Prohibition*, an early-20th-century companion to this) on photographs, grainy video, actors’ readings of diaries or news articles, and of course those aforementioned interviews. The last might be the most compelling, providing a bridge from the macro to the micro.”

And the *Philadelphia Enquirer* said: “It’s a deeply researched, visually superb study of what the film terms ‘a decade-long natural catastrophe of biblical proportions’.”

Yet some critics seem just wilfully obtuse – or uncaring. David Wiegand in the *San Francisco Chronicle* for example: “It’s in dire need of tighter editing, most of all. Yes, the images from the ’30s are powerful, but after a while, their power is diminished by repetition.” ☼



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Alex Pagliaro, runs Amnesty Refugee Program, visitor to Nauru;

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

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# Cameron in Blunderland

Felicity Arbuthnot

**"The refuge of the morally, intellectually, artistically and economically bankrupt is war."**

(Martin H Fischer, 1879-1962)

**It has not been an auspicious couple of weeks for UK Prime Minister David Cameron.**

His Cabinet colleagues, largely a bunch of millionaires, have accused the unemployed of being work-shy and a burden on the taxpayers – never mind that businesses are closing in near industrial numbers and that often hundreds, if not thousands, apply for one job. Additionally, according to the Literacy Trust: "One in six people in the UK struggle with literacy. This means their literacy is below the level expected of an eleven year old ... Men and women with poor literacy are least likely to be in full-time employment at the age of 30."

A junior Health Minister has accused the poor of being fat because, she has decided, they eat the wrong things.

The latter of course, implies that the overweight poor will be a further burden on Britain's National Health Service, being more likely to develop chronic conditions. It seems this health fascism exempts government Ministers and politicians such as the Minister for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles, who must flatten the tyres and springs of his Ministerial limousine, along with other political rotunds. Politicians who of course, live entirely at the taxpayers' expense, from large salaries, with all financial outputs covered including health care.

David Cameron himself stated that without the health help he had received, often 24-hours a day, for his little son Ivan, suffering a chronic condition which subsequently proved fatal, his family would have been unable to cope. Now, under his government, the Health Service too is under government fire – slash and burn style. Cuts in welfare include attempting to force the very disabled, even potentially terminally ill, back to work. Some have committed suicide.

Public anger and resentment is palpably mounting against pretty well all policies in a government seen as completely blind to the reality in Britain's villages, towns and cities.

The government message, of course, is fiscal belt tightening, "getting the economy back on track."

Then the Prime Minister cancelled a long planned address in Europe on Britain and the EU (another mess) leapt on a plane for Mali, a geographical stone's throw away from the ruins of his last African foray, Libya, and announced support for France's reckless insurgency, in one of the few countries the British have not invaded, plundered or colonised. So much for fiscal probity.

The opposition Labour Party's Defence spokesman, Jim Murphy, commented on what rapidly became Operation Creep: "The UK commitment to Mali has grown from lending the

French two transport aircraft, to the deployment of perhaps hundreds of troops to the region." Most will be there, Cameron has assured, on a "training mission."

In what should have been a mega reality check for anyone but the Prime Minister, former Labour Cabinet Minister, Frank Dobson, pointed out that "The American catastrophe in Vietnam started off with a deployment of troops in a training capacity."

From there, Cameron went to meddle in Algiers, popped in on the remains of Libya in a 16 vehicle armed and armoured motorcade, where he addressed a police training college (in English) and assured them that, "In building a new Libya, you will have no greater friend than the United Kingdom. We will stand with you every step of the way." That should send a chill down spines.

Cameron's decision to fly to the Maghreb, wrote one commentator, "was a Blair-style statement that Britain intends to stay involved." Indeed, Cameron's references to a "generational struggle" make him sound remarkably similar to Tony Blair after 9/11.

"I believe we are in the midst of a long struggle against murderous terrorists and a poisonous ideology that supports them," he told the World Economic Forum in Davos on returning.

Whilst: "We've successfully put pressure on Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, so Al-Qaeda franchises have been growing for years in Yemen, in Somalia and across parts of Africa" he warned. His predecessor, "peace envoy" Tony Blair, wanted by lawyers and others worldwide for his Iraq lies, cheered on Britain in Mali from the television studios.

