



Werribee protests – the criminalisation of dissent

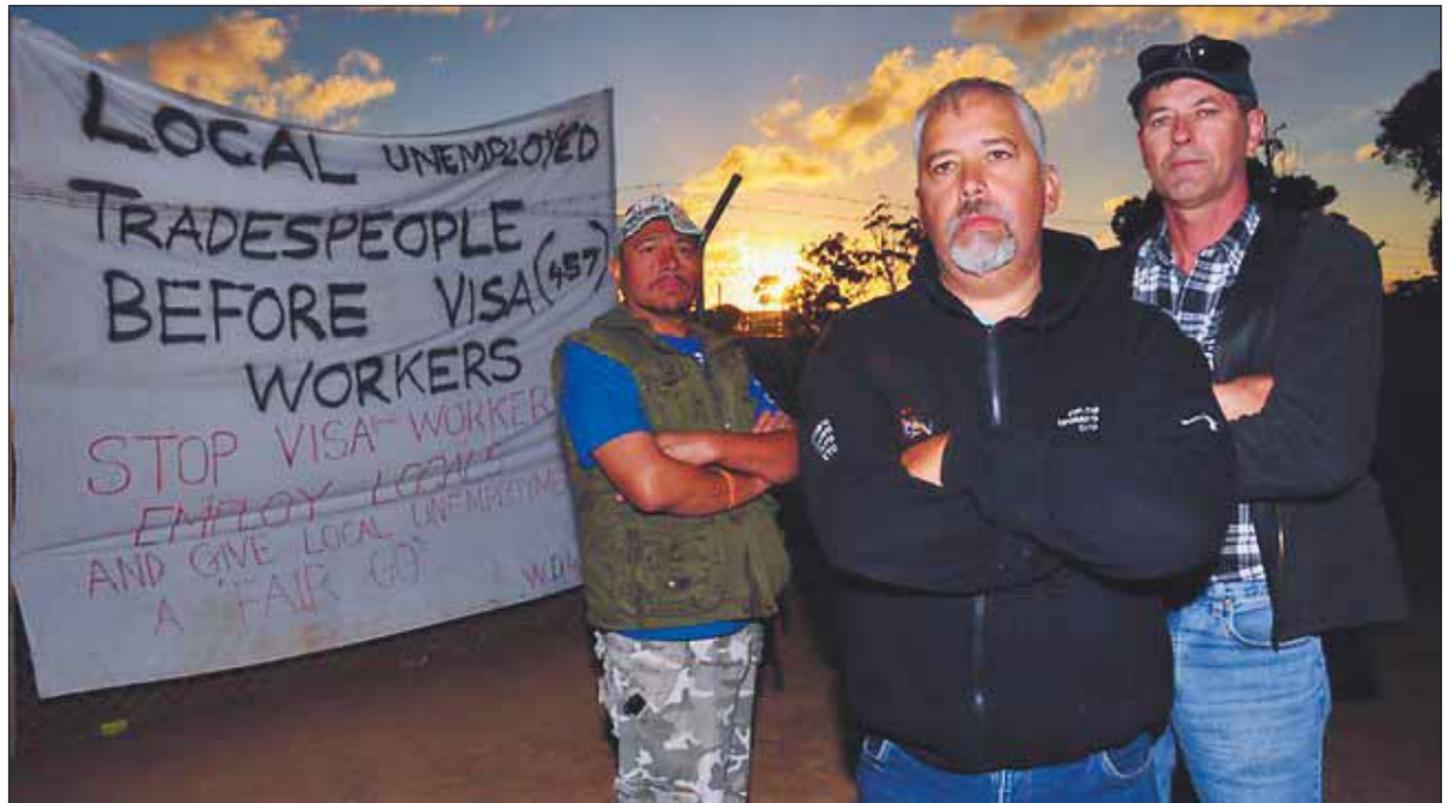
Bob Briton

Protests at the site of a new water treatment plant in western Melbourne grabbed the media spotlight recently when a contractor on the project took the Rambo-like step of hiring helicopters to fly type 457 visa workers onto the site. They were flown over the heads of unemployed local tradespeople who were emphatic that they had nothing against the Filipino workers involved, but that there was no “skills shortage” requiring the use of guest labour. Threats of police action and massive fines saw to the winding up of the protest and, as *The Guardian* goes to press, vengeance is set to be pursued in the Federal Court. The re-badged ABCC, Fair Work Australia Building and Construction, is going to hound the AMWU (Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union) for the cost of crushing the dissent. Amounts of \$300,000 a day (including \$6,000 a day for helicopter hire) have been bandied about in the media.

The events confirm an increasingly confrontational trend on the part of companies and governments to break the resistance of workers and communities seeking to defend jobs, pay rates and conditions from attack. The case of Bob Carnegie in Queensland is another recent example (see page 4).

Aside from the deployment of helicopters, the events at Werribee saw other extreme tactics used against those protesting the abuse of 457 visas. Head contractor, Spanish joint venture Tedra Australia Pty Ltd, hired a right-wing activist from the anti-union HR Nicholls society for advice on the protests. They provided a recording device to *Australian Financial Review* columnist and industrial relations consultant Grace Collier who hid it in her bra to secretly record conversations with AMWU organiser Tony Mavromatis. She also used a laptop to secretly record a telephone conversation via Skype.

While there are doubts Ms Collier’s “evidence” is admissible in court, its intention is clear – to trap the organiser into some sort of admission that the AMWU was coordinating the protests and thus “guilty” of organising a picket.



Pickets have essentially been made illegal over recent decades and governments, bosses and their ideological servants are keen to shut down any other forms of firm resistance to workplace dictatorship. The organiser is alleged to have said that he believed the protests would end if local workers were hired.

The Baillieu government was also keen to break the protest and worked to force the police off the sidelines to intervene. According to media reports, police were unwilling to get involved as they had not received any complaint from the owner of the land where the protests were being held. City West Water finally caved in to pressure from the government and businesses involved and made the official complaint last week.

Baillieu is exploiting recent events to press

for tougher legislation to crush the sort of protest seen at Werribee. The Premier refuses to acknowledge people in a work-deprived community would be moved to protest the snubbing of local tradespeople and insists it must be a conspiracy hatched by unions, which he appears to regard as outlaw organisations. “I think we’ve seen that over the past 10 years, rotating [union] members through pickets so that anybody who is subject to a legal order from the courts is rotated out and others are rotated in. I think there is some room to review that ...”

Unfortunately for the Premier, his predecessors gifted those sorts of powers to federal authorities but there is no doubt he will be part of the team currently pressing for total employer victory on industrial issues. They are threatening to kick up a stink about the

completely symbolic amendments to the *Fair Work Act* to do with roster changes and flexible working hours. They will try to shoot down new legislation about workplace bullying.

Bosses will try to conceal their intentions with all sorts of verbiage, as they did in regard to the use of the type 457 workers at Werribee. They insist they were employed using the same rate of pay as local workers and that they had high grade welding skills that were not available on the local labour market. Workers insist that safety standards at the site are sub-standard and that the work could have been carried out by a third year apprentice. They are angry about the lack of jobs and government projects to provide employment. They deeply regret the crippling of unions’ ability to defend workers by means previously accepted as legitimate. ✪

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The pretend mining tax

The admission last week that the mineral resources rental tax (MRRT) has only raised \$126 million in the first six months of operation was another blow to the Labor government's budgetary woes. In the 2012-13 budget, the government predicted the mining tax would raise \$3 billion. With the promise of a budget surplus hanging like an albatross around its neck, the government now has to face the inevitable reality that its promise of "sharing the riches" of the mining boom with the people of Australia has gone up in smoke.

Resources Minister Martin Ferguson, also known as the minister for mining corporations, staunchly defended the poor result and the MRRT, saying the big three mining corporations designed the tax and are happy with it. They have every reason to be happy with it! Rio Tinto, BHP Billiton and Xtrata sat round the table and negotiated the MRRT which was to replace the original super profits tax put forward by the former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. He was unseated by the mining companies with the help of a right-wing union. Rio Tinto has admitted that it has not paid a cent of the MRRT on all of its highly profitable, multi-billion dollar mining operations.

When the tax was introduced, Treasurer Wayne Swan defended it, saying that "wholly-domestic mining companies paid an effective tax rate of only 17 percent and multinational mining companies paid an effective tax rate of only 13 percent – both dramatically below the headline company tax rate of 30 percent", on corporate profits. He argued that a "handful of vested interests that have pocketed a disproportionate share of the nation's economic success now feel they have a right to shape Australia's future to satisfy their own self-interest."

We were told the income from the MRRT would fund an increase in government superannuation contributions to low-income-earners; investment in roads, bridges and other infrastructure to assist the mining sector; and the next round of company tax cuts – one percent – as compensation for the increase in superannuation payments which are being raised from nine percent to 12 percent in 0.5 percent instalments over six years. (At the same time the government was demanding that workers forego part of their next wage rise to fund the increase in super contributions!)

MRRT flawed from the start

When the MRRT legislation was passed, *The Guardian* warned that it was flawed: "There is a big question mark over how much the mining companies will actually pay or be out of pocket. Part of the deal involves the federal government refunding state royalties paid by the mining corporations to state governments. These royalties are based on the volume of production, not profits. When the boom comes to its inevitable end, the government could find itself losing money on the deal." (Issue #1530, 07-12-2011)

"Australians will receive an appropriate return on their non-renewable resources, which they own 100 percent," Financial Services Minister Bill Shorten told Parliament when moving the MRRT. He then went on to explain some of its loopholes. "The tax doesn't apply to the value added by miners through processing. It applies only to profits attributable to the resource at the valuation point just after extraction." In other words, the tax is not based on the company's overall profits from coal and iron ore. Companies must calculate the profit made up to the point of extraction. This calculation excludes profits attributable to value added through such processes as washing, crushing, sorting, separating or refining of the coal or iron ore following extraction.

Companies will be able to immediately write-off exploration costs and all new investment and deduct expenses for projects in calculating net profit. "No MRRT will be payable until the project has made enough profit to pay off its upfront investments," Shorten said. The scope for creative bookkeeping is enormous. The main reason given for the shortfall is that the companies have reduced the original estimates of profit at the point of extraction provided when designing the tax. The deal with the Big Three did not lock in the break down of how the profit is allocated between the point of extraction, washing, sorting, etc.

The only way that the people of Australia, including the traditional Indigenous owners, can share the wealth that the minister correctly points out belongs to them, is for the mining companies to be nationalised. Public ownership would see all profits returned to the public purse – adding hundreds of billions annually to provide quality public health, education, housing, transport, renewable energy, infrastructure, and the social, economic and cultural needs and rights of Indigenous Australians.

