



"Press freedom" furore masks media self-interest

Bob Briton

The federal parliament hasn't even seen the fine print of the Communications Minister's proposal to alter current media rules but the public has already been subjected to a sustained and hysterical media campaign against the legislation. Stephen Conroy has been called "Gillard's henchman" with headlines, editorials and columnists going into hyperbolic overdrive to suggest the Gillard government is out to censor the bosses' media. The alleged objective: to lift the PM's flat-lining political fortunes. The proposed changes have certainly caused a flare-up in the ongoing war over media acquisitions involving rival industry players but the suggestion that the government is going to do anything about meaningless print media "self-regulation" is a joke.

The latest legislation has its origins in the government's Convergence Review established in March 2011 and the Finkelstein Review set up in September of the same year. The latter inquiry was launched in the wake of the phone hacking scandal involving Rupert Murdoch's News Limited media empire in the UK. Australia's corporate media have closed ranks to defend the "Dirty Digger's" local operations but the awkward fact remains that the tainted press baron owns a sizeable chunk of Australia's mainstream media. The ongoing, unscrupulous campaigns against federal Labor and the Greens were also as plain as the nose on Rupert's face at the time of the establishment of the inquiry.

Conroy's legislation reportedly contains a host of sweeteners for the monopoly media. TV licence fees would be halved. This could save the Seven, Ten and Nine networks around \$150 million a year. Seven's chairman Kerry Stokes claims the "price of TV industry reform is just too high", in reference to the proposals regarding the print media. The government intends to establish a Public Interest Media Advocate to rule on proposed mergers in the industry and to oversee the working of the Press Council, which currently receives complaints regarding newspaper content.

"Press freedom is not something that can be put up for sale," Mr Stokes said. He is also



reported to be opposed to the proposed scrapping the 75 percent "reach rule" at this stage. This rule restricts a TV network's access to, at most, 75 percent of the population. At different times, all the big players have campaigned against this and other media ownership rules. But, right now, Seven and Ten claim they need more time to consider the change. The reason for this new-found caution is undoubtedly the merger currently being discussed by the Nine Entertainment Co. and Southern Cross Media.

Big financial interests are at the core of the hysteria over supposed attacks on press freedom. The Public Interest Media Advocate being proposed could not do anything to stem the trashy, right-wing trend in the press or stamp out the abuses going on at present. When asked whether she acknowledged any of News

Corp CEO Kim Williams' concerns about "government-sanctioned journalism", the Prime Minister replied, "That is absolute nonsense. The media industry says to me that they believe in self-regulation, well tick, so do I."

The legislation also foreshadows changes to the charters of the ABC and SBS to confirm their roles in online media. The minister maintains that his legislation is aimed at preserving or expanding media diversity. His detractors, like Opposition communications spokesman Malcolm Turnbull, claim that such efforts are unnecessary because Australia has never enjoyed greater media diversity. This is deliberately misleading. Well-resourced media – the places that people go to for the raw material of the plethora of blogs, Facebook posts and Tweets – are as monopolised as they ever have been.

The lifting of ownership rules could worsen that situation. The legislation reportedly says little of substance about support for local content or community television.

Federal Labor must be frustrated that its efforts to get out of the corporate media's road have backfired so spectacularly. The current spectacle poses the question as to how the media could be reformed to allow for the proper airing of a greater diversity of views. Both major parties prefer that the media are absolutely dominated by monopoly interests. Ultimately, it will be a task for a government of a new type, made up of left and progressive forces with active support in the community, to encourage such new media. The quicker we achieve that radical political change, the quicker we will get decent media content. *

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Pope Francis I and the poor

The world's Catholics have a new Pope. The former Cardinal from the Argentinean capital of Buenos Aires is the first non-European to hold the post in the Church's long history. Pope Francis I is reported to be a man of great humility, foregoing accommodation in the Archbishop's palace in Buenos Aires to live in a modest apartment, cook his own food and travel on public transport. He is also reported to be a strong advocate for the poor. The world's media hammered this officially sanctioned message heavily following the elevation of Jorge Bergoglio but Vatican spokesmen were very quickly obliged to engage in damage control as details of the Pope's more dubious past began to circulate among the people.

The Jesuit cleric is a conservative, a strident opponent of abortion and marriage equality. More damaging still are reports that, while Archbishop in his homeland, he did little to help two young priests who were arrested and tortured during the dictatorship's Dirty War against the left between 1976 and 1983. Sydney's Cardinal George Pell rushed the Pontiff's defence saying that he had, at least, made some representations to military strongman Jorge Videla. Bergoglio was questioned by police about the matter when democracy returned to the country but, unlike a number of his clerical colleagues, was not prosecuted.

Vatican officials tried desperately to blame the uncomfortable reminders of the Church's less-than-heroic role during the dictatorship on misguided "leftists" and "atheists". It is understandable that the left in Argentina would seek to remind people about the relatively recent, traumatic experience of those years. Up to 30,000 political activists were "disappeared". Thousands more were tortured horribly. Babies were taken from mothers and placed with military families throughout Latin America. In 2000, the Church in Argentina felt obliged to apologise for its failure to stand up for the people during those dark days.

The stance of the Church's hierarchy in different countries of Latin America varied greatly during the tormented years of the 1970s and '80s. It varies significantly today, as well. But it is clear that the newly-elected Pope is not from that tradition of priests who put their bodies on the line in defence of the impoverished peoples of the region. Pope Francis I is most certainly NOT an adherent of "liberation theology" – the movement originating in Latin America that believes that Christians need to pursue practical, political change and not just mouth platitudes about "the poor".

The election of another conservative Pope should come as no surprise. John Paul II, the Polish Pope who played such an active part in bringing down socialism in Eastern Europe and beyond, saw to it that the pool of Cardinals from which his successors would be drawn was stacked with like-minded clerics. Joseph Ratzinger pressed on with his predecessor's right-wing agenda during his years as Pope Benedict XVI. His reign will probably be recalled primarily for the shameful cover-up of paedophilia in the ranks of the Church and the failure of authorities to act against child sex abuse.

For all this neglect of the interests of the most vulnerable, conservative Church leaders will continue to preach about the corruption of the times, excesses of capitalist consumer society and to remind adherents in the most general terms about the needs of "the poor". The faithful will carry on their seemingly endless charitable work. A long line of Popes, from the time of Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* encyclical of 1891 to the present, have scolded the rich for their callousness to the poor of the world. Rich Catholics may or may not feel chastised but capitalism, which is exploitative and oppressive by its very nature, continues. In fact it is sacrosanct in the Church's eyes. Any efforts on the part of "the poor" to organise a new society based on collective ownership and solidarity (socialism) are held to be "unnatural" and a challenge to the supposedly divine model of private ownership.

Progressive Catholics have fought a long, ongoing battle against this patently hypocritical attitude to "the poor". In this clash of political outlooks, one is reminded of the words of Brazilian Archbishop, the late Dom Helder Camara, who had the courage to speak out plainly and frequently against the dictatorship's efforts to crush his people's hopes. He said, "When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a Communist."

PRESS FUND

Tony Abbott has made a big splash – as he likes to do – with his statement that Indigenous people would benefit greatly if the Liberal/National coalition wins the federal election. Abbott is trying to distance himself from John Howard, who refused to make a formal apology for the appalling historic abuse of Indigenous people. But Howard was Abbott's mentor, and Abbott has refused to give any details about his program for Indigenous affairs. *The Guardian* intends to expose the Liberals' hypocrisy over this issue, but we really need your help by way of contributions for the Press Fund, so please send in something for the next issue. Many thanks to the following for their support this week:

Mark Mannion \$5, "Round Figure" \$15, Shane Talbot \$50

This week's total \$70 Progressive total: \$950

Motor accident compo scheme to be binned

The NSW government has recently proposed changes to the motor accidents compensation scheme which will cut compensation accident victims can receive.

The government, without any consultation with the legal profession or any other stakeholder in the system except insurance companies, has decided that the current system is to be thrown in the bin, despite the fact that overall it works well.

The recent changes to the workers' compensation scheme removed an injured worker's right to claim compensation for journey claims, that is, claims for accidents which occur on the way to and from the workplace. In cases where the accident was a motor accident, injured people had rights under the motor accident scheme. Now those rights are to be severely restricted.

Since 1942 New South Wales has enjoyed a compulsory public motor vehicle insurance system. In return for a quite modest premium, accident victims who are injured by the fault of another are entitled to receive compensation for the result of their injuries.

Even after 70 years of adjustments to the system it remains one of substantial benefits.

In serious cases significant monetary damages for pain and suffering are awarded. Reasonable out-of-pocket expenses both for the past and for the probable future are paid.

Loss of earnings for all but extremely high earners are awarded in full, both those incurred in the past and those which are likely to be incurred in the future, and if necessary, for the injured person's lifetime.