It now transpires that David Cameron relies on Blair, who may yet be headed for the International Criminal Court in The Hague, as, seemingly some sort of mentor, from whom, it is reported, he has been taking personal advice. The Chancellor, George Osborne, is reported as referring to Blair as "the master."

Cameron is quoted as being "very admiring of Blair, whom he regards as a nice person and has conviction." With judgment like that, there may be those who feel he would be dangerous in charge of a broom, let alone a country.

Iraq's ruins, widows, orphans, three million dead and five million displaced are testimony to Blair's "conviction" and niceness, in this tenth anniversary of the invasion year and 22nd of the embargo, which Blair endorsed, helped sustain its strangulation, colluded with UK aircraft aiding the illegal US bombings, during his term in office, 1997-2007.

On February 4 David Cameron hosted Afghanistan's President, Hamid Karzai, and President Asif Ali Zardari of Pakistan at a dinner at the Prime Ministerial country home, Chequers "as part of his ongoing efforts to help to strengthen Afghanistan-Pakistan relations and promote regional peace and stability," according to The Independent.

It would have been interesting to have been a fly on the wall as the canapés did the



UK Prime Minister David Cameron.

rounds. Ahead of this much touted mini-summit, President Karzai gave lengthy interviews to the UK *Guardian* and ITN. It was, to put it mildly, a bit of a broadside:

"In 2002 through 2006, Afghanistan had a lot better security. When we had our own presence there, with very little foreign troops, schools were open in Helmand and life was more secure," said the President.

Moreover, while he appreciated "the sacrifices and 'contributions' of the British forces, "... we also would like our allies in the west to recognise the immense sacrifices of the Afghan people in the last ten years, the immense loss of life and the suffering that the Afghan people put up with ..."

Acknowledging corruption within the Afghan government and its agencies, indeed the allegations levelled at his own family and connections are a litany, he stated that "in comparison to the corruption coming through the international donor contracts, and the way the money was spent (it was) really insignificant." He gave examples.

Asked about the attacks by Afghan troops on coalition forces, he said it "pained" his Administration as a "serious breach of hospitality" for which Afghanistan is known, but "...there has to be a lot more cultural sensitivity by our allies when they send troops to Afghanistan. Plus much more."

Given night raids, wholesale destruction

of lives, livelihoods, homes and terrorism by drones, his restraint was commendable, the more so since he and colleagues survived a US "friendly fire" missile attack in 2001, suffering serious injuries, also involving damage to facial nerves, still sometimes noticeable.

Asked what stood in the way of progress in Afghanistan, "The risk is continuation of foreign interference ..." Further, "The exit of foreign forces will not bring more violence ... but a serious, strong, good reduction in violence will occur." Earlier he had said, "On our own, as Afghans, we will be good. It's the external factors that will determine the extent of progress and stability or the lack of it."

On the planned departure of western troops from Afghanistan, one comment was that perhaps the reason was "... that they have felt that there was no fight in Afghanistan from the very first day, that terrorism was not in Afghanistan to be found, that they had to go to the (Taliban's) sanctuaries a long time back, that they didn't do that and since they cannot do that even today there is no point for them to stay in Afghanistan, so they would like to leave ..." Ouch.

(It should be said that in the mid-'90 Karzai not only worked with the Taliban, but they asked him to be their Ambassador to the United Nations.)

In a long interview, there are certainly some enlightening lines. US and UK "progress" and conquest of "hearts and minds" over 12 years in Afghanistan seems to lie buried in that "graveyard of empires."

The US is committed to "an enduring presence" in Afghanistan (it's the minerals, stupid). So far, Hamid Karzai is talking a conciliatory line. They would perhaps be confined to the odd base, but in no towns or villages. Mr Karzai seems like a man who is capable of changing his mind.

It is to be hoped nothing went wrong with the menu of that bridge building Prime Ministerial dinner. Britain has had another major food scandal, with horsemeat found in beefburgers – and pork in halal meat. Hope none found its way to Chequers to round off Cameron's latest accident prone couple of weeks.

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**David Cameron relies on Blair, who may yet be headed for the International Criminal Court in The Hague, as, seemingly some sort of mentor.**



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