PRESS FUND

Interviewed recently on ABC TV, federal opposition leader Tony Abbott said the Australian people wanted "strong and stable government, and that's what we hope to give them if we win government this year." "Hope to"? He equivocated because he knows that if the Liberal National coalition wins the elections, their policies will cause a national upheaval. So much for stability! For our part, we'll do everything in our power to prevent the introduction or implementation of these policies, and to replace them with others that are really in the interests of the vast mass of the Australian people. However, we need your help, by way of contributions to the Press Fund, so please send us something for the next issue. Many thanks to this week's contributors, as follows:

Mark Mannion \$20, K Marks \$10, "Round Figure" \$10, Eddie Seymour \$50

This week's total: \$90 Progressive total: \$370

Help Save the Nursing and Midwifery Health Program

The Victorian branch of the Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) has been campaigning to secure ongoing funding for the Nursing and Midwifery Health Program, Victoria (NMHPV) and in late 2012 a reprieve was granted through the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) until June 30, 2014. The NMBA decided they are unwilling to fund the NMHPV beyond this date.

The NMHPV provides advice, support, referrals and case management to nurses and midwives and nursing and midwifery students facing the challenges of alcohol, drug and mental health issues.

As an independent service the program has helped hundreds of nurses and midwives suffering drug and alcohol and mental health problems. Employees are often anxious about seeking help from their employer due to the stigma associated with mental health and problems of addiction.

This puts them at greater risk of their condition impacting their professional lives and also increases the risk that they may be reported to AHPRA. It is critical that every effort is made to provide nurses and midwives with access to independent

health care so they can confidently access support early.

It is critical that we save the NMHPV.

The ANF is very concerned that without ongoing funding the NMHPV would be unable to continue to offer its essential services to Victorian nurses, midwives and students of nursing and midwifery. If the program has to close its doors it will be nearly impossible to resurrect.

Recently the ANF met with Anne Copeland, Chair of the NMBA, about the future of the NMHPV and discussed its opposition to and disappointment in the Board's decision to cease funding.

The ANF believes that its decision is not supported by evidence of the program's critical work, provided through feedback from the nurses and midwives who have relied upon the service, and feedback from employers and Directors of Nursing and Midwifery who have gained so much from the resulting workforce benefits.

A recent report released by the NMHPV and produced by the University of Melbourne found that the NMHPV had provided significant casework support and health promotion for nurses and midwives. They found the NMHPV had improved the health of nurses and increased

awareness among nurses and midwives and employers regarding the health needs of nurses and midwives.

They suggest there is a strong case for the service to continue into the future.

We have to find a long term solution to resolve the future NMHPV funding problems. Our strong preference has been to have the program totally funded by the NMBA. However the NMBA is refusing to agree to this.

The ANF has been working on alternative suggestions to put to the NMBA. One proposal is to organise partial funding by the NMBA with a small contribution from each Victorian registrant.

The \$560,000 per annum cost required to operate the program (as at 2012) is not prohibitive, particularly given the critical services it provides. It equates to around six dollars per Victorian registrant per annum. The union is proposing a joint funding option to maintain the NMHPV beyond 2014. The proposal suggests three to five dollars per annum (5.75 to 6.2 cents per week) increase in registration renewal fees for Victorian nurses and midwives to cover 50 percent of the cost of maintaining the NMHPV with the other 50 percent contributed by the NMBA. ☺

New bonus payment small first step

The National Welfare Rights Network (NWRN) has welcomed the passage of the new Income Support Bonus, worth \$210 per year and is shocked that the Coalition voted against such a small bonus. Despite the passage of the Bill, much more needs to be done to address the increasing levels of hardship and poverty being experienced by over 700,000 Australians, many living on the Newstart Allowance of just \$35 per day.

"The new supplement is very small but welcome particularly as it is paid six monthly giving people the chance to have a small lump sum to buy, for example, a coat or shoes or pay an unexpected bill. This is the first real increase in income support payments to

unemployed people and students in almost two decades," said Maree O'Halloran of the NWRN.

"The bonus is recognition that payments for unemployed people and students are inadequate, but it needs to be followed up with a substantial increase of \$50 per week for single people in the May federal budget."

The new income support bonus provides \$210 a year to single recipients, \$350 a year for most couples where both partners are eligible. The payment is tax-free and is not means-tested, and will be indexed to the Consumer Price Index. It will be paid in instalments in March and September each year. But anyone subject to income management will have half the funds quarantined under the Basics Card.

"The increase equates to just \$4 a week. This bonus will, of course, not ameliorate the anger of 84,000 single parents, some of whom protested on the streets [earlier this month]. However, NWRN welcomes this disbursement as a down payment and a starting point for delivering a fair go to people out of work. Much more is needed if we are genuine in wanting to lift unemployed people out of poverty and into work.

"It is very disappointing that the Coalition voted against the bonus. In November last year, Coalition Senators on a Senate Committee agreed that the Newstart Allowance, at just \$246 per week, fails to provide an acceptable standard of living "for anything but the shortest period". ☺

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Government buckles over coal seam gas

Peter Mac

Last week Tony Burke, federal Minister for the Environment, indicated he would take on the mining corporations and if necessary the state governments, to protect the environment.

However, leaked correspondence then revealed that last November the Minister had decided to approve a major new gas mine at Boggabri, another in the Leard State Forest near Narrabri and a massive new coal seam gas mining project near Gloucester. They had already been approved by the NSW government, but required federal environmental clearance.

Burke angrily accused the NSW government of having leaked "commercial in confidence" information. He said he himself would now make the final decision on whether the project could proceed, depending on whether the mining corporations could satisfy his approval conditions, and with no further consultation with the NSW government.

There are grave issues surrounding the outcome. Pepe Clarke, chief executive of the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, also stated: "Leard Forest is a rich natural habitat, teeming with life, and this decision marks the death knell of this extraordinary area."

A huge open-cut coal mine has already been excavated south of Gloucester, which the owners wish to extend to form a massive excavated strip. If they succeed and the CSG mines proceed as well, this beautiful and economically-productive valley will be ruined.

Blocking the wedge

Burke claims that the approval conditions are so onerous the projects may never get started. He has demanded that energy company AGL prepare a hydrological survey of the Gloucester region before he makes his final decision.

He also wants mining corporation Whitehaven to provide a "biodiversity corridor" within the Leard Forest, to ensure the survival of koalas and other threatened species during mining operations, and he wants high quality "offsets" for cleared forest areas, i.e. the restoration of other

forests where biodiversity damage has already occurred.

However, these requirements are unlikely to cause significant impediments to the projects. Admittedly, Burke's position is a great improvement on that of NSW Energy Minister Chris Hartcher, who last month claimed that:

"There are two million gas extraction wells throughout the world now, and it's difficult for the anti-gas protesters to point to one that is causing problems. The challenge for them is to find a single example where the water has been tainted or the ground has been damaged. But they don't have a single example - anywhere in the world."

This appallingly partisan statement ignores hundreds of cases, in Australia and overseas, of damage to the atmosphere, soil, underground streams and surface water courses from CSG mining. Representatives of the mining industry itself have admitted, albeit grudgingly, that CSG mining carries such risks.

While in opposition Hartcher himself stated unequivocally that the results of mining in the US "clearly demonstrate disastrous problems associated with this industry through groundwater loss, contamination and waste water." But now he is in effect saying that he's not going to hinder any mining operations until someone can prove to him that one particular CSG mine caused soil or water pollution.

It's true that it's virtually impossible to detect the failure of anti-pollution measures at a particular point during deep mining operations. Nevertheless, pollution of soil or groundwater during "fracking" (pressure injection of chemicals into underground fissures to release coal seam gas) can be detected subsequently by the presence of chemicals used during the process. This includes the carcinogenic BTEX chemicals, evidence of which has been found in soil and water samples after many CSG mining operations in Queensland.

There is now ample evidence about the damage that open-cut coal mines and coal seam gas mining operations can cause to public health and the environment. Burke could have reversed Hartcher's "stone-wall"



argument and simply rejected each of the three proposals on the grounds that the proponents have not proved that the proposal presents no public hazard.

The three projects would result in the production of about 47 million tonnes of greenhouse gases per annum, so Burke could have added that the burning of fossil fuels threatens the future of human life on earth, and that this necessitates the phasing out of coal as an energy source.

Instead, he summed up his position with the statement: "Of all the decisions I have ever made, this is the one where I have the least idea of whether the projects are going to go ahead."

A major issue

CSG mining is now a major election issue. Independent federal MP Tony Windsor, whose cooperation is crucial to the survival of the Gillard government, is demanding the amendment of the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act to make water quality a trigger for federal intervention.

He's absolutely right. The NSW government has just approved a proposal to construct five long-wall

coal mines beneath a series of upland swamps within Sydney's water catchment area. It has also removed public health experts from the board of the Sydney Catchment Authority, and has installed a former mining executive as the Authority's chairman.

Last year, treated coal seam gas water which mining company Santos wanted to reinject into shallow aquifers in the Pilliga forest in northern NSW was subjected to tests that revealed the presence of toxic chemicals. Santos insisted that the process would be completely safe, but an independent laboratory scientist commented: "This sample of water is unacceptable for any use".

An ecological report has found that coal seam gas exploration in the Pilliga has already resulted in the

clearing of vegetation, habitat loss and fragmentation. Naomi Hogan from the Wilderness Society described the Pilliga as completely dependent on groundwater. She said: "Coal seam gas is completely inappropriate for the Pilliga, a recharge area of the Great Artesian Basin and iconic wildlife haven."

Will the Gillard government take effective action to rein in the coal and coal seam gas industries and their acquiescent state governments? Will Burke act on Tony Windsor's demand for inclusion of water quality as a "trigger" for federal intervention? Alas, to date the signs are not good. But there's still time for us to convince the government to do the right thing before the federal election. ☘

Pete's Corner



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Bob Carnegie case: ITF statement

ITF (International Transport Workers' Federation) president Paddy Crumlin last week spoke out in defence of trade unionist Bob Carnegie and in strong condemnation of legal actions taken against him by the Lend Lease company of Australia.

Bob Carnegie, a long-time union activist, faces 54 charges of contempt arising from his leadership of a community protest during a nine-week strike by 600 trade unionists at the

Queensland Children's Hospital in Brisbane. If convicted, he could face a jail sentence and over a million dollars in fines, as well as significant legal bills. His trial began on February 11 in Brisbane's Federal Magistrates Court. (Since then 36 charges have been dropped but he still faces 18 additional charges – Ed.)

The dispute, over wages and work conditions on the site, involved Abigroup, a subsidiary of Lend Lease. The workers sought an agreement

which would include a clause guaranteeing that all workers employed on the site by subcontractors be paid the same rate for the job, because wages paid by different subcontractors could vary by up to \$10 an hour. Workers formed a "community protest" and Carnegie helped organise the effort

Eventually, a national strike of construction workers at another branch of Lend Lease in September 2012 forced Abigroup to the bargaining table. As part of the settlement,

Abigroup agreed not to pursue legal action against a number of QCH workers. But, the company, in violation of the spirit of that agreement covering workers at the site, decided to single out Carnegie.