In cases where family members or paid carers are required to provide personal care services or domestic care services for an injured person or even a dependent of such injured person (for example a child) money is awarded for that need.

To see that justice is done, the court system oversees the process so as to flush out the occasional malingerer or fraudster but more importantly to compel uncooperative insurance companies to pay just compensation.

The announced changes are far reaching and will leave the blameless injured in an extremely vulnerable position when they are going through the worst period of their lives from a physical, mental and financial point of view.

Many of their present entitlements will be removed and given to the guilty party who injured them in the first place.

Their present entitlement to damages for care appears to be going to be removed entirely.

Their damages for wage loss are to be replaced by a short-term system intended to rapidly dump them on the federal social security system and consequently the tax payer rather

than enforce those losses against the insurer which pocketed the premium in the first place.

For the justice system to operate fairly for all concerned, lawyers are necessary. But now apparently the justice system is to be removed from the whole equation. As usual, this starts with lawyer bashing.

Various politicians including the NSW Premier have given examples of cases which are expensive to run.

There are however two sides to any case. In a costly case, there is usually an unwilling and uncooperative insurer dragged to justice by the courts in an environment where unlimited financial resources are at the insurer's disposal.

The proposed new system is intended to force the accident victim to negotiate himself or herself with the insurer when such victim is in no fit state to do so.

All that will happen is that insurers will use their muscle to achieve settlements at extremely low values resulting in the financial ruin of the victim.

The system is not broken. Why then the attempt to "fix" it when the only people to benefit are the shareholders of large insurance companies already making profits of approximately double those which were originally intended. ❖

Creative Australia: "We should all be singing from the same song sheet"

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) has welcomed the boost in funding to arts training organisations (announced on March 13) by Arts Minister Simon Crean, but argues that Creative Australia's ambitions will be undermined by short-sighted cuts to the creative arts by universities and TAFE.

"While the federal government is putting in \$20.8 million into the National Institute of Dramatic Art, the National Institute of Circus Arts and some other high level training organisations, universities and TAFE are busy cutting creative arts programs," NTEU national president, Jeannie Rea said.

"The creative arts are an easy target when university and TAFE funds are being squeezed."

The six training organisations to attract the increased funding have around 1,200 students between them while many thousands of others have already been disadvantaged or excluded by course cuts at universities and TAFEs.

"It is a sad but familiar story – one hand giveth while the other taketh away."

Rea said that major cuts to the arts had already occurred at a number of institutions across Australia including the Australian National University, the University of Ballarat, Swinburne University of Technology and the Western Australian Academy of the Performing Arts, Perth's "star factory".

"Last year James Cook University decided to refocus its creative arts school on digital arts, while dropping theatre and performance majors. Meanwhile, the New South Wales government has removed all subsidies to fine arts courses as part of its \$80 million cuts to TAFE with some 4,000 students losing out and now paying a small fortune to study. More recently, Monash has cut fine arts at its Churchill campus," she said.

In terms of graduates being employed in the arts industry, Swinburne University is one of the most successful organisations in the country, but the \$35 million cut to its budget last year, as part of a general Victorian government cut of \$290 million to TAFE, means it will have to close its Prahran campus,

home to its creative arts program and the National Institute of Circus Arts (NICA).

"It's all very well to increase funding to elite training organisations, but if universities and TAFEs are slashing creative arts programs at the same time, where will Australia get its future camera operators, directors, set and lighting designers, choreographers and makeup artists for television, film and stage?"

"We need a cultural policy which has agreement from all states, from all levels of government and from our different institutions and organisations."

Rea said that the NTEU supported Creative Australia's goal of every Australian student gaining a universal arts education with the implementation of the Australian Curriculum.

"But, again, where will we get enough skilled and inspired teachers if we're axing so many creative arts courses at our universities and TAFEs? We should all be singing from the same song sheet." ❖

Coal seam gas restrictions welcome, but much too late

Peter Mac

The Gillard government says it will introduce legislation to enable it to review coal seam gas (CSG) proposals and if necessary countermand state government approvals of any proposals that might adversely affect water resources or the environment. The Gillard government has clashed with state governments, particularly in NSW, over their approval of CSG projects.

Federal opposition energy spokesman Ian Macfarlane has declared that the government's move could provoke a Constitutional challenge.

The federal Corporations Act enables the federal government to take action against corporations, in order to protect the environment. This applies, for example, to threatened species or species covered by international covenants to which Australia is a party, where the protection of that species is a requirement of the federal Environment and Biodiversity Act.

However, the Constitution gives the states control over mining, not the Commonwealth. The federal opposition, conservative state governments and mining industry would undoubtedly argue in court that federal intervention to restrict CSG mining would violate the Constitution.

Jennifer Westacott, CEO of the Business Council of Australia warned that the new process would duplicate state and territory processes and involve "new layers of unnecessary uncertainty, complexity and cost", would reduce jobs and damage the economy, and provide "no tangible benefit for the environment." She failed to mention the loss of profits for mining corporations.

A group of manufacturers, energy generators and oil and gas corporations has issued a statement condemning "knee-jerk policies" in reaction to community protests over CSG proposals.

The conservative state governments have supported the coal and gas industries against criticism and competition. The NSW government recently dismissed its scientific advisory body on water in favour of a committee of "business and community" representatives, and the Victorian government has placed severe restrictions on wind farms.

Stung by the Gillard government's criticism of its high rate of CSG approvals and flinching at

public protests, the NSW government recently foreshadowed legislation requiring a two kilometre buffer zone between residential areas and CSG mines, and CSG "no go" zones for wineries and stud farms.

Mining industry representatives say these requirements would cost jobs and drive up energy bills by more than \$2 billion this decade. However, the industry would still have the right of access to the vast uninhabited areas beyond the urban centres, including farms. It's not clear whether home-steads would be protected within a two kilometre boundary, because the O'Farrell government hasn't yet provided a legislative definition of a "residential area".

The legislation would provide very little protection for Australia's national parks or agricultural land from subsidence, pollution or loss of groundwater, and it would have no effect on projects already approved, such as the Gloucester Valley mines.

In contrast, the Gillard government's new water trigger intervention process has the potential to curb the coal and gas industry's activities. However, realising that potential depends on the willingness of the federal government to pass the necessary legislation in the first place, and then to enforce it.

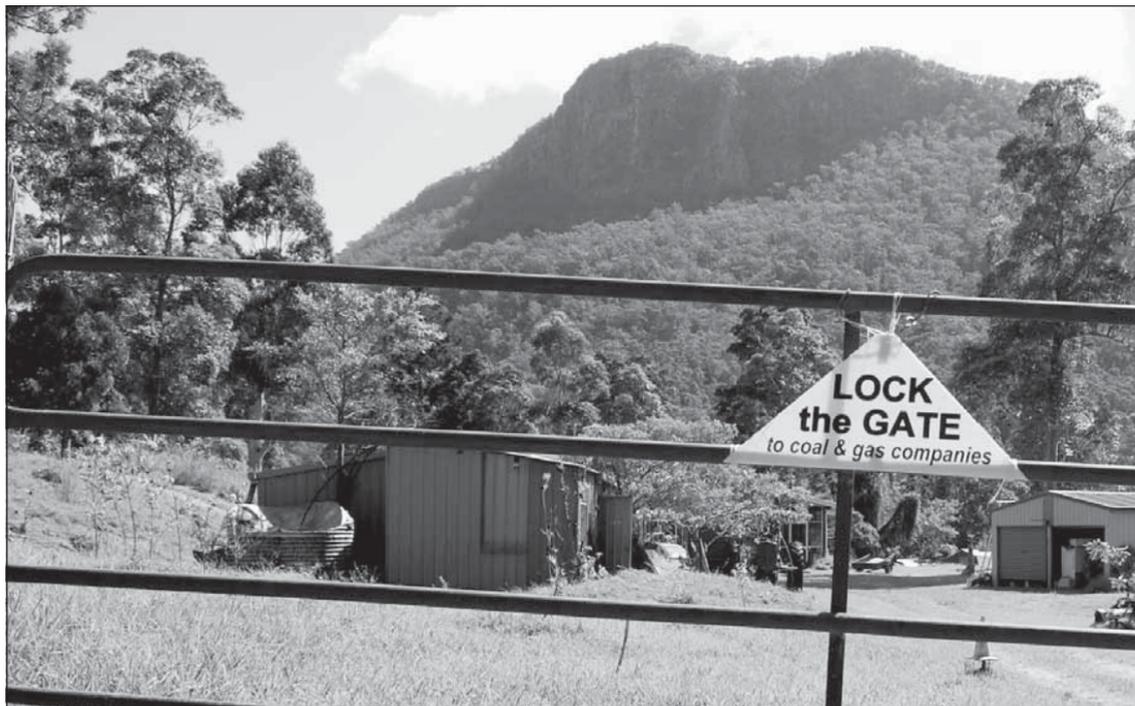
The wider picture

Last week the federal government's Scientific Committee on CSG issued a scathing report on Arrow Energy's proposal for a vast multi-billion dollar CSG project in Queensland's Surat Basin.