Paddy Crumlin explained: "This court case is widely viewed by the Australian trade union movement as nothing less than corporate bullying. The actual industrial dispute was settled long ago and Lend Lease, via its subsidiary Abigroup, pledged not to take retaliatory action against other workers. Yet the company is now bringing the full weight of its legal and financial resources to bear. It looks very much like their prime aim is an effort to destroy one individual and send a chilling message to other workers that they risk financial ruin if they exercise fundamental rights of free speech and association."

In a strongly worded letter to Lend Lease's CEO Steve McCann urging the company to drop all legal actions against Carnegie, Paddy Crumlin wrote: "In fact, continuing to prosecute this case against Mr Carnegie will do harm to your company's image in the community and its

long-term relations with its workers. The picture people will see is that of a large, powerful company trying to destroy and bankrupt one individual. Indeed, it puts your company at odds with basic democratic Australian values: the right to free speech and the right to support your co-workers."

Crumlin pledged to take the matter to ITF members around the world, as well as to the ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation). "Together, we will be considering what actions should be taken to ensure that you remedy the matter by withdrawing the legal matters and move on so that further constructive relationships between the workers and your company can be delivered," Crumlin wrote.

Crumlin, in his role as national secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia, has also mobilised the union's members to participate in community protests throughout Australia on the first day of Carnegie's trial.

For more details please and to see the letter in full, please visit mua.org.au/news-story/3527 ✪

Call for release of political prisoners in Ireland



On Sunday February, 10, the James Connolly Association, Melbourne held a very successful rally outside the State Library against the British policy of internment, that is the detention without trial that is being practiced in the north of Ireland.

The gathering also called for the immediate release of Irish Political Prisoners Marian Price and Martin Corey. These two republicans are being held in prison by the orders of the Secretary of State

for North Ireland, Owen Patterson, overriding the decisions of courts and judge's to grant bail.

So, people can be arrested, held in isolation, without due cause, without evidence, without charges and without trial or release dates at the whim of this Secretary of State. This is blatantly unfair persecution of dissidents and will not help further the cause of peace and justice in Ireland.

In fact such discriminatory actions are sure to inflame an

already intolerable situation where Irish nationalist feel very little has changed for the better since the signing of the Good Friday Agreements between Sinn Fein and the British government. The protest was part of an ongoing campaign to free the Irish Republican Political Prisoners and to support them and their families.

Steven Katsineris, for the James Connolly Association, Melbourne.

Victorian public school staff stage record-breaking stopwork

For the first time in 15 years, Victorian public education teachers, principals and support staff held a third statewide stopwork on February 14 in further pursuit of a new workplace agreement with the state government.

Over 30,000 school staff stopped work, with thousands attending a meeting at Hisense Arena in Melbourne, linked live to a regional rally in Mildura.

Australian Education Union (AEU) Victorian branch president Meredith Peace said the state government had dragged the dispute out for over two years and it was time Premier Baillieu showed some leadership and, in the interests of students and school communities, put a fair offer on the table.

The statewide strike will send a clear message to the state government that enough is enough and it must invest more in public education," she said.

"The Victorian government continues to spend \$1,453 less per student on education than the national average and has been responsible for over \$2 billion in cuts and broken promises.

"Close to half of our public schools still have classes of over 25 students, which makes it extremely difficult for teachers to provide each student with the individual attention they need."

Peace said that Victorian teachers are now the second lowest paid in the country. Teachers in Western Australia and New South Wales at the top of the incremental scale are

paid \$7,508 and \$4,991 respectively more than Victorian teachers for the same role.

Further, almost one in five teachers (18%) are currently on short-term contracts. This figure increases to 45% for beginning teachers.

"Education support staff remain the lowest paid in Victorian schools and receive little or no recognition of their skills, experience and the crucial role they play," Peace said. "Many education support staff earn less than the minimum wage. Over 44% are on contracts.

"The AEU put a significantly revised offer – of 4.2% per year over three years – to the Baillieu government in November. This offer was comparable to teacher salaries in NSW and South Australia and in line with the police deal in Victoria."

She said that to ensure every Victorian student receives the education they deserve, there is the need to attract and retain the best quality teachers, principals and education support staff to our schools.

"We do not take industrial action lightly, but in this case, it is crucial to ensure quality teachers, principals and education support staff remain in this state and in our profession.

"It is time for the state government to treat Victoria's public school staff with the respect they deserve and resolve this dispute without further delay," Ms Peace said. ✪

Protests at PNG consulates to close detention camp

Protests were held in Sydney and Brisbane to coincide with the first court sitting in Papua New Guinea to consider the constitutional challenge to the Manus Island detention camp. The legal challenge has been initiated by the PNG Opposition leader, Belden Namah.

Lawyers at the hearing applied for an interim injunction to prevent any further transfers of asylum seekers from Australia to Manus Island until the constitutional challenge is finally determined.

"This legal challenge will hopefully bring about the closure of one half of Julia Gillard's Pacific hell-holes," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

There have been constant protests against transfers and the conditions

on Manus Island since the detention camp was opened in November. The evacuation of the detention camp (which holds 34 children and around 200 adults) in the recent tsunami alert is just the latest indication that Manus Island is no place to hold asylum seekers. Some asylum families were left to walk from the detention camp to the highest land they could find.

"Worse, it seems some of the male Iranian asylum seekers were prevented from leaving the camp at all," said Rintoul. "Bottled water is the only source of fresh drinking water in the camp which is constantly plagued by power failures, and where the single males have nothing but tents.

"The arbitrary selection process has seen the transfer of people who have immediate family members

in Australia as well as sick people who need medical care that can't be provided on Manus Island.

"The Labor government has successfully drawn the PNG government into an agreement that violates the rights of asylum and may well violate PNG law. We will be calling on the PNG government to uphold the law, terminate the agreement and close Manus Island.

"Julia Gillard's latest anti-refugee offensive has also roped-in the New Zealand government into aiding and abetting her Pacific Solution. But a successful constitutional challenge in Papua New Guinea would be a major blow to Gillard's regional attempts to undermine the Refugee Convention and trash refugee rights." ✪

Fears for future of Dumbartung

Kirstie Parker

Who will stand up for Nyoongah culture? That is the question being asked by Nyoongah man Robert Eggington, who for more than 20 years has led the Dumbartung Aboriginal Corporation and its renowned Kyana Gallery in Perth.

Mr Eggington says Dumbartung, which operates out of the old Catholic orphanage (Clontarf) in the suburb of Waterford, is potentially just months – if not weeks – from closure as its current funding peters out with little word of more.

For the past year, the grassroots organisation has survived on a one-off community grant from Lotterywest and funds from a tender under Redress WA to record the stories of adults seeking ex-gratia payments for abuse and/or neglect suffered while they were in state care.

Part of the Lotterywest grant was put towards development of a business plan to help Dumbartung use its resources in an income-generating, sustainable way.

The business planning consultants are due to report at the end of this week, but Mr Eggington is apprehensive about what may lay ahead.

“If Dumbartung isn’t funded through the responsibilities of government heritage and cultural maintenance, we would have to go overseas to get access to the money needed to keep this asset going,” he told the *Koori Mail* newspaper.

“Within that lies an absolutely shameful hypocrisy of the fact that the state and federal governments do not see the preciousness of the Kyana Gallery, an asset they should feel privileged to fund.”

Dumbartung began as an advocacy and cultural body, hosting the famous Kyana Aboriginal Cultural Festivals of the early 1990s.

Over time, its scope has morphed to encompass campaigning for human rights, protection of Aboriginal intellectual property (including a fight against the fabrication of stories in American author Marlo Morgan’s controversial book *Mutant Message Down Under*), repatriation of cultural material, educational and cross-cultural programs reaching thousands of schoolchildren and adults, and prison art activities.

Some of its most important work centres on healing the grief and loss experienced by Aboriginal women, through a program conducted by Robert’s wife Selina, and other activities conducted with Nyoongah youth around substance abuse, identity, and suicide prevention.

The Kyana Gallery is a

cultural, totally non-commercial enterprise that is home to thousands of Nyoongah and other items donated and acquired over time, including rare artefacts (some of which have been repatriated from domestic and overseas collecting institutions), artworks including some by the late Revel Cooper and other famed artists from Carrolup in the state’s south-west, “bookahs” (Nyoongah kangaroo cloaks), historical photos and records, and much more. None of these items are for sale.

Mr Eggington said that some items in the gallery’s non-public keeping room were thousands of years old; so ancient that the ceremonies they were used for no longer existed.

However, the conditions within the gallery are far from ideal. Its floor is uneven, the roof leaks when it rains and there’s no temperature or climate control, which means some of the gallery’s contents are continually at risk.

A few years back, the Gallery was recognised by the National Library of Australia (NLA), the National Archives and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet as nationally significant.

Museum consultants Dr Brian Shepherd and Paul Bridges have assessed the significance of Dumbartung and its collections.

“It is clear that it is one of considerable local, state, national and international significance when understood within its institutional context,” the pair said in their 2011 report.

Their recommendations referred to “the need to harness the collection within recognised professional museum practice to ensure that its worth can be more widely understood and passed to future generations”.

Dumbartung and the Kyana Gallery also have the support of a cross-section of the community, from Nyoongah people to respected child health expert and 2003 Australian of the Year Professor Fiona Stanley and activist journalist John Pilger.

Over time, they have hosted and won the admiration of the Dalai Lama, folk singer Bob Dylan, the late Johnny Cash, who visited with his late wife June Carter and actor Kris Kristofferson, and British punk band Prodigy.

But all of this will matter little unless Dumbartung gets thrown a lifeline, and quick.

Behind the scenes, some suggest that Nyoongah culture is too hot a topic for the WA Liberal government, which is currently negotiating with the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC) over a rumoured \$1 billion native title settlement.

There’ve been vocal, highly-charged protests against the would-be deal, with much of the dissent coming from a Noongar Tent Embassy established on Heirisson Island (Matagarup) in the Swan River on the city centre outskirts.

“Our story, our way”

“This all comes down to one very, very important human right and that is Aboriginal people’s human right to start throughout those collections to archive, maintain and interpret our story, our way, in relation to the significance of what is the oldest living culture on the most ancient land mass on the face of the Earth,” Mr Eggington said.

“And what has become a world-wide interest not in going into tourist shops and buying pretty dot-dot painting or watching a dance group in an auditorium but learning about the real history and culture through bastions of culture like Kyana.

“The story tellers are Aboriginal people because for far too long our story has been told by non-Aboriginal professionals like anthropologists, social workers and more.”

A comment on the future of Dumbartung and the Kyana Gallery was sought from WA’s Minister for Culture and the Arts, John Day, but none was received by the time of printing.

The Labor Opposition’s spokesman for Culture and the Arts, and Heritage John Hyde told the *Koori Mail* that WA Labor recognised “the importance of Nyoongah culture and values efforts by Nyoongah Elders and stakeholders to preserve and celebrate our indigenous culture”.

He said he was disappointed the government had not done more to research and promote the Carrolup and other Nyoongah artists, or lobby the Commonwealth effectively for a national Indigenous museum to be based in WA. However, Mr Hyde did not comment specifically on Dumbartung or the Kyana Gallery.

Mr Eggington said that numerous government ministers and politicians had visited the Kyana Gallery during the past few years, including federal School Education Minister Peter Garrett, federal Liberal MP Joe Hockey, state Aboriginal Affairs Minister Peter Collier, and Deputy Premier Dr Kim Hames.

“They have seen the value of the gallery and have all said upon their departure ‘we will ensure that Dumbartung will continue,’” he said.

“They all leave promising the earth but you never get a grain of sand back.”

Koori Mail ✪



Selina and Robert Eggington and Nyoongah Elder John Pell inside Dumbartung’s Kyana Gallery.

Photo: *Koori Mail*



Two of Australia’s biggest unions, the Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union (AMWU) and the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) and asbestos victims have launched a new campaign, Asbestos Free Future, to raise the awareness about the ongoing dangers of asbestos. All forms of asbestos have been banned in Australia since 2003, but Australians are still at risk of contracting mesothelioma and asbestos-related diseases. People can be exposed to asbestos in many ways, such as through home renovations on older properties; uncontrolled exposure during natural disasters (bush fires, floods); at work-sites – both public and private. Many younger Australians are not aware of the dangers to their health while renovating older homes. “As many as two out of three houses built between WW2 and 1983 contain asbestos”, said Lindsay Fraser from the CFMEU.

The Victorian Institute of Forensic Mental Health (Forensicare) will suspend assessments of people in court and close 16 beds for the criminally insane because of budget cuts. Forensicare will gradually close 16 of 116 beds at the Thomas Embling Hospital in Fairfield, which treats mentally ill people in the criminal justice system who are in need of acute psychiatric care and treatment. There will be a reduction in training opportunities for staff who work with some of the state’s most dangerous patients as a result of cost cuts. State authorities accuse the federal authorities for the cuts while the latter states that the Victorian government is responsible for any cuts in the health system. Neither helps the situation where the community will be put at risk because more mentally ill offenders would be sent to jail without treatment. “If people are released from jail without treatment and their illness continues, they are at the same risk of re-offending. People who go through the mental health system instead of jail have a much lower rate of recidivism”, said Dr Ness McVie, the chair of the faculty of forensic psychiatry at the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists.

Campaigners against domestic violence welcomed the government’s move to give victims of domestic violence the right to request changes to their work hours. The right to request flexible hours has also been extended to carers, older workers and parents of school-age children. It is but a very tiny step in providing more flexible work arrangements to meet people’s needs. However, there is no obligation on the employers to actually provide flexible hours if requested.



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30th Southern Cross Brigade to Cuba

Richard Titelius*

In late December 2012 and January 2013, 29 people from Australia attended the 30th Annual Southern Cross Brigade of solidarity with the Cuban people and their society and unique socialist Revolution

Since 1983 groups of people from Australia and New Zealand have been going to Cuba to participate in social and cultural activities and meet representatives of various Cuban government and non-government organisations. The international brigades of solidarity are organised by the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the People (ICAP), which also organises solidarity brigades with people from many other parts of the world. The brigades are usually accommodated at the International Camp of Julio Antonio Mella located in a rural setting near the town of Caimito located 50 kilometres west of Havana. Tours are also made to other provinces to experience life and engage in social, cultural and historical activities with the Cuban people throughout the country.

The notion of a brigade in solidarity with Cuba is for non-Cubans to know what life is like for Cuban people and to experience a taste of this life and what it is that makes it an example of a society that is a beacon of freedom to people the world over – from Europe to Africa and Australia to the Americas and Asia.

To achieve this end the people of ICAP have over the years created a program of activities for brigade members to participate in and enjoy. The schedule of activities is different each year so that people who wish to enjoy the brigade multiple times can do so and still experience something new and different each time. This year's brigade was held over 23 days with activities from Artemisa province in the west to Havana and Granma province.

This year's Southern Cross Brigade did not have any New Zealanders though it did have participants from all mainland states including the ACT and of all age groups (the youngest being 20 years old and the oldest being 79) and a variety of walks of life from students to a retired engine driver, teachers and a former politician. Politically the brigade members were also quite diverse in their beliefs – from Communists to people who were centrists and libertarians which made for lively question times at the many forums on Cuban social, economic and political life.

This however did not detract from the overall cohesiveness of the brigade which was led by West Australian Primary School teacher Rhonda Andrews. From the Cuban side of proceedings the ICAP official in charge of the brigade was Rigoberto Zarza, who was ably assisted by a number of other staff including our interpreter in chief Ezekiel Morales who hailed from Bayamo in Granma province where we were to spend several days seeing the area's many important historical sites.

The many forums on Cuban society presented to the Brigade ranged far and wide. From labour relations, taxation and working life, the role of women in Cuba, the media in Cuba, the plight of the Cuban Five, the Cuban economy and the role of foreign investment, international relations including with the US, agriculture and food production, urban recycling, civil defence in times of natural disasters, education, public health, permaculture, human sexuality, biotechnology, the environment and renewable energy production and Cuban film and television production.

At each of these forums brigade members were not only able to receive comprehensive information on this diverse range of subjects but could also ask questions. Brigade members would need to be armed with the answers to questions about life in Cuba when they return to Australia when much of their side of the solidarity bargain would begin.

This was when we returned to Australia and would give public presentations on our experiences in Cuba or simply when we met with friends, family and the communities and/or workplaces in which we are located. The true



Brigadistas, at Camp Julio Antonio Mella, clearing the sweet potato herbage with machetes prior to harvest.

Photo: Richard Titelius

value of the Brigade becomes evident when one returns to Australia and is confronted by the misconceptions and disinformation that the corporate or conventional media puts out about Cuba.

Though more enlightened yet still capitalist countries such as Germany, which I visited following the visit to Cuba, are also not immune from inaccurate reporting on news about Cuba. This characterises most conventional media reporting by developed Western nations on events in Cuba.

Cases in point spring to mind and the first is the recent elections to the National Assembly in Cuba. In Australia and in Germany the election was seen as not being able to bring about any real change as there was only one party. However, on national Cuban TV there were regular slides about the facts and figures of all the candidates for positions on the national assembly and each one is in the same format as the others.

The Communist Party of Cuba's nomination for Raul Castro in Santiago de Cuba looks the same as any other candidate running for a position on the National Assembly. The ads which are also posted up on local shops, which look similar to the slides on TV, mention what organisations they belong to and these include the local Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR), the Cuban Federation of Workers (CTC) and the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) as well as the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC).

Though voting is not compulsory, 90% of Cubans participate in the elections and approximately 70% of those elected are members of the Communist Party, the other 30% are members of other organisations.

Most Cubans are well educated and take an interest in local and national affairs. What decides in their minds who should be elected is whether the person who nominated or renominated is up to the task and is a hard worker.

In Australia and other countries of the capitalist world the elections in Cuba are seen as a forgone conclusion and that real change in Cuba

will not come from the elections – as if voting Liberal or Labor in an Australian election with its so-called multi-party system brings about any worthwhile or necessary change. Most parties are parties which support the rule or reform of capital, so no surprises there either.

In 1961, at a public rally in Havana, Cuba Comandante en Jefe, Fidel Castro said that there would be no need for elections as the West sees them as the people have won – and the people support the Revolution, as most Cubans continue to do to this day.

This brings us to our second case which is that of the announcement on January 12, 2013, by the Cuban government that without almost any restriction, any Cuban is now allowed to obtain a passport and if they are able to obtain a visa from another country, may travel to that country. The media in Cuba showed Cubans lining up outside the Interior Ministry to obtain passports and outside embassies to obtain visas.

The Western media seemed to portray this as the beginning of the end of communist Cuba as once Cubans had seen what the rest of the so-called free world was like they either would not want to come back or once they returned to Cuba they would not want their lives to be the same and would seek a society which would emulate the societies which they had visited in the West.

Far from it, many Cubans have already been allowed to legally visit the US if they had relatives there and most of those who had been there, saw the dark side of those societies, heard the falsehoods that people tell them about Cuba based on the lies that media such as the *Miami Herald*, *New York Post* and *Fox (Faux) News* put out about Cuba and know that it is not the reality they live.

Apart from the many varied forums Brigade members attended, they also visited many historical sites, including the Comandancia La Plata in the Sierra Maestra Mountains from where Fidel and Che carried out the Cuban Revolution in the first six months of the campaign in the mid 1950s, the Che Monument in Santa Clara,

and the landing place of the *Granma* boat near the town of Niquero in Granma province.

Also, the birthplace of Carlos Manuel de Cespedes in Bayamo, Granma Province, who was the landowner in the 1860s who first kicked off the struggle for Cuban independence by freeing his slaves and organising a revolt against the Spanish.

We visited the Mausoleum dedicated to those many young men from Artemisa province who so valiantly joined Fidel Castro in the failed storming of the Moncada Barracks on July 26, 1953, an event which precipitated the successful revolution six years later.

However, the Southern Cross (in Spanish *Cruz del Sur*) Brigade was not all information forums and historical sites, members were also required to spend some mornings doing field work which involved pulling yucca (a sweet potato like plant), cleaning weeds out of the sweet potato (*boniato*) and banana patches, picking tomatoes and planting seedlings.

In the evenings there were occasionally dance classes, afternoon visit to museums and art galleries and one evening a visit to the National Theatre in Havana to see a spectacular presentation of the Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite* opened by the nonagenarian Director of the National Ballet of Cuba herself, Alicia Alonso.

Now the real work of the members of the Southern Cross Brigade begins when they return to Australia to spread the word of the reality of Cuban life and Cuban society and to return serve on the misinformation and misconceptions that abound in much of the Australian media.

We owe it to the Cuban Five who remain imprisoned in the US for defending their country from terrorists, the people of Cuba who wait for the US economic blockade to end and for the US to return 117 square kilometres of territory at Guanatanamo Bay back to Cuba which it illegally ceded to itself in 1903 as part of the Platt Agreement.

*Richard Titelius is a Brigade member *Cruz del Sur*, member ACFS and member CPA

Holocaust and extermination – a terrible normality

Michael Parenti

Through much of history
the abnormal has been the norm.
This is a paradox to which we should attend.
Aberrations, so plentiful
as to form a terrible normality of their own,
descend upon us
with frightful consistency.