The panel concluded that the company's environmental impact statement (EIS) did not adequately address "matters of national environmental significance" arising from the cumulative impact of the proposed works, including potential contamination of groundwater and the disposal of millions of tonnes of salt from underground water.

The president of the community group, Lock the Gate, described the panel's report on the Surat Basin proposal as "... nothing short of a damning critique of the draft EIS, raising numerous concerns about impacts on groundwater, including potential drawdowns in the Condamine Alluvium aquifer that irrigates the central Darling Downs region."

The Greens have commented that the Gillard government's move is much too late, given that it recently



granted conditional approval for the massive Gloucester mine, and for others earlier.

They have also pointed out that the Scientific Committee's warnings about the Surat Basin proposal are essentially the same as their warnings about the reduction in volume and quality of underground water from the Gloucester Valley project because of coal seam depressurisation.

Moreover, the Greens and independents have reminded the Gillard government that action to rein in the coal companies was one of their conditions for entering into a coalition with the government.

The need for the government to preserve a united front with its coalition partners undoubtedly acted as a stimulus for its about-face on the issue of federal intervention.

Mind you, the NSW government has also been acting to protect its political future. The two-kilometre restrictions are intended to soothe mounting public anger over proposed CSG mining in Sydney's outer western suburbs.

They may also have a soothing effect on one of CSG's most vocal opponents, right-wing Sydney radio "shock-jock" Alan Jones. He wields tremendous influence over his vast following, and is treated with fawning deference by conservative politicians. And lo and behold, he just happens

to own a horse stud, which would be protected from CSG mining under the new regulations!

The "two kilometre" legislation would also improve the conservatives' national image, thereby assisting federal Liberal candidates in western Sydney's key marginal seats during the September elections.

But it won't reduce the threat to NSW agriculture. Independent MP Tony Windsor wants a rigorous independent scientific analysis of every CSG proposal, but he won't get it from the O'Farrell regime.

And that's not all. The struggle between the coal companies on the one hand and the farmers, environmentalists and concerned community

groups on the other, is a reflection of the global struggle to mitigate climate change, which requires reductions in the use of coal and other fossil fuels in order to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions. As a major coal exporter Australia has a major role to play in that struggle.

That certainly wouldn't happen if a Liberal/National coalition was elected in September. Led by Tony Abbott, a new coalition government would undoubtedly seek to repeal any legislation that might impede the activities of the coal or gas corporations.

And that must be prevented at all costs. ☘

Pete's Corner



Sydney
On the International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination and 'National Close the Gap Day'

MARCH 21 RALLY AGAINST RACISM

Stop Stronger Futures " No to 10 more years of Intervention

Speakers include:

Sue Gillett, Bankstown Aboriginal activist and STICS member

Ray Jackson, Indigenous Social Justice Association

Rosealee Pearson, Yirrkala NT



◆ STOP the expansion of income management:

Not in the NT, not in Bankstown not anywhere

◆ STOP Black Deaths in Custody -

Justice for Kwementyaye Briscoe and all victims

Thursday March 21

12:30 @ office of Tanya Pflibersek MP

150 Broadway, opposite Broadway shops

Contact Jean 0449 646 593 www.stoptheintervention.org

WA public servants rally

Richard Titelius

A mass meeting of members of the Community and Public Sector Union-Civil Service Association on March 6, at the Perth Convention Centre, was called with a week's notice to help inform members of the issues at stake in the state election and what may happen if a Liberal/National Party government is returned.

Though both major parties are tied to the capitalist system and therefore an ideology that seeks to cut costs and reduce services, the Liberals and Nationals are the least restrained about carrying out this agenda (see election analysis, *Guardian* March 13).

This was evident when the CPSU/CSA sent a questionnaire to the Liberals, Nationals, Labor and the Greens asking them why union members should choose one of them as their employer. The Greens came out as the most friendly of employers pursuant to the unions requirements.

More than 600 members and fellow activists attended the meeting to listen to a number of union officials give an update of what lies ahead for public sector workers and the people of Western Australia.

CPSU/CSA branch secretary Toni Walkington addressed the meeting to echo the sentiments of many public servants when she stated, "Public servants have had enough of efficiency dividends, privatisations, contracting out, Public Private Partnerships and having to work harder to do more with less."

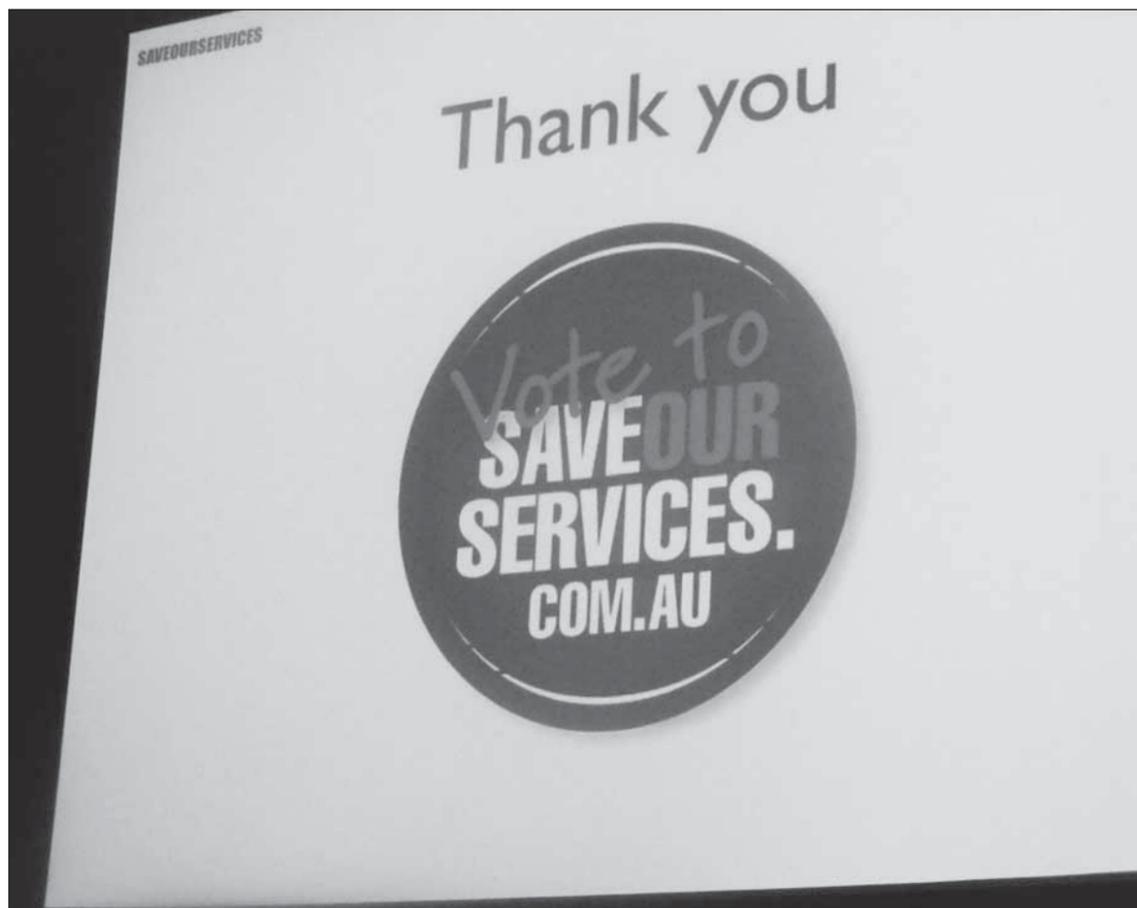
All government departments had felt the pressure of these demands being put on them by a government which has increasingly politicised public service and led to service cuts

and increased workloads. These were especially felt in the Department of Child Protection, Department of Housing, Department of Education, Health Department and the Juvenile Justice section of the Department of Corrective Services.

In February the CPSU/CSA had received the report from Professor Bill Mitchell, an economist at Charles Darwin University of Melbourne called, "A critical appraisal of the Western Australian Budget 2012-13" which was critical of the surplus budget mantra being trotted out by conservative governments around Australia including that of Liberal Premier Colin Barnett. The report was critical of the mentality that in a so-called boom economy; a government was adopting fiscal austerity in this generation which will have detrimental effects on future generations. They pursued AAA credit ratings when it was these ratings agencies which helped to precipitate the GFC by "fraudulently providing the highest ratings to assets they knew were of inferior quality and were of a high risk of failing". They funded capital expenditure from savings in recurrent expenditure which includes paying the salaries of public servants.

Walkington also observed what many public servants have known for some time: that the WA public service had not kept up with population increases, especially as WA had one of the fastest growing populations in Australia.

There was also the discourse of contestability which had come out of the Costello Report which had been commissioned by the Liberal Premier of Queensland, Campbell Newman. This recommended that all services which are contestable should



be contracted out to take advantage of efficiencies in price and value.

There is also a Bill sitting in parliament, the Labour Relations Legislation Amendment and Repeal Act 2012, which seeks to make changes to industrial relations including to not make it obligatory for an employer to bargain. This provision currently exists for those workers and

employers in the federal system who are subject to provisions of the Fair Work Act 2009.

In Western Australia we have seen how this provision has played out with the workers at Recall Records in Malaga, where the management has refused to negotiate on the claim by members of the National Union of Workers. Since February 21 the members have been camped outside their place of work waiting for the employer to bargain and negotiate. The employer wishes to crush the union so that the workers

will have to enter into a non-union agreement.

The meeting also heard from members at three agencies where the austerity and privatisation agendas had started to have an effect: the Conservation and Environment, Child Protection and the Transport (Traffic Licensing Branch) Departments. The latter private operators are already providing services which are leading to more work for the public servants as they are called upon to fix up the errors of the private providers. ☘

Translink review a blueprint towards a privatised system

On March 7 the Newman government authorised its Transport Arm Translink to issue its review of the South East Queensland Bus Network. The review was touted as necessary to reallocate resources to overcrowded runs and remove underutilised services. It was opened for submissions from the users and operators of transport.

The timing of the review's release was significant in that it happened days after former federal treasurer Peter Costello released his report into Queensland government finances.

A smirking Costello had called for the privatisation of schools, hospitals and public transport, naming the train services and buses. Costello put forward that this was necessary to restore the state's AAA credit rating.

Buses in south east Queensland are operated under contract to the Translink Authority, a creation of the previous state government but incorporated into the Department of Main Roads after the election of the Campbell Newman government. Neil Scales from Merseyside Transport took over from Peter Strachan, formerly National Express. The two have long-standing associations from their

involvements in privatised transport in the United Kingdom.

Brisbane City Council operates most services in south east Queensland. The Council-owned system has a superior service level and better working conditions than the privately owned bus operators plying their trade in south east Queensland.

This review is a sophisticated attack on the Council bus service and extends the Department of Transport biases against the Council services.

It proposes increases to interchange services, particularly towards rail services, and reduction of services through the central business district. This is due to infrastructure restraints: amongst these are the inadequate access to the city provided through the Cultural Centre Bus Station, a poorly designed station which requires all services to queue at the station's single lane access. The report proposes to fix this simply by reducing the number of buses travelling through.

It is keen to reduce frequencies of services outside the spread of 7am to 7pm and to remove services at non-peak time which are claimed to be duplications. It is also

proposed to ask passengers to walk further, a problem in hilly Brisbane for the elderly and disabled. Passengers are encouraged to use rail services even though these are already short of capacity.

One astounding admission is that the report identifies that it was Translink and presumably government policy to increase the cost of travel on buses and public transport to reduce demand on government resources.

It is thus an admission that these policies are more about discouraging public transport growth than about increasing the provision of services. Bus ways which had provided a great growth in accessibility of transport were stopped by the Campbell Newman government.

It is hard not to draw the conclusion that this report and its consequences are to strengthen the position of those who would privatise the transport system more.

In many cities in Australia this has already been achieved and the plunderers have been in taking government money and delivering inferior services, and wages and conditions to public transport workers. ☘

QLD LNP gov't's slash and burn policies take their toll on jobs

The Queensland Council of Unions has told the Newman Liberal National Party government it should stop picking fights with the union movement and concentrate on addressing Queensland's increasing jobless rate.

In the most recent job figures, Queensland jumped from 5.5 per cent to 5.8 per cent in February, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures. The state lost more than 2,800 full-time jobs in the month.

Queensland's economic performance continues to fall short of the national seasonally adjusted unemployment rate, which came in at 5.4 per cent in February.

The state government's job cuts are having a contractionary effect on the state economy and a devastating impact in parts of regional Queensland.

"Instead of wasting time on picking fights with their own workers over union membership, they

should be thinking about how to create secure jobs for the 146,100 Queenslanders without work," QCU president John Battams said.

Economic growth is stagnating in Queensland. Public sector sackings have not only added to the number of unemployed but have had a detrimental affect on public services including health and education.

At the same time the government is hell bent on further privatisation in line with the recent "independent" report from former Liberal Treasurer Peter Costello.

"It's time for the Newman government to walk away from Costello and his Report, and reassess its policies of job cuts and privatisation, including contracting out.

"The medicine that Costello and [state Treasurer] Nicholls have forced on Queensland isn't agreeing with the people or the economy." ☘

Warning of another Stolen Generation

Australia faces the very real prospect of another Stolen Generation unless it stems the tide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being placed in out-of-home care, the country's lead Indigenous children's advocacy body says.

And it says Indigenous children in care must be supported to remain connected with their families, communities and culture.

The bleak prediction follows new findings that Indigenous children are almost eight times as likely to be abused or neglected as non-Indigenous children and ten times as likely to be in out-of-home care.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's Child Protection Australia 2011-12 report found that substantiated child abuse and neglect in Australia rose by about 20 percent in the 12 months to June last year.

The total number of children, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who were the subject of substantiated abuse (where an investigation has confirmed abuse) increased from 31,500 to 37,800, a rate of 7.4 per 1,000 children.

There were nearly 40,000 children in out-of-home care and most – 90 percent – were on care and protection orders.

Children aged just one year or under were most likely to be the subject of a substantiation. In 2011-12, 13.2 per 1,000 children under one were found to be the subject of

substantiated abuse, up from 12 per 1,000 in 2010-11.

Older children, aged 15-17, were least likely to be the subject of a substantiation, with a rate of 3.2 per 1,000 children.

But the Indigenous figures were the most concerning, confirming the suspicions of many in our communities – that our already serious situation is getting worse.

Chairperson of the Secretariat of Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) Sharron Williams said it was "simply not acceptable" that one-third of all children in out-of-home-care were Indigenous.

"The financial cost of these continued policy failures is considerable. But the human cost to the individual children, their families and communities is devastating – and it will impact on generations to come," Ms Williams said.

"... Clearly current approaches have not worked, as the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children coming into contact with child protection systems in the states and territories continues to grow at an alarming rate."

Indigenous families and communities had to be involved in finding new and long-term solutions and addressing the underlying causes of child abuse and neglect would be at their core, she said.

"Our children and families continue to experience systemic discrimination and disadvantage in



health, education and housing," Ms Williams said.

"Any long-term and sustainable solutions to our children's welfare must be based on ensuring the basic needs of our children and families are met.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities must be empowered to participate in a meaningful way in the design and delivery of programs that affect their lives."

Ms Williams said there needed to be a greater focus on early intervention and prevention measures – improving access to Indigenous community-based early childhood, child care, family support and child welfare programs.

"We need to recognise and build on the strengths of Indigenous

families and communities to support and nurture their children," she said.

Once in care, many Indigenous children lost connection with family, community and culture. Their right to that connection needs to be met, SNAICC says, through better application of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle, especially in the Northern Territory, Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania, where a high percentage of our children are being placed with non-Indigenous caregivers.

According to the report, the time a child has spent in out-of-home care varied. While 38 percent of children in out-of-home care had been in a continuous placement for five or more years, 19 percent had been in their current placement for less than 12 months.

Across Australia, the vast majority (93 percent) of children in out-of-home care were placed in home-based care, such as with foster carers or relatives/kin.

Koori Mail

MUA members fight for jobs

Anna Pha

Global stevedoring company DP World plans to bring in a massive program of automation at its operations in Brisbane in October. It is determined to not only destroy jobs but slash working conditions and casualise jobs in pursuit of larger profits while eroding coverage of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA). DP World informed the union at a meeting in early February this year of its job crucifying plans. The MUA whose members are affected, has a massive struggle on its hands to defend conditions and protect as many jobs as possible.

Automation in the hands of profit-driven stevedoring companies is set to have a far bigger impact in terms of redundancies than the effect of containerisation in the 1960 and '70s.

Automation, which is being implemented by all three stevedore companies in Brisbane, is centred around the introduction of auto-stacking cranes which lift and transfer containers (from the wharf onto the truck). The automation process is occurring around the globe.

The MUA is fighting to retain the maximum number of jobs and improved conditions. It has already established good working conditions in the new Hutchison operation, including reduced hours of work. But DP World is holding out,

refusing to budge on its slash-and-burn approach.

Its proposals include reducing the number of wharfies with permanent rostered jobs from 97 to 25 and the number of unrostered permanent wharfies (variable salaried employees) whose income is not guaranteed, from 149 to 80. The planned changes would see an increase in the percentage of casuals from 12 to 25 percent.