The number of massacres in history, for instance, are almost more than we can record. There was the New World holocaust, consisting of the extermination of indigenous Native American peoples throughout the western hemisphere, extending over four centuries or more, continuing into recent times in the Amazon region.

There were the centuries of heartless slavery in the Americas and elsewhere, followed by a full century of lynch mob rule and Jim Crow segregation in the United States, and today the numerous killings and incarcerations of Black youth by law enforcement agencies.

Let us not forget the extermination of some 200,000 Filipinos by the US military at the beginning of the 20th century, the genocidal massacre of 1.5 million Armenians by the Turks in 1915, and the mass killings of African peoples by the western colonists, including the 63,000 Herero victims in German Southwest Africa in 1904, and the brutalisation and enslavement of millions in the Belgian Congo from the late 1880s until emancipation in 1960 – followed by years of neocolonial free-market exploitation and repression in what was Mobutu's Zaire.

French colonisers killed some 150,000 Algerians. Later on, several million souls perished in Angola and Mozambique along with an estimated five million in the merciless region now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The 20th century gave us – among other horrors – more than 16 million lost and 20 million wounded or mutilated in World War I, followed by the estimated 62 million to 78 million killed in World War II, including some 24 million Soviet military personnel and civilians, 5.8 million European Jews, and taken together: several million Serbs, Poles, Roma, homosexuals, and a score of other nationalities.

State sponsorship

In the decades after World War II, many, if not most, massacres and wars have been openly or covertly sponsored by the US national security state. This includes the two million or so left dead or missing in Vietnam, along with 250,000 Cambodians, 100,000 Laotians, and 58,000 Americans.

Today in much of Africa, Central Asia, and the Middle East there are “smaller” wars, replete with atrocities of all sorts. Central America, Colombia, Rwanda and other places too numerous to list, suffered the massacres and death-squad exterminations of hundreds of thousands, a constancy of violent horrors. In Mexico a “war on drugs” has taken 70,000 lives with 8,000 missing.

There was the slaughter of more than half a million socialistic or democratic nationalist Indonesians by the US-supported Indonesian military in 1965, eventually followed by the extermination of 100,000 East Timorese by that same US-backed military.

Consider the 78-days of NATO's aerial destruction of Yugoslavia complete with depleted uranium, and the bombings and invasion of Panama, Grenada, Somalia, Libya, Yemen, Western Pakistan, Afghanistan, and now the devastating war of attrition brokered against Syria. And as I write (early 2013), the US-sponsored sanctions against Iran are seeding severe hardship for the civilian population of that country.

All the above amounts to a very incomplete listing of the world's violent and ugly injustice. A comprehensive inventory would fill volumes. How do we record the countless other life-searing abuses: the many millions who survive



Due to the US invasion, more than half of the Iraq population is either dead, wounded, traumatised, imprisoned, displaced, or exiled.

wars and massacres but remain forever broken in body and spirit, left to a lifetime of suffering and pitiless privation, refugees without sufficient food or medical supplies or water and sanitation services in countries like Syria, Haiti, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Mali.

Think of the millions of women and children around the world and across the centuries who have been trafficked in unspeakable ways, and the millions upon millions trapped in exploitative toil, be they slaves, indentured servants, or underpaid labourers. The number of impoverished is now growing at a faster rate than the world's population. Add to that, the countless acts of repression, incarceration, torture, and other criminal abuses that beat upon the human spirit throughout the world day by day.

Let us not overlook the ubiquitous corporate corruption and massive financial swindles, the plundering of natural resources and industrial poisoning of whole regions, the forceful displacement of entire populations, the continuing catastrophes of Chernobyl and Fukushima and other impending disasters awaiting numerous aging nuclear reactors.

Inured to horror

The world's dreadful aberrations are so commonplace and unrelenting that they lose their edge and we become inured to the horror of it all. “Who today remembers the Armenians?” Hitler is quoted as having said while plotting his “final solution” for the Jews. Who today remembers the Iraqis and the death and destruction done to them on a grand scale by the US invasion of their lands? William Blum reminds us that more than half the Iraq population is either dead, wounded, traumatised, imprisoned, displaced, or exiled, while their environment is saturated with depleted uranium (from US weaponry) inflicting horrific birth defects.

What is to be made of all this? First, we must not ascribe these aberrations to happenstance, innocent confusion, and unintended consequences. Nor should we believe the usual rationales about spreading democracy, fighting terrorism, providing humanitarian rescue, protecting US national interests and other such rallying cries promulgated by ruling elites and their mouthpieces.

The repetitious patterns of atrocity and violence are so persistent as to invite the suspicion that they usually serve real interests; they are structural not incidental. All this destruction and slaughter has greatly profited those plutocrats who pursue economic expansion, resource acquisition, territorial dominion, and financial accumulation.

Ruling interests are well served by their superiority in firepower and striking force. Violence is what we are talking about here, not just the wild and wanton type but the persistent and well-organised kind. As a political resource, violence is the instrument of ultimate authority. Violence allows for the conquest of entire

lands and the riches they contain, while keeping displaced labourers and other slaves in harness.

The plutocratic rulers find it necessary to misuse or exterminate restive multitudes, to let them starve while the fruits of their land and the sweat of their labour enrich privileged coteries.

Profit-driven imperialism

Thus we had a profit-driven imperial rule that helped precipitate the great famine in northern China, 1876-1879, resulting in the death of some 13 million. At about that same time the Madras famine in India took the lives of as many as 12 million while the colonial forces grew ever richer. And 30 years earlier, the great potato famine in Ireland led to about one million deaths, with another desperate million emigrating from their homeland. Nothing accidental about this: while the Irish starved, their English landlords exported shiploads of Irish grain and livestock to England and elsewhere at considerable profit to themselves.

These occurrences must be seen as something more than just historic abnormalities floating aimlessly in time and space, driven only by overweening impulse or happenstance. It is not enough to condemn monstrous events and bad times; we also must try to understand them. They must be contextualised in the larger framework of historical social relations.

The dominant socio-economic system today is free-market capitalism (in all its variations). Along with its unrelenting imperial terrorism, free-market capitalism provides “normal abnormalities” from within its own dynamic, creating scarcity and maldistributed excess, filled with duplication, waste, overproduction, frightening environmental destruction, and varieties of financial crises, bringing swollen rewards to a select few and continual hardship to multitudes.

Economic crises are not exceptional; they are the standing operational mode of the capitalist system. Once again, the irrational is the norm. Consider US free-market history: after the American Revolution, there were the debtor rebellions of the late 1780s, the panic of 1792, the recession of 1809 (lasting several years), the panics of 1819 and 1837, and recessions and crashes through much of the rest of that century. The serious recession of 1893 continued for more than a decade.

After the industrial underemployment of 1900 to 1915 came the agrarian depression of the 1920s – hidden behind what became known to us as “the Jazz Age,” followed by a horrendous crash and the Great Depression of 1929-1942. All through the 20th century we had wars, recessions, inflation, labour struggles, high unemployment – hardly a year that would be considered “normal” in any pleasant sense. An extended normal period would itself have been an abnormality. The free market is by design inherently unstable in every aspect other than wealth accumulation for the select few.

What we are witnessing is not an irrational

output from a basically rational society but the converse: the “rational” (to be expected) output of a fundamentally irrational system. Does this mean these horrors are inescapable? No, they are not made of supernatural forces. They are produced by plutocratic greed and deception.

Fightback

So, if the aberrant is the norm and the horrific is chronic, then we in our fightback should give less attention to the idiosyncratic and more to the systemic. Wars, massacres and recessions help to increase capital concentration, monopolise markets and natural resources, and destroy labour organisations and popular transformative resistance.

The brutish vagaries of plutocracy are not the product of particular personalities but of systemic interests. President George W Bush was ridiculed for misusing words, but his empire-building and stripping of government services and regulations revealed a keen devotion to ruling-class interests. Likewise, President Barack Obama is not spineless. He is hypocritical but not confused. He is (by his own description) an erstwhile “liberal Republican,” or as I would put it, a faithful servant of corporate America.

Our various leaders are well informed, not deluded. They come from different regions and different families, and have different personalities, yet they pursue pretty much the same policies on behalf of the same plutocracy.

So it is not enough to denounce atrocities and wars, we also must understand who propagates them and who benefits. We have to ask why violence and deception are constant ingredients.

Unintended consequences and other oddities do arise in worldly affairs but we also must take account of interest-driven rational intentions. More often than not, the aberrations – be they wars, market crashes, famines, individual assassinations or mass killings – take shape because those at the top are pursuing gainful expropriation. Many may suffer and perish but somebody somewhere is benefiting boundlessly.

Knowing your enemies and what they are capable of doing is the first step toward effective opposition. The world becomes less of a horrific puzzle. We can only resist these global (and local) perpetrators when we see who they are and what they are doing to us and our sacred environment.

Democratic victories, however small and partial they be, must be embraced. But the people must not be satisfied with tinselled favours offered by smooth leaders. We need to strive in every way possible for the revolutionary unravelling, a revolution of organised consciousness striking at the empire's heart with the full force of democracy, the kind of irresistible upsurge that seems to come from nowhere while carrying everything before it.

Information Clearing House ✪

Fighting to save our hospitals

Will Stone

BRITAIN: Last week saw action across the capital to defend London hospitals from the crippling effects of government-imposed cuts. Events kicked off with the parliamentary launch of Defend London's NHS – an unprecedented coalition of MPs, unions, campaigners, patients, doctors and other health workers.

The campaign brought together activists from Lewisham, Ealing, Charing Cross, Hammersmith, Central Middlesex, Whittington and Kingston who are battling to save their accident and emergency departments, maternity units and in-hospital care from the government's savage cost-cutting.

In recent months tens of thousands of Londoners have taken to the streets in various protests against the cutbacks, most prominently in Lewisham where two huge demos in December and January saw almost 50,000 marching to save the hospital's Accident and Emergency department. But Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt ignored the masses and said Lewisham's A&E department would be downgraded and its maternity unit replaced by a midwife-led facility.

The decision effectively means that the successful Lewisham hospital is being sacrificed to bail out neighbouring South London Healthcare Trust, which has crippling private finance initiative (PFI) debts.

As a result Lewisham's downgraded A&E will no longer be fit to serve patients with more serious conditions, who will have to travel half an hour to the next nearest hospital. Even some Tories are on the side of the campaigners with this one.

In a recent debate in Parliament when Hunt announced his decision, Beckenham MP Bob Stewart said: "I do actually find it rather strange

that a successful hospital is being slashed when other hospitals have been saved."

And Conservative Enfield North MP Nick de Bois added: "You recognise that Lewisham is the victim of failed PFI and failed finance not of its making."

As part of the newly launched Defend London's NHS week of action, campaigners held a rally outside Lewisham hospital in protest against Hunt's decision. They also joined Ealing campaigners to hand in "We Love Our NHS" Valentine's cards to the Department of Health.