"We refuse to be cut to the bone on the basis of dodgy company projections that are about eroding unionism, especially through casualisation," MUA assistant national secretary Warren Smith told *The Guardian*.

"The company talks of numbers. We talk of people and realise every job means an impact on a family, on kids. This reality seems somewhat lost as the extreme agenda of the company is rolled out," he said.

Patrick's auto-strad terminal in Brisbane has three times the amount of rostered permanents as DP World is proposing and the straddles for moving containers along the wharf are driverless! The straddles will not be driverless at DP World.

"Logic dictates they are trying to rot the situation and rob us of viable permanent jobs," the union said in a leaflet distributed to members. The company is also attempting to hive off some MUA members' jobs to managers and

supervisors, reneging on previous job guarantees.

The MUA is demanding a trial of the new equipment to test the company's claims.

"If the company does not move we will be calling for solidarity and action against DP World in all of their operations internationally, as well as targeting the Citi Group which provides the capital behind DP World Australia".

The Dockers' section of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) has expressed its support for the workers and a call has gone out to unions around the world to do the same. So far the MUA has received over 50 messages of support from unions internationally.

ITF Dockers' section secretary Sharon James said, "Please convey to our comrades in Brisbane that ITF dockers' unions stand united with them in their struggle. ... we are determined that automation will not be used as a means to break or reduce the power of unions. If the time comes, we will mobilise the support of this great union family to their cause."

Guardian readers can express their solidarity by going to the ITF website www.itfglobal.org and clicking on "dockers" and then looking for the link to the Brisbane dispute. ☘



One in four superannuation holders would be prepared to shift their savings if their fund was investing in coal or coal seam gas companies. There is a growing world-wide campaign to put pressure on super and pension funds to dump high-carbon investments. Ethical and environmental considerations are slowly taking priority over financial concerns. Forty percent of superannuation holders believe their funds should consider ethical and environmental implications and not just go for maximising financial return. The industry is worth \$250 billion and if this trend continues it will be a great contribution to the future of the planet.

The NSW Ombudsman Bruce Barbour was highly critical of the police investigation into the killing of Brazilian student Roberto Laudisio Corti. In a scathing report, Mr Barbour found the critical incident investigators fundamentally misunderstood their responsibilities – thus potentially exposing the public to danger. They may have also concealed evidence to avoid outside scrutiny. Mr Corti was wanted for stealing two packets of biscuits in Sydney CBD. He was tasered up to 14 times, sprayed with three cans of capsicum spray and was pinned down by "half a tonne" of police last year. He died within minutes. He was 21. "It's incredible that a year after Roberto's tragic death, none of the officers involved appears to have faced disciplinary action by the NSW Police Force. Despite the coroner finding that numerous officers behaved like thugs, they are still policing the streets of Sydney", said Michael Reynolds, Mr Corti's brother-in-law.

The federal government is being urged to allow small-scale nuclear reactors to power remote mining projects in the outback. It is not in the interests of either of the major parties to discuss this issue before the elections given the controversial nature of the subject. However, Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) are not exactly as harmless and "clean" as the proponents of their use claim. There are many issues which have not been discussed in any detail. The main issue, however is: why use old technology which has a number of problematic issues instead of developing new methods and technology? SMRs are not cheap and safe. Besides, mining operations have a certain use-by date. Once a mining operation is finished – who is responsible for the decontamination? Or will the outback be littered with Small Modular Reactors?

Seeds of Destruction: The Hidden Agenda of Genetic Manipulation

This skillfully researched book by F William Engdahl focuses on how a small socio-political American elite seeks to establish control over the very basis of human survival: the provision of our daily bread. "Control the food and you control the people."

This is no ordinary book about the perils of GMO. Engdahl takes the reader inside the corridors of power, into the backrooms of the science labs, behind closed doors in the corporate boardrooms. The author cogently reveals a diabolical world of profit-driven political intrigue, government corruption and coercion, where genetic manipulation and the patenting of life forms are used to gain worldwide control over food production. If the book often reads as a crime story, that should come as no surprise. For that is what it is.

Engdahl's carefully argued critique goes far beyond the familiar controversies surrounding the practice of genetic modification as a scientific technique. The book is an eye-opener, a must-read for all those committed to the causes of social justice and world peace.

What follows is the Preface to "Seeds of Destruction: The Hidden Agenda of Genetic Manipulation".

"We have about 50% of the world's wealth but only 6.3% of its population. This disparity is particularly great as between ourselves and the peoples of Asia. In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security. To do so we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and day-dreaming; and our attention will have to be concentrated everywhere on our immediate national objectives. We need not deceive ourselves that we can afford today the luxury of altruism and world-benefaction." George Kennan, US State Department senior planning official, 1948.

This book is about a project undertaken by a small socio-political elite, centered, after the Second World War, not in London, but in Washington. It is the untold story of how this self-anointed elite set out, in Kennan's words, to "maintain this position of disparity." It is the story of how a tiny few dominated the resources and levers of power in the postwar world.

It's above all a history of the evolution of power in the control of a select few, in which even science was put in the service of that minority. As Kennan recommended in his 1948 internal memorandum, they pursued their policy relentlessly, and without the "luxury of altruism and world-benefaction."

Yet, unlike their predecessors within leading circles of the British Empire, this emerging American elite, who proclaimed proudly at war's end the dawn of their American Century, were masterful in their use of the rhetoric of altruism and world-benefaction to advance their goals.

American Century

Their American Century paraded as a softer empire, a "kinder, gentler" one in which, under the banner of colonial liberation, freedom, democracy and economic development, those elite circles built a network of power the likes of which the world had not seen since the time of Alexander the Great some three centuries before Christ – a global empire unified under the military control of a sole superpower, able to decide on a whim, the fate of entire nations.

This book is the sequel to a first volume, *A Century of War: Anglo-American Oil Politics and the New World Order*. It traces a second thin red line of power. This one is about the control over the very basis of human survival, our daily provision of bread. The man who served the interests of the postwar American-based elite during the 1970s, and came to symbolise its raw realpolitik, was Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Sometime in the mid-1970s, Kissinger, a life-long practitioner of "Balance of Power" geopolitics and a man with more than a fair share of conspiracies under his belt, allegedly declared his blueprint for world

domination: "Control the oil and you control nations. Control the food, and you control the people."

The strategic goal to control global food security had its roots decades earlier, well before the outbreak of war in the late 1930s. It was funded, often with little notice, by select private foundations, which had been created to preserve the wealth and power of a handful of American families.

Originally the families centred their wealth and power in New York and along the East Coast of the United States, from Boston to New York to Philadelphia and Washington DC. For that reason, popular media accounts often referred to them, sometimes with derision but more often with praise, as the East Coast Establishment.

The centre of gravity of American power shifted in the decades following the War. The East Coast Establishment was overshadowed by new centres of power which evolved from Seattle to Southern California on the Pacific Coast, as well as in Houston, Las Vegas, Atlanta and Miami, just as the tentacles of American power spread to Asia and Japan, and south, to the nations of Latin America.

Built on blood

In the several decades before and immediately following World War II, one family came to symbolise the hubris and arrogance of this emerging American Century more than any other. And the vast fortune of that family had been built on the blood of many wars, and on their control of a new "black gold," oil.

What was unusual about this family was that early on in the building of their fortune, the patriarchs and advisors they cultivated to safeguard their wealth decided to expand their influence over many very different fields. They sought control not merely over oil, the emerging new energy source for world economic advance. They also expanded their influence over the education of youth, medicine and psychology, foreign policy of the United States, and, significant for our story, over the very science of life itself, biology, and its applications in the world of plants and agriculture.

For the most part, their work passed unnoticed by the larger population, especially in the United States. Few Americans were aware how their lives were being subtly, and sometimes not so subtly, influenced by one or another project financed by the immense wealth of this family.

In the course of researching for this book, a work nominally on the subject of genetically modified organisms or GMO, it soon became clear that the history of GMO was inseparable from the political history of this one very powerful family, the Rockefeller family, and the four brothers – David, Nelson, Laurance and John D III – who, in the three decades following World War II, the dawn of the much-heralded American Century, shaped the evolution of power George Kennan referred to in 1948.

In actual fact, the story of GMO is that of the evolution of power in the hands of an elite, determined at all costs to bring the entire world under their sway.

Three decades ago, that power was based around the Rockefeller family. Today, three of the four brothers are long-since deceased, several under peculiar circumstances. However, as was their will, their project of global domination – "full spectrum dominance" as the Pentagon later called it – had spread, often through a rhetoric of "democracy," and was aided from time to time by the raw military power of that empire when deemed necessary. Their project evolved to the point where one small power group, nominally headquartered in Washington in the early years of the new century, stood determined to control future and present life on this planet to a degree never before dreamed of.

Global spread of power

The story of the genetic engineering and patenting of plants and other living organisms cannot be understood without looking at the history of the global spread of American power in the decades following World War II. George



Kennan, Henry Luce, Averell Harriman and, above all, the four Rockefeller brothers, created the very concept of multinational "agribusiness". They financed the "Green Revolution" in the agriculture sector of developing countries in order, among other things, to create new markets for petro-chemical fertilisers and petroleum products, as well as to expand dependency on energy products. Their actions are an inseparable part of the story of genetically modified crops today.

By the early years of the new century, it was clear that no more than four giant chemical multinational companies had emerged as global players in the game to control patents on the very basic food products that most people in the world depend on for their daily nutrition – corn, soybeans, rice, wheat, even vegetables and fruits and cotton – as well as new strains of disease-resistant poultry, genetically-modified to allegedly resist the deadly H5N1 Bird Flu virus, or even gene altered pigs and cattle. Three of the four private companies had decades-long ties to Pentagon chemical warfare research. The fourth, nominally Swiss, was in reality Anglo dominated. As with oil, so was GMO agribusiness very much an Anglo-American global project.

In May 2003, before the dust from the relentless US bombing and destruction of Baghdad had cleared, the President of the United States chose to make GMO a strategic issue, a priority in his post-war US foreign

policy. The stubborn resistance of the world's second largest agricultural producer, the European Union, stood as a formidable barrier to the global success of the GMO Project. As long as Germany, France, Austria, Greece and other countries of the European Union steadfastly refused to permit GMO planting for health and scientific reasons, the rest of the world's nations would remain sceptical and hesitant. By early 2006, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) had forced open the door of the European Union to the mass proliferation of GMO. It appeared that global success was near at hand for the GMO Project.

In the wake of the US and British military occupation of Iraq, Washington proceeded to bring the agriculture of Iraq under the domain of patented genetically-engineered seeds, initially supplied through the generosity of the US State Department and Department of Agriculture.

Mass experiment

The first mass experiment with GMO crops, however, took place back in the early 1990s in a country whose elite had long since been corrupted by the Rockefeller family and associated New York banks: Argentina.

The following pages trace the spread and proliferation of GMO, often through political coercion, governmental pressure, fraud, lies, and even murder. If it reads often like a crime story, that should not be surprising. The crime being perpetrated in the name of agricultural efficiency,

Don't fall for Pentagon spin

Ben Freeman

If you believe the hype, sequestration is going to deal a catastrophic blow to the politically powerful defence industry. It's a "doomsday mechanism," former Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta declared. The Aerospace Industries Association (AIA) – the leading advocacy group for Pentagon contractors – has also warned of the allegedly dire consequences of sequestration for their industry (which receives nearly US\$1 billion a day from the Pentagon), expressing "extreme disappointment that sequestration was not averted."

The political implications for the contractor lobby are just as calamitous, we're told. Roll Call's Eliza Newlin Carney says the enactment of sequestration "marks a moment of truth for an industry that has lost clout and allies on Capitol Hill, probably for good."

And, of course, sequestration's plan to reduce Pentagon spending by US\$492 billion over the next nine years was the reason Democrats mistakenly believed Republicans would seek to avoid it at all costs.

Don't believe the hype

The truth? We're watching a political magic trick. Right now, we're at the part of the show where it appears Congress and the President sawed through Pentagon contractors. They're moaning and complaining – giving the audience a good show – but fear not, contracts will be just fine.

This is largely because of the rock solid foundation the industry is standing on. Every year for the last five years the Pentagon has doled out at least US\$360 billion to contractors. In fact, every year since the war in Afghanistan began contractors have received more than half of the Pentagon's total budget. In other words, contractors have received more taxpayer money than the Department of Defence's civilian employees and nearly 1.4 million active duty military personnel combined.

All that money has really added up. So much so that Pentagon contractors are sitting on a backlog of contracts worth nearly as much as the entirety of Pentagon sequestration.

In other words, even if contractors absorbed all of the Pentagon sequestration cuts, they'd still be on track to receive more than US\$300 billion a year in new contracts, which is more than double what any other country in the world spends on its military.

Does any of this sound catastrophic?

Behind the curtain

We, the naïve audience of taxpayers (who are, of course, paying for this whole show), are supposed to believe the victim has been eviscerated. Once we pull the curtain back, however, we'll see the truth behind the trick: contractors may have been a target of sequestration, but they're still winning the war for the Pentagon's budget.

To be clear, the contractor lobby didn't take the hit from sequestration on March 1, but on August 2, 2011 when the Budget Control Act of 2011 was enacted and included cuts to Pentagon spending as a punishment for Congressional inaction. Unfortunately for the contractor lobby, inertia is the norm for a Congress that hasn't passed an actual budget in nearly four years. For many policymakers sequestration became the best, worst option. Most Members of Congress got at least something they wanted by doing what Congress does best – nothing.

But, even with the enactment of sequestration, contractors can rest assured of their pre-eminent role in the Pentagon's budget. They're being protected as much as possible from all sides – the Secretary of Defence, Hawks on the Hill, the Department of Defence Comptroller, and the White House.

Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel said during his confirmation hearing, "The



continuing health of the industrial base will be a high priority for me."

And despite sequestration, hawks are far from an endangered species on Capitol Hill. John McCain, for example, remained an especially ardent opponent of Pentagon cuts, arguing that it would "significantly impact our industrial capabilities."

Then there's Pentagon Comptroller Robert Hale, who said in a sequestration briefing on February 20, "I don't anticipate that we will cancel many, if any, contracts... And, I would like to say to reassure them [contractors], if you've got a contract with us, we're going to pay you."

But to truly understand the situation, consider that the White House recently issued sequestration guidance which allows agencies to award new contracts for "high-priority initiatives." In short, existing contracts aren't likely to be cancelled, and new contracts are only a "high priority initiative" rubber stamp away.

Sequestration will reduce the amount of money flowing to the industry. But, even though the Pentagon pie will be smaller, all signs point to contractors still getting most of it.

Who's actually disappearing?

While contractors aren't disappearing en masse in this magic trick, the same can't be said of the Defence Department's civilian employees, who are facing the economic impact of sequestration head-on.

Hale announced that the Pentagon will furlough most of its civilian workforce – nearly 800,000 employees – beginning in April. This includes approximately 15,000 military school teachers and staff. Employees are expected to be furloughed (enforced break) one day per week, without pay, for the remainder of the fiscal year.

The Defence Department is, by far, the largest employer of government workers, so there's likely plenty of waste in this bloated bureaucracy. But, cutting civilian workers without taking meaningful steps to reduce the Pentagon's over-reliance on contractors may ultimately cost taxpayers far more than it saves.

Furloughing civilians may create work vacuums where the Pentagon has no choice but to hire contractors to complete essential tasks. From a taxpayer's perspective, this might not be problematic if they both cost the same amount, but they don't.

An analysis by my colleague, Scott Amey, of the Project On Government Oversight has found that service contractors employed by the Pentagon cost between two and eight times as much as civilian employees, on average.

Service contractors are not always the most expensive personnel option, and may sometimes be a better option even when they are. But, when the Pentagon spends more on contractors every year than it does on either the troops or its civilian employees, and appears primed to keep protecting contractors even under sequestration, taxpayers have a right to know why.

Why spare the big contractors?

In recent years the big Pentagon contractors have been receiving more taxpayer money while employing fewer people. There's a more basic explanation for why Pentagon contractors are being protected – money.

According to lobbying data from the Centre for Responsive Politics, the defence industry has spent more than US\$100 million on lobbying every year since 2005.

The industry also doled out more than US\$26 million in campaign contributions during the 2012 election cycle. US\$16 million of that went to Republicans, and the money went disproportionately to representatives with the greatest sway over the Pentagon's budget. For example, House Armed Services Committee Chairman Buck McKeon received US\$566 thousand from the industry (more than 25 percent of all his campaign cash in 2012). The industry even went so far as to give nearly \$20,000 to McKeon's wife in her campaign for a seat in the California state legislature.

But, if you're thinking that it's just Republican hawks who are on the take from Pentagon contractors, think again.

In 2012 the industry gave more than US\$10 million to Democrats. President Obama, the Noble Peace Prize recipient, received more than a million dollars in campaign contributions from Pentagon contractors during each of his runs for President. Coincidentally (or not), US overseas arms sales have more than doubled while Obama has been President.

In stark contrast to the lavish contributions coming from Pentagon contractors, the more than two million people employed by each of the service branches and the DoD, combined, made just over \$3 million in contributions during the 2012 election cycle, and had nominal expenditures on lobbying.

So, now that sequestration hit and it's time to make cuts, the choice is easy for policymakers – don't bite the hand that feeds.