The "justification" for health cuts probably doesn't get any more patronising than NHS North West London's Shaping A Healthier Future consultation, which asked residents to choose between option A, B or C with the consequence seeing the closure of four A&E departments, downgrading their hospitals into "local" trusts.

Preferred option A would see the A&Es at West Middlesex University and Chelsea and Westminster Trusts kept open but the closure of those at four other hospitals – Charing Cross, Ealing, Hammersmith and Central Middlesex.

NHS North West London is due to make its final decision on February 19. In the meantime Hammersmith and Fulham Council's spin doctors have put out a press release stating that Charing Cross A&E has been "saved" from closure. In reality it will be downgraded in the same way as Lewisham's.

Labour MP for Hammersmith Andy Slaughter told the *Star* at the Defend London's NHS launch: "This is a particularly cynical move from the council. To get everyone's hopes up by saying that their A&E has been saved and then including what they're really doing in the small print."

In protest at NHS NWL



campaigners organised two simultaneous rallies in Hammersmith and Ealing. Other demonstrations include at Kingston against NHS South West London's plans to close two out of five A&Es and maternity units serving the area.

Earlier in the week on Tuesday night Methodist Hall in Archway, north London, was crammed to the doors with hundreds of patients, campaigners and politicians livid at plans by the board of Whittington Hospital to sell off £17 million worth of buildings at its north site to private companies, with dire consequence for staff and the provision of care.

They wiped the floor with the hospital's chairman Joe Liddane after he attempted to explain away

the plans to the public meeting that included chairwoman of Defend the Whittington Hospital Coalition Shirley Franklin, Jeremy Corbyn MP and outspoken author Owen Jones.

This positive first step to link up campaigns across London shows the urgency for such a campaign to be replicated on a national level to highlight the extent to which hospital boards, councils and politicians will go to fool the general public.

But while Save Our Hospitals chairman Carlos Nero says campaigners are doing their "utmost" to launch a national defend our NHS campaign, Health Emergency director John Lister says it has been problematic historically.

"It's difficult because what

matters most to the general public is the hospital down the road from them, their local hospital," says Lister. "This means it has always been hard to co-ordinate campaigners in the north to join up with events that only affect those in the south.

"Even in London where the boundaries are more blurred, it has proved to be a challenge that hasn't been achieved for many years, so this is an encouraging development. I'm sure a national NHS campaign can be done."

If the government continues to bulldoze through massive NHS cuts while rubberstamping more plans to privatise services then it will no longer be a question of can but must. *Morning Star* ☘

Nearly 50 countries helped CIA torture prisoners

Lyuba Lukko

The authors of the report "Globalisation of Torture" found that governments of 54 countries assisted the CIA in search, transportation and torture of terrorism suspects. This work was started by the CIA after September 11, 2001. In the former Soviet area the CIA was supported by the governments of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Lithuania and Uzbekistan. Some Western analysts were surprised that the list did not include Russia.

The report was presented on February 5 in New York by the George Soros Open Society Fund. The authors describe in detail how the CIA involved the "third party" countries in an operation called "extraordinary rendition." They involve detention of a person without a court order with the following imprisonment and tortures to extract confessions. Sometimes these confessions were false and were used, for example, to justify the US intervention in Iraq.

The report states that 136 people were detained under the emergency procedure, and details each story. If the secret help of

governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Egypt comes as no surprise, the "black holes" in the governments of Sweden, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, Denmark and Iceland, that is, the countries that boast of openness and transparency, are striking. These "independent" and "non-aligned" governments acted on the instructions of the CIA, i.e., in the figurative expression of former Vice President Dick Cheney, they quietly, without any discussion, using their available sources and methods, destroyed people without trial.

In a television interview with Fox News in 2011, Cheney said that it was a great program of intensive interrogation and absolutely legal. He said that it could not be called torture and should be resumed. It was not legitimate because the US is a party to the UN Convention against Torture of 1984. Another thing is that the domestic law on torture is seriously flawed and does not comply with the convention.

Four secret documents adopted during the presidency of George W Bush were published in the US. They contain detailed description of the permitted methods of

interrogation by the CIA. The documents legalised an entire list of harsh methods of interrogation, including blows in the face, placing prisoners in the areas that impede movement, forcing them to stay in uncomfortable positions, and sleep deprivation. The regulations also permit the use of torture by water (simulated drowning) and placing prisoners in the enclosed spaces with insects. President Barack Obama said that he put an end to these techniques by his decree, but there are serious doubts about it.

The program was indeed "great," as it allowed justifying the war against Saddam Hussein, attracting as allies the current enemies of the US – Syria and Iran. In Iran, however, no one was tortured. Its government transferred to Afghanistan 15 prisoners suspected of terrorism in exchange for a group of fellow citizens in March of 2002. Six people in the group were soon transferred to secret prisons in the United States, where they remain to this day. Cooperation with Iran ended in 2002 when President Bush declared it part of an "axis of evil."

President Assad signed a special agreement with the CIA and

was active with the agency in 2001 - 2002. At least nine suspects were detained in Syria or transferred there for questioning. The prisoners were kept in prison Far Falastin in the western suburbs of Damascus. The most famous case is the arrest and extradition to Syria of a Canadian citizen Maher Arar in 2002. Arar was imprisoned for over ten months. He was placed in horrendous conditions, in a cage, where he was beaten with hoses and threatened with an electric current, the report of the Fund stated.

Muammar Gaddafi also helped the CIA. According to the report, he approved the transfer of the aircraft that carried a Hong Kong detainee Abu Munthir. Gaddafi worked alongside Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak who was later accused by the Americans of brutal suppression of the "Arab Spring." However, his cruelty was fine with them when it was needed. Mubarak has sanctioned the arrest and interrogation of Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, who at risk of torture in the hands of Egyptian officials gave false information regarding Iraq, stating that its government provided chemical and biological weapons

to Al-Qaeda. These data extracted under torture was later used by General Colin Powell in his address to the UN to justify the US invasion of Iraq. Al-Libi later retracted his statement, but soon died in a Libyan prison, allegedly committing suicide.

The former Soviet Union was also found helping the CIA. Azerbaijani authorities gave the agency the right to use the country's airports to transport prisoners. Richmor Aviation airline, working under a contract with the CIA, performed at least 76 flights from Baku, the report said. The report mentioned detention in Azerbaijan of Ahmed Mohammed al-Hazza Darby in 2002, who was allegedly transferred to the CIA and later placed in a prison in Bagram in Afghanistan, where he was subjected to various forms of torture.

Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, who took office in 2004, according to the report, authorised capture and extradition of several CIA terror suspects, apparently closely related to the Chechen fighters trained in the Pankisi Gorge. pravda.ru ☘

US a factor in six million Congo deaths

Dan Kovalik

Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, writing for the UK *Guardian*, called it “the most important assassination of the 20th century.” He was referring to the murder of the first legally elected prime minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC or Congo), Patrice Lumumba, on January 17, 1961, through the combined efforts of the United States and Belgium. The assassination took place less than seven months after Congolese independence from Belgium. The Congo has yet to recover from this tragic event.

In his article, Nzongola-Ntalaja explained that Lumumba’s murder – “the country’s original sin” – was motivated by the US desire to control the Congo’s resources:

“With the outbreak of the Cold War, it was inevitable that the US and its western allies would not be prepared to let Africans have effective control over strategic raw materials, lest these fall in the hands of their enemies in the Soviet camp. It is in this regard that Patrice Lumumba’s determination to achieve genuine independence and to have full control over Congo’s resources in order to utilise them to improve the living conditions of our people

was perceived as a threat to western interests.”

Sadly, as we find throughout the rest of the world, the end of the Cold War has not slowed the US in its aggressive pursuit of other peoples’ wealth. Indeed, in large part because of the demise of the Soviet Union, which had been a check on US intervention, the US aggression has only increased.

And so, as the Soviet Union was collapsing, US President Bill Clinton began to pave the way for a giant resource grab in the Congo – the most resource-rich country on earth, and also the poorest, with the very lowest Human Development Indicator of the 187 countries ranked by the United Nations. Thus, as we learn well from the work of Edward S Herman and David Peterson, most notably in “The Politics of Genocide”, the US in the early 1990s backed forces led by Paul Kagame, who was trained in intelligence at Fort Leavenworth, in their takeover of Rwanda.

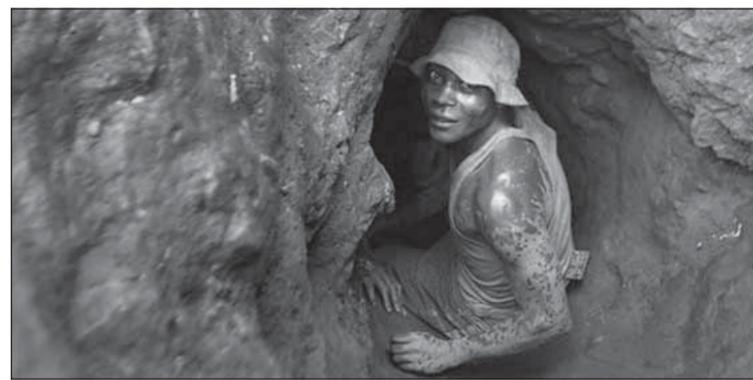
And then, in 1996, the US-backed Kagame, who had become president of Rwanda with US help, in his invasion of the Congo. The result has been the greatest mass killing since WWII, with around 6 million killed in the Congo since that time.

In a recent interview with me, Kambale Musavuli of Friends of the

Congo explains that US economic and geopolitical interests have motivated its continuing support for the blood-bath in the Congo, which continues to this day. As Kambale explains, the US is motivated by “economic and military interests.”

“Economic interests in Congo are that which we need in our daily life. The cobalt which comes out the Congo can be found in your cell phone, the cobalt of the Congo can be found in the battery of the broker of Congo’s minerals, and they loot Congo’s mineral resources while they commit atrocities. ... Chaos allows resources to leave from the Congo at a cheap price, and of course it’s not actually just leaving, it’s actually being stolen from the Congolese people.

“The second [factor] is military interest. Rwanda’s and Uganda’s militaries have been trained by the United States. Since the era when the American soldier was killed in Somalia in Mogadishu, the US did not want to have any of the troops in Africa anymore. So the US created a system in which they would train all the foreign military missions. I mean, can you imagine that ... today, we have Ugandan soldiers in Afghanistan fighting the war on terror. How many Americans know that? We have Rwandan soldiers in Haiti



and in Sudan. These missions can be deployed across the world to protect US interests around the world. ... So, the US government is valuing profits before people, and ignoring the fact that people have the right to life, to human rights.”

Kambale, speaking for himself and many other Congolese, is begging Americans to wake up and speak out against the US support for the genocide being carried out in his country:

“If you are aware, just as we took action to end the Holocaust in Europe, if we know in the Congo millions have died from – estimates take the number to over six million, and half of them are children under the age of five – and we remain silent when we know what is happening, we are really complicit. And in a very tangible way because we are supporting the two oppressive regimes in Rwanda and Uganda, and in turn these nations are using the support that we are giving them to create, fabricate militia groups which are committing war crimes and crimes against humanity.”

The US intervention in Africa, while most notable in the Congo because of the extent of its brutality there, does not end in that country. Thus, we recently saw the US lead the regime change in Libya, which has devastated that country and

directly led to the destabilisation of its neighbour, Mali.

The US is also supporting Ethiopia as it carries out its own genocide against the 5 million ethnic Somalis in its Ogaden region. Thus, as Graham Pebbles recently explained in *Counterpunch*:

“In the harsh Ogaden region of Ethiopia, impoverished ethnic Somali people are being murdered and tortured, raped, persecuted and displaced by government paramilitary forces. Illegal actions carried out with the knowledge and tacit support of donor countries [most notably the US], seemingly content to turn a blind eye to war crimes and crimes against humanity being committed by their brutal, repressive ally in the region; and a deaf ear to the pain and suffering of the Ogaden Somali people.”

And, President Obama is preparing to up the ante by sending Special Forces to 35 African countries this year. Kambale was correct in saying that we have a moral obligation to speak out against this US war against his country and the continent of Africa. His words indeed bring to mind similar words of Martin Luther King which are as true today as they were then: “The greatest purveyor of violence in the world: my own government, I cannot be silent.”

People’s World ✪

“I will be a doctor thanks to the Bolivarian Revolution”

Heidi Pérez comes from Jobure, a small town located in the state of Delta Amacuro (Venezuela’s east) and she is one of the 1,674 medical students coming from Latin America and Africa who embarked on a career in medicine in the Salvador Allende Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM, Spanish acronym), located in the state of Miranda, Venezuela.

When she speaks, you can see the innocence and energy of an 18-year-old. She vigorously and proudly states that she “will be a doctor thanks to the Bolivarian Revolution.”

Heidi was chosen by mid-2012 by an inter-institutional committee of the Ministry of People’s Power for University Education whose duty is to incorporate Venezuelan young people from far-away communities into the Training Program of Community Integral Doctors in the ELAM.

The ELAM is a humanist education centre that educates medical doctors with a socialist perspective. When students graduate from ELAM, they return to their communities to pay off the social debt regarding health care on a non-profit basis.

Furthermore, the ELAM was conceived as a strategic integration

project of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). The ELAM’s medicine program is six years long and education there is totally free of charge. This initiative seeks to guarantee the access to health care in all the ALBA member countries and African countries.

“Last year ten Venezuelans entered the ELAM’s program. We all belong to the Warao tribe. Our town is four hours away from Tucupita (Delta Amacuro’s capital state), and to arrive there we have to cross the Orinoco River by boat,” Heidi tells.

My community needs me

In order to fulfil her dream to be a doctor, Heidi had to leave her town and family. She affirms that she saw what she is experiencing today as something impossible.

She does not deny the sacrifice that implies being away from her family. “There is not a telephone signal where I live. We do not have a fixed telephone at home either. My parents call me when they go to Tucupita every two weeks, or once a month sometimes. It is a sacrifice that will bring a reward because my goal is to graduate and

go back home to help my people,” she explains.

Heidi’s wishes to improve the conditions of her community encouraged her to start her career in integral medicine. She experienced first hand what it feels not to rely on doctors and health care.

“I experienced traumatic experiences as a child. I watched many people die on the curiara (light, long canoe) because they did not arrive on time in the health centre in Tucupita to receive medical care. So when I was chosen I did not think twice, I could not lose this opportunity. My community needs me,” she says.

Exciting experience

Heidi is attending her first year of Community Integral Medicine and stresses that since she began her introductory course and field-work she has been further encouraged to serve and help others.

“It is an exciting experience. We study here all day and visit places no one dares to go to take care of patients. They are not merchandise, we see them as human beings that lack medical care and must be healed. We are studying to be always there with those in need, with our people,” she explains.

Venezuelaanalysis ✪



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28 February 2013

12pm Rally
Supreme Court Gardens
12:30pm March on Parliament

The Mining Boom

Let's spread it around



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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Monty Miller's legacy

Monty Miller fought in the Eureka Stockade and he lived to give his support to the fledgling Communist Party in 1920.

He served a term of imprisonment during World War I for opposing conscription when he was well over the age of 80. His comrade in the dock, for the same offence, was Michael Sawtell. He was given a prison sentence and because of his age the judge wanted to exempt Monty Miller from going to jail. He refused to accept the offer of exemption.

Just before his death, he was

visited by the author Katharine Susannah Prichard, who told him about the formation of the CP and he indicated his agreement with its basic ideology.

Our Labour Movement is built upon the foundation of those pioneers. We honour their memory.

The present day vintage of those who call themselves Labor parliamentarians are, in most cases, concerned with a political career and the emoluments that go with it. That is why we need Marxists in the federal and state parliaments. The sooner the better.

**Raul Bassie
NSW**

Act to save the Tarkine

Labor Environment Minister Tony Burke has opened the way for the proliferation of mines across the magnificent Tarkine region of Tasmania.

Many of the proposed mines are in parts of the Tarkine that even John Howard had protected for their global heritage values.

The Tarkine includes the second largest intact cool temperate rainforest on the planet, and is home to the last healthy population of Tasmanian Devils.

Minister Burke's decision could pave the way for the Tarkine to be turned into a tin and iron ore mining pit, and push the Tasmanian Devil even closer to extinction in the wild.

The Tarkine is also home to so many wonderful, innovative tourism operators and food producers – people who could now have their livelihoods threatened or destroyed.

Hundreds of you wrote to the papers, and a big splash of them in the Courier Mail kept the Reef front and centre in this election year.

We need to do it again to save the Tarkine. Please write to your paper today to make sure that Labor can't bury their failure in a tailings dam.

Moments like this can feel hopeless, but I think back to campaigns that we have won together in the past – and I know that we can win the fight to protect the Tarkine and build a clean, green and clever economy for all Tasmanians.

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They started to dam the Franklin River, and we did not give up – and we won.

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We can do so again.

This decision shows Labor can't be trusted on the environment.

For the Tarkine and those who rely on it, please write to national newspapers today.

With determination,

**Christine Milne
The Greens**

Culture & Life

by
Rob Gowland

Selling war and selling justice



Yes, "advanced technology systems, products and services" that only incidentally kill people, usually poor people.

Boy, did I miss out on a thrill? With a bit of finagling (and a degree of luck) I could have been enjoying a pretend flight in the Yanks' latest fighter plane, the Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II. Where? At the Hilton Hotel of all places. Where else would you go to play at destroying Arab or African villages full of "hostiles" or to teach the Chinese who really rules the world?

Lockheed Martin issued a general invitation to Australian journalists to attend a demonstration of the "interactive cockpit demonstrator" of the hideously expensive F-35, which the company modestly describes as "the world's most advanced multi-role fighter aircraft", so that the journos could get the "feel" of the plane, could familiarise themselves with it, even claim to have "flown" it in a variety of "mission scenarios". Then of course the company could confidently expect them to repay the favour by "talking up" the plane in their columns. Instead of bemoaning the aircraft's not inconsiderable cost they could talk knowledgeably about its combat capabilities and its "stealth, fighter agility and integrated sensor-technology".

Lockheed Martin describes the version destined for Australia, the F-35A, as a "vital choice for Australia's Defence Force long-term air-combat capability". But then, Lockheed Martin is an arms dealer and like second-hand car dealers, they will say anything to secure a sale. Listen to the spurious way the company describes itself: "Headquartered in Bethesda, Maryland, Lockheed Martin is a global security

and aerospace company that employs about 120,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture, integration, and sustainment of advanced technology systems, products, and services."

Yes, "advanced technology systems, products and services" that only incidentally kill people, usually poor people. And they do it for money, of course – lots of money. The company's net sales for 2012 were a mere \$47.2 billion.

Like all high-end armaments programs in the US, the development and manufacture of the F-35 fighter is big business. As the company boasts, it "supports over \$300 million in high-technology manufacturing and skilled employment generation across the country, particularly in small to medium-sized enterprises." But that is corporate flimflam: it has been shown time and again that if that same \$300 million were spent on renewables and other green projects it would generate at least 50 percent *more* jobs and put much more money into the general US economy.

But then it wouldn't help them to gain control of other countries' resources, like oil, diamonds, minerals. And how could the capitalist powers retain their leadership of the world if they did not constantly threaten other countries with wholesale death and destruction?

However, that is not how Lockheed Martin sees it: "The F-35 Lightning II is the world's most advanced military aircraft and for over a

decade, the US and our allies have invested in developing this fifth-generation, international, multirole fighter aircraft that will serve as a cornerstone of global security in the 21st century." Apparently, "global security" and protecting US imperialist interests are one and the same thing.

I see it's not just unemployed single mums and handicapped people who are having to struggle on reduced money these days. The Federal Court itself had its funding cut from \$93.5 million in 2010 to \$89.7 million in 2011. It regained part of that in 2012 when its budgeted allocation rose to \$90.2 million. But that still leaves the court three million short, without making any allowance for inflation or all the other rising costs that have inflicted themselves on all institutions over the last few years.

The Chief Justice of the Federal Court, Patrick Keane, complained this month that not only had the Federal Court's budget been slashed over the last three years, but its workload had gone up by 20 percent in the same period. At the same time, the number of judges had been reduced from 50 to 44.

I admit that when the term "exploited workers" comes up, Federal Court judges are not usually the first people that come to mind. But when a government is making such a mess of the national economy that even sections of the establishment are being treated shamefully, and the Court system is being used as a convenient

milch cow, then you know that something is rotten in the system. Chief Justice Keane, who moves to the High Court in March, clearly thinks so.

He berated the federal government for raising court fees. Warning that it could push justice out of people's reach, he said: "User pays theories are great for the ministry of finance but, for a long time – since Magna Carta – to no one will we sell justice."

"The idea that one of the essential things that a state provides is justice is one of the core values of our tradition," he said. "And to have to pay very substantial fees to get in the door of a court is a matter of concern. [The Federal Court] does not impose the fees and we don't keep the money."

Michael Legg, Associate Professor at the University of NSW School of Law, commented that "fees have usually increased annually to keep pace with inflation, but the most recent changes look like the federal government has gone 'here is a cash cow – let's milk it'."

"My biggest concern has been the way that it impacts individuals and their ability to pay."