Sequestration won't upset the military industrial (Congressional) complex that President Eisenhower warned the US about more than 50 years ago. It will only ensure that taxpayers pay for a little less of it.

Information Clearing House ✪



environmental friendliness and solving the world hunger problem, carries stakes which are vastly more important to this small elite. Their actions are not solely for money or for profit. After all, these powerful private families decide who controls the Federal Reserve, the Bank of England, the Bank of Japan and even the European Central Bank. Money is in their hands to destroy or create.

Their aim is rather, the ultimate control over future life on this planet, a supremacy earlier dictators and despots only ever dreamt of. Left unchecked, the present group behind the GMO Project is between one and two decades away from total dominance of the planet's food capacities. This aspect of the GMO story needs telling. I therefore invite the reader to a careful reading and independent verification or reasoned refutation of what follows.

F William Engdahl is a leading analyst of the New World Order, author of the best-selling book on oil and geopolitics, *A Century of War: Anglo-American Politics and the New World Order*. His writings have been translated into more than a dozen languages.

Order this critically-acclaimed book from Global Research!
Seeds of Destruction: The Hidden Agenda of Genetic Manipulation by F William Engdahl, Global Research Publishers, globalresearch.ca ✪

Canadian Labour Congress targets Harper government

Darrell Rankin*

Hundreds of delegates are expected to attend the Canadian Labour Congress's largest-ever political action conference, which will plan how to defeat the Harper government, on March 22-24 in Toronto.

The most highly managed conference will produce a life of its own when a government is ripping a country apart and selling it part by part. The Communist Party has called for a broad, political action conference for many years, and it is important that the most be made of it.

The conference's success will be measured by how it organises the fight, especially before the election, not just during the short stampede to the polls called the campaign period.

On the positive side, there is a focus on key issues like labour rights (the attack on the Rand formula and the closed shop), the Aboriginal question in the labour movement, creating industrial jobs, equality of women, child care, privatisation, and green energy.

Some focus is on rebuilding once-vibrant coalitions, like those that thrived in the 1980s fighting against free trade and for nuclear disarmament. The new coalitions need to

include those entering political life today, activists fighting for Aboriginal rights and the environment, students against tuition hikes, the Occupy movement.

Many CLC affiliates already have their separate campaigns targeting the Harper Tories. The problem for the CLC and this conference is to send a message: Bring these efforts together! Unite, locally and across Canada.

Local and regional coalitions will be a basis for strong Canada-wide coalitions; these played an important part defeating the Mulroney-Campbell Tories in 1993, and they are needed now.

There are difficulties. The agenda is heavy on workshops like working with media. No time is available for different movement caucuses to meet. The agenda has little or nothing for anti-war, environmental or anti-free trade movements, all historically connected to the labour movement. The lack of travel equalisation, income-related fees, or billets makes it expensive for many activists outside Toronto.

The main thing, though, is that the conference is taking place. When hundreds of people start to talk, they can produce the sparks that will



push the Tories to defeat. All popular movements in Canada need the active involvement of the labour movement as never before.

It will be hard to match the send-off to the Mulroney-Campbell government in 1993, when the CLC helped rally 100,000 people on Parliament Hill, through the anti-free trade Pro-Canada Network. Such rallies can and should take place again, this fall and before the election.

The Harper government is carrying out a vicious attack on the labour movement and workers as a whole. The time has come for more thought

about stronger measures in the fight-back, including work stoppages which are now common in many European and Asian countries.

The attack begs for political strikes in reply, even at a time when the economic struggle expressed by strikes or lockouts remains at historically low levels in Canada.

In 1988, the CLC targeted 50 Tory MPs for defeat in one of the Canada's most important elections dealing with Canada-US Free Trade. The next election is equally important. If the CLC will carry out a similar campaign next election, groups need

to sign-up at the conference and get to work. Time is short.

There is no shortage of political action to take against the narrow, utterly selfish Harper Tory agenda which is leading us to disaster. Developing and mobilising for a broad, emancipatory alternative, the CLC can help defeat Toryism and its big business agenda. If it's done well, the defeat will last forever.

*Darrell Rankin represented the Canadian Peace Alliance at the Pro-Canada Network, the Action Canada Network and the Solidarity Network. *People's Voice* ✪

Squatting law is cause of problems, not the cure

Vyvian Raoul

BRITAIN: "People are being made unnecessarily homeless and very vulnerable people are suffering as a consequence [of the squatting law]. This legislation was based upon prejudice and has only made matters worse. This new evidence demonstrates so clearly the need to repeal this misguided law." John McDonnell MP.

In August 2011, the British Ministry of Justice launched a consultation, optimistically entitled Options for Dealing with Squatting. After ignoring the 96 percent of respondents who were against criminalisation – including the Law Society, homelessness charities Crisis and Shelter, and even the Metropolitan Police Service – the government pressed ahead. In September 2012, the act of seeking shelter in abandoned residential properties in England or Wales – squatting – was "dealt with". Under Section 144 of the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO), anyone found putting a roof over their head in this way would be punished by up to six months in prison or a US\$7,427 fine.

Six months later, Squatters' Action for Secure Homes (SQUASH) has released a report into the effects of that law. Our findings suggest that homeless and vulnerable people have been disproportionately affected. In the midst

of a housing crisis, at a time when homelessness is rising, the law has further narrowed options for many, and is indeed sending otherwise innocent people to prison.

The right-wing press – papers made by property owners for property owners – laid the ground for this legislative attack by carpet-bombing public opinion with endless articles about unwashed Eastern Europeans displacing honourable Hampstead homeowners. Members of Parliament made proud speeches about protecting homeowners, deliberately conflating homes and empty houses (and never mentioning the donations they receive from property developers). "We want to send a clear message to would-be squatters that it is simply not acceptable to occupy someone else's home", proclaimed Justice Minister Crispin Blunt.

At the time, property lawyers and housing experts pointed out that ministers and the media alike were deliberately misleading the public to push through their property protection law. And now SQUASH's research has further exposed that dishonesty: not a single, solitary squatter arrested under the new law was found to be displacing a homeowner.

During the rush to criminalisation, John McDonnell MP asked a pertinent question in a parliamentary debate: "Will it cause more problems than it seeks to cure?"

Section 144 couldn't help but cause more harm than it prevented because, in reality, squatting caused almost no harm in the first place. Within weeks, the first "scumbag squatter" was banged up: 21-year-old brick-layer Alex Haigh, who had no prior criminal convictions, was struggling to find work in the capital and had sought shelter in an empty Pimlico property. It had been abandoned for more than a year by its owners.

Ironically those, like Haigh, who are now behind bars, may have escaped an even worse fate: in February 2013, Daniel Gauntlett, who was homeless, died outside an empty bungalow in Kent, which media reports suggest he had previously been prevented from entering by the police. Section 144 was pushed through as farce: it is being manifested as tragedy.

But rather than rolling back the legislation, recently promoted Conservative MP Mike Weatherley has proposed an early day motion that calls for the law to be extended to commercial properties. Ominously, it already has 24 signatories.

At the very least, SQUASH calls on the government to carry out a full, independent impact assessment before further criminalisation is considered. If parliament wants to protect all of the people it represents – not just those that own empty property – it should repeal this law; it has already caused too much harm. *New Internationalist* ✪

Cuba 5 wives meet with UN human rights chief

Roberta Wood

Denial of the right of a spouse to visit an incarcerated person is a violation of human rights, said United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navenethem Pillay. Human rights organisations have been highly critical of the conditions of incarceration of five Cubans serving time in US prisons as a result of their activities monitoring anti-Cuba terrorist groups in Miami.

In a meeting in Geneva with the wives of two of the five, Pillay expressed her intention to do whatever is possible to find a solution to the case, reported the Cuban Permanent Mission there.

Adriana Perez, wife of Gerardo Hernandez, and Olga Salanueva, wife of Rene Gonzalez, requested Pillay's intervention on human rights grounds to be able to visit their husbands whom they have not seen in over a decade. The US State Department has repeatedly refused to grant the Cuban women entry visas.

Hernandez is serving a life sentence in a California maximum-security prison and Gonzalez is barred from returning to Cuba while serving probation in Florida after a 12-year term.

By refusing to issue the wives visas, the State Department is in

effect denying the women the right to see their husbands. Pillay acknowledged the visa denial as a violation of human rights, constituted an additional punishment.

It's not surprising that Perez and Salanueva found a sympathetic audience in Pillay. A South African of Tamil descent, Pillay has her own history in defence of human rights. In 1973, despite being barred as a non-white from entering any South African courtroom, she won the right for political prisoners on Robben Island, including Nelson Mandela, to have access to attorneys. She had attended law school at Harvard, supported by donations from the local Indian community where she grew up, the daughter of a bus driver. In 1995, when Mandela appointed the Harvard-educated Pillay to the country's High Court, she entered a South African courtroom for the first time. Pillay also spent time running a shelter for victims of domestic violence.