Australia's image of itself as the "lucky country" has taken something of a battering lately, and it looks like it's going to take more of a battering in the not too distant future, with people from all walks of life, not just workers, copping a beating. Approached properly, this should provide opportunities for broadening the strata that are prepared to struggle for a better life, a different – better – society. ☘



Sunday February 24 –
Saturday March 2

Observant readers will notice that the dates for this week's *Worth Watching* are the same as last week's. You may remember that in the first issue of the *Guardian* for this year, we announced that the period covered by *Worth Watching* would be a week earlier than previously. This was done to allow time for readers' issues of the paper to get to them before the programs covered in it actually went to air. A noble intention, but one that did not work in practice: it turned out the preview discs that I depend on for advance viewing of the programs simply are not all available in time for us to do that.

So we have reverted to the timetable we used last year. To achieve this we have had to make this week's *Worth Watching* cover the same week as we covered in last week's *Guardian* (just a different selection of programs). Next week things will once again be running smoothly.

I mentioned two weeks ago that the third and final episode of *Masters Of Money* (SBS ONE Wednesday at 9.30pm) would deal with Marx and Marxism, but that readers should not expect too much since anything good the series might say about Marx would be negated by the "crimes" it would be sure to ascribe to his followers.

That turned out to be true as far as it went, but in fact it did not go

nearly far enough! Marx was certainly praised, but not for Marxism, oh no. For his astute and indeed unparalleled historical analysis of the history of capitalism in the early-to-mid 19th century, yes. Other-wise it seems he got it all wrong. And I mean all.

According to the program, Marx believed that downward pressure on wages would force wages down continuously until they became so low that the workers would revolt. "But this just didn't happen," says the economics editor of *The Economist*. "Instead, wages have gone up decade after decade!" Silly old Marx.

Who are these experts who tell us what Marx taught? One – I kid you not – is the British Chancellor of the Exchequer (a Tory, of course). Others include several journalists (also Tories – they are certainly not supporters of Marx), and a couple of patronising academics (likewise). No doubt, to have invited a Marxist to comment would have invited bias! And we wouldn't want that, would we?

The talking heads' glib dismissal of Marx and Marxism is curiously at odds with the general tone of the program's commentary, which begins by banging on about how the succession of global economic crises have brought about a massive reawakening of interest in Marx – among bourgeois economists and capitalists!

The writers of the program subscribe wholeheartedly to the theory that the fall of the Berlin wall signalled the "death of communism" (in any case it was a "violent, repressive form of government"). But what else can you expect from a program that uses a member of David Cameron's Cabinet as an expert on Marxism? The idea is just too weird.

I must admit at this point that I did not watch the whole episode: my blood pressure could not have lasted the distance, but there was a significant factor missing in what I did see: class struggle. This was very evident early on, when the pundits were telling us what was wrong about Marx's economic writings.



Karl Marx – *Masters Of Money* (SBS ONE Wednesday at 9.30pm)

Remember that nonsense about Marx believing that wages would go down and keep going down, whereas "in reality" they have gone up and up?

Yes, of course wages have gone up. But only as a result of the struggle of the organised working class – fierce, determined and often violent struggle. Things that workers have to pay for have also gone up, like prices, and inflation, and fares and rents, and all those other things that people need and use – in fact *everything's* gone up. So, are working people better off with their wage increases "decade after decade"?

In other words, gross wages may have gone up but have *real wages*? No! Workers are engaged in a continuous struggle chasing after ever-rising prices, while fighting a rear-guard action to prevent their hours of work being lengthened, their

wages (real and otherwise) being cut and their conditions eroded.

The program also tells us that everything good that humanity has achieved, invented and created over the last 200 years is a consequence of the pursuit of profit, without which there would be no incentive for progress. Seriously, that's what it says.

The curious thing is that in a back-handed sort of a way the program recognises that the pundits of capitalism are all at sea in trying to cope with the recent raft of crises.

Peter Symon frequently reminded us that the smartest minds in capitalism knew their dialectics, were well aware of the scientific discoveries of Marx and Engels (this program incidentally dismisses Engels very summarily) and – more importantly – how to apply them. Those on display here are not in that class at all.

There is some interesting – even valuable – material buried deep within this program, but you have to wade through such a load of bilge it is questionable whether the effort is worth it. It seems as though every second sentence is a distortion or a misrepresentation of Marxism.

The strange collection of "experts" are all busy trying to impress us with their erudition about Marxism while simultaneously trying to assure us that they are far too smart ever to have been taken in by such an outdated thinker as Karl Marx.

Marx, it seems, was alright when they used to send children to work down coalmines, but today, when "capitalism has become kinder" – yes, kinder is the word they use – then Marx is clearly no longer relevant. Although a lot of people think he is, which is a bit of a concern. ☹



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February 22

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

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

March 1

OBAMA'S SECOND TERM – WHAT CAN WE EXPECT?

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

March 8

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

David Goodman, Professor, China Research Unit, UTS;
Kerry Brown, Professor, Professor Chinese Politics & Director China
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regularly stocks *The Guardian*

Fuelling resistance

Ewa Jasiewicz

BRITAIN: Last winter over 7,000 people died because they could not afford to keep warm enough. During the winter months, that works out at around 60 people dying every day. Over the past five years deaths from hypothermia have doubled – and it's no coincidence that in this same period energy bills have gone up by a shocking 71 percent.

Combined Big Six energy company profits may have risen by billions but millions of people in this country cannot afford to turn the heating on.

The Big Six dominate our domestic fuel market. They have all ratcheted up prices by nearly 14 percent in the past 24 months. Each 1 percent plunges a further 40,000 people into fuel poverty.

Government cuts have seen the winter fuel allowance chopped by £50 for the under-80s and £100 for those over that age. Pensioners, the disabled, asylum-seekers, students, single mothers and those trapped in poverty pay or unemployment are choking on a lethal cocktail of cuts, depressed wages, poor housing, high rents and unaffordable energy.

A poll by YouGov calculates 47 percent of working-class and 22 percent of middle-class households would be considered fuel poor if housing and fuel costs were added together.

Stir into this mix the rising risks presented by climate change – flooding, volatile weather and surging food prices due to drought – and life at the sharpest end of capitalism in 2013 is getting harder and harder. Some people are literally not just failing to make ends meet, but not making it altogether.

The same class dynamics and corporate controls which secure privilege for the one percent are at play when it comes to the commodification of energy and decision-making on how we power our country and who gets to heat or eat.

That's why Fuel Poverty Action is focused not just on exposing the corruption, market-rigging, lack of democracy and unsustainability of a corporate-run and marketised energy system, but on the alternatives.

Community-controlled energy, renewable localised energy co-ops, people supporting one another and standing up to red bills, bailiffs, unscrupulous landlords and exploitative bosses. Coming out of the Climate Camp mobilisations between 2005-10, Fuel Poverty Action began



as a conversation between mainly middle-class white activists in a squatted field on the site of Heathrow's proposed third runway in the summer of 2011.

But the group has since evolved into a diverse network of those hardest hit by government policy, including Disabled People Against Cuts, the Greater London Pensioners Association, Single Mothers Self-Defence and the All-African Women's Group.

Our actions have focused on exposing the impact of fuel poverty on people's health as well as targeting the companies that are profiting from our energy.

We don't believe energy should be a commodity. We believe energy should be a common resource which everyone has a right to – not just those who can afford it.

Letting it be controlled by corporate monopolies and markets leads to people choosing between heating and eating, and a dash for

gas which will be a marathon disaster for people and planet. Gas is touted by the Big Six as the low-carbon fuel of the future – no surprise there. The government's keen on it too, which isn't much of a surprise either given that Big Six staff are working on energy policy within the Department of Energy and Climate Change.

But in fact it is almost as polluting as coal and will plunge millions more into fuel poverty. Likewise, the new fracking goldrush where speculators can set up rigs almost anywhere and get rich quick from a gas-dominated market could mean earthquakes in Salford and risks for future generations.

Green energy would be cheaper and safer, despite industry lobbyists spreading disinformation to the contrary. Figures from Ofgem show that in 2011 the average energy bill across Britain and Northern Ireland rose by £150, with £100 of this due to the rising cost of gas.

The expert Committee on Climate Change

calculates that from 2004-10 rising wholesale gas prices added £290 to bills, compared to £30 for investments in low-carbon generation.

The committee found it feasible for 65 percent of electricity to be generated by renewables by 2030 – others put it even higher. But the government won't pick the green solution if left to its own devices. We need to speak out.

Last weekend Stop the Great Fuel Robbery rallies happened all over the country. In Nottingham, Edinburgh, Haringey and Hackney – and outside the Department of Energy and Climate Change in central London – people struggling with bills shared their stories, protested at the destructive Big Six collusion with the government and come up with alternatives for real energy democracy. Power to the People! Join us!

www.fuelpovertyaction.org.uk
Morning Star ✪

Statement

Escalating violence against women

The Executive Director of UN Women Michelle Bachelet has expressed deep concern over escalating violence against women:

In the days following the second anniversary of the Egyptian revolution, I note with great concern the escalation of violence and alarming reports of rising violence against women in public spaces.

Two years ago, the world witnessed Egyptian women and men in Tahrir square and across Egypt calling for change and exercising their political and civil rights to public assembly and expression. As a vibrant force in civil society, women continue to press for their

rights, equal participation in decision making, and the upholding of the principles of the revolution by the highest levels of leadership in Egypt. UN Women is deeply disturbed by the gravity of recent attacks against women, including the reports of sexual assault, many of which occurred in the same Tahrir Square in which women rallied to contribute to a better future for their country.

UN Women calls upon the government and people of Egypt to take a firm stand against all forms of violence against women and girls, and to promote human rights for all, including the rights

of women to live free of violence and discrimination and to participate fully in social, economic and political life. This necessitates commitment at the highest level of leadership in Egypt to put in place the legislation and mechanisms that ensure the protection of women and their ability to exercise their rights.

Global

The statistics are shocking – between 15 to 75% of women in every community suffer from some sort of violence. Up to 70% of these violent acts are perpetrated by intimate partners. Two

women are murdered every day in Guatemala, on average; in India, there are many thousands of dowry-related deaths every year; in so-called developed nations such as the USA, Canada and Israel, 40 to 70% of women were murdered by intimate partners; on a worldwide basis, 50% of sexual assaults are committed against children under 16; up to 150 million women and girls suffer some kind of violence yearly; 30% of first sexual experiences are rapes or attempted rapes.

Three million girls a year in Africa are submitted to female genital mutilation; 100 to 140

million women and girls live with the scars of this practice; 60 million children a year are forced to make commitments in marriage ceremonies; 80% of human trafficking is committed against women and girls; 79% of these, or 632,000 women and girls a year, are trafficked for purposes of sexual exploitation. 379,200 women and girls are subjected to conditions of sexual slavery every year.

In parts of Europe, between 40 and 50% of women are subjected to unwanted sexual advances; in Asia, up to half the women suffer sexual harassment at work. ✪



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