Support for Commissioner Pillay's position can be sent to her by fax or mail:

High Commissioner of Human Rights Navenetham Pillay
United Nations Office of Geneva
8-14 Avenue de la Paix
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland
Fax: +41 22 917 9011
People's World ✪

Chinese President Xi promotes Sino-African ties

Nile Bowie

The fact that China's incoming president, Xi Jinping, is set to visit Africa on his first foreign trip is a strong indication of where Sino-African relations are headed. But as Beijing focuses on building African industry, Washington has other plans.

At a recently held meeting of the National People's Congress in Beijing, China's leaders unveiled a dramatic long-term plan to integrate some 400 million countryside dwellers into urban environments, by concentrating growth-promoting development in small- and medium-sized cities. In stark contrast to the neglected emphasis on infrastructure development in the United States and Europe, China spends around US\$500 billion annually on infrastructural projects, with US\$6.4 trillion set aside for its 10-year mass urbanisation scheme, making it the largest rural-to-urban migration project in human history.

China's leaders have mega-development in focus, and realising such epic undertakings not only requires the utilisation of time-efficient high-volume production methods, but also resources – lots and lots of resources. It should come as no surprise that incoming Chinese president Xi Jinping's first trip as head of state will take him to Africa, to deepen the mutually beneficial trade and energy relationships maintained throughout the continent that have long irked policy makers in Washington.

The new guy in charge will visit several African nations with whom China has expressed a desire to expand ties with, the most prominent being South Africa. Since establishing relations in 1998, bilateral trade between the two jumped from US\$1.5 billion to US\$16 billion as of 2012. Following a relationship that has consisted predominately of economic exchanges, China and South Africa have now announced plans to enhance military ties in a show of increasing political and security cooperation.

During 2012's Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, incumbent President Hu Jintao served up US\$20 billion in loans to African countries, which were designated for the construction of vital infrastructure such as new roads, railways and ports to enable higher volumes of trade and export. In his address to the forum, South African President Jacob Zuma spoke of the long-term unsustainability of the current model of Sino-African trade, in which raw materials are sent out and manufactured commodities are sent in.

Xi's visit highlights the importance China attaches to Sino-African ties, and during his stay, he will attend the fifth meeting of the BRICS, the first summit held on the African continent to accommodate leaders of the world's most prominent emerging economies, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. The BRICS group, which accounts for around 43% of the world's population and 17%



China's incoming president, Xi Jinping.

of global trade, is set to increase investments in Africa's industrial sector threefold, from US\$150 billion in 2010 to US\$530 billion in 2015, under the theme "BRICS and Africa: Partnership for development, integration, and industrialization".

With focus shifting toward building up the continent's industrial sector, South Africa is no doubt seen as a springboard into Africa and a key development partner on the continent for other BRICS members. Analysts have likened the BRICS group to

represent yet another significant step away from a unipolar global economic order, and it comes as no surprise. As eurozone countries languish amidst austerity, record unemployment and major demand contraction, the European Union has declined as a share of South Africa's total trade from 36% in 2005 to 26.5% in 2011, while the BRICS countries' total trade increased from 10% in 2005 to 18.6% in 2011.

The value and significance of the BRICS platform is its ability to proliferate South-South political and economic ties, and one should expect the reduction of trade barriers and the gradual adoption of economic exchanges using local currencies. China's ICBC paid \$5.5 billion for

a 20 percent stake in Standard Bank of South Africa in 2007, and the move has played out well for Beijing – Standard has over 500 branches across 17 African countries, which has drastically increased availability of the Chinese currency, offering yuan accounts to expatriate traders.

It looks like the love story that has become of China and Africa will gradually begin shifting its emphasis toward building up a viable large-scale industrial base. Surveys out of Beijing cite 1,600 companies tapping into the use of Africa as an industrial base, with manufacturing's share of total Chinese investment (22%) fast gaining on the mining sector's (29%).

RT ★

Ireland's mortgage crisis

Caoimhghim O Croidheain

We are living in a society where the combination of fractional-reserve banking (lending out multiples of deposits) helped along by quantitative easing (printing almost unlimited quantities of money) based on fiat currencies (money without intrinsic value) has created exponential growth for the world's financial elites. This led to unprecedented bubbles in the property market as banks made it easy for people to borrow more money than they would have been allowed in the past when a conservative banker guideline for a home buyer was to have a two to two and a half times mortgage-to-salary ratio.

In contrast to these methods for almost unlimited sources of (false) wealth conjured up by financial elites, workers (borrowers) have only one source – wages – which are going into decline due to government cutbacks and increased taxes. Yet despite this obvious anomaly, whereby the banks get bailouts with even more money, borrowers are expected to pay back, and in full, under threat of repossession, every single cent of the flawed money lent to them to pay exorbitant house prices inflated by excessive lending in the first place.

According to David Hall, Director, Irish Mortgage Holders Organisation:

"The Irish mortgages crisis, now into its sixth year, is still raging beyond any control of the authorities. Per latest figures from the Central Bank of Ireland, 186,785 mortgages (including BTL) in Ireland are at risk (in arrears, restructured or in repossession), accounting for an unprecedented 25.3 percent of all mortgage accounts still outstanding."

Hall goes on to state that "with some 650,000-750,000 estimated people residing in the households with the principal residence in mortgages difficulties, we are witnessing a wholesale destruction of savings, pensions and wealth of several generations of Irish people."

As if that wasn't bad enough the government is introducing property charges from July 1. Media discussion of these issues revolve around valuations of properties and not around the huge amounts of tax already paid to the government when the houses were purchased or the fairness of such a tax on properties which were bought during the bank-inflated boom, delusionally misnamed yet commonly known as the "Celtic Tiger".

Media pundits, sounding like poodles discussing the length of their leashes, have not questioned the ethics of forcing people to pay back such huge sums of money under the rubric that allowing people to write-down a portion of the debt would cause a "moral hazard" (as if the initial lending spree was itself moral). Similarly, there is little discussion of the property tax deferral option for low income persons, a sinister move, which implies, (like with the hard line taken on mortgage repayments) that exemption is not an option any more for low wage earners but only more accumulated debt (with interest) to be paid sometime in the future- further impoverishing those least able to pay.

Adding insult to injury, the Department of Finance secretary general John Moran spoke recently of an "unnaturally low level of repossessions" and that "homeowners could not expect the taxpayer to subsidise them to remain in a house 'that is beyond their means'." It is interesting to note that "their means" didn't seem to matter at all when it came to lending out the huge amounts of money at the outset.

globalresearch.ca ★

Brotherhood slams UN pro-women stance

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood has sharply criticised a so-far unpublished UN document on combating violence against women. It said that it was "deceitful," clashed with Islamic principles and undermined family values.

The text of the document, which is still being argued over, studies how to address sexual violence and rights of women to control their sexuality as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Diplomats are seeking agreement before the two-week meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women wraps up in New York.

Egypt is reportedly seeking to introduce an opt-out clause to allow each country to implement the document according to its own traditions.

According to the Brotherhood, the draft under discussion advocates sexual freedom for women and the

right to abortion "under the guise of sexual and reproductive rights."

The Brotherhood also decried the document's defence of homosexual rights and equating children born in and out of wedlock.

It said the title of the document addressing violence was "deceitful."

"It contains articles that clash with Islamic principles and its basics in the Quran and in Islamic traditions," the Brotherhood statement said.

"It eliminates Islamic values and seeks to destroy the family ... which would lead to social disintegration."

The Brotherhood called on Muslim nations, women's groups and Islamic organisations to reject the document. It urged women's rights groups not to be "lured by phoney calls for civilised behaviour."

Morning Star ★

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Too little too late

Sixteen months after I moved a Bill in the Senate, the government is finally taking action to protect our water from dangerous coal seam gas and large coal mines.

This is big news for all of you who have been campaigning tirelessly to protect our rivers and aquifers from the risks posed by coal seam gas.

Public efforts have pushed the government to take this first step towards protecting our land, water, climate and communities from coal seam gas.

But unfortunately, it's too little too late from Minister Tony Burke, who has never said no to a coal seam gas project.

After one of the biggest community campaigns in Australia's history, the government is finally paying attention and moved in the Parliament to amend environmental laws to protect water resources from coal seam gas.

But this announcement comes hot on the heels of an enormous coal seam gas development at Gloucester in NSW, and the earlier approval of three big CSG projects in Queensland. If Tony Burke and Labor were serious about protecting water from coal seam gas, they could have passed my Bill back in November 2011, which would have added a similar "water trigger" to our national environment laws.

If he was serious about protecting our water, Tony Burke should apply this new water test to all of the coal mines and coal seam gas projects he's already approved as 'Environment' Minister.

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

Write a letter to the Editor

I'll move in the Senate to make sure these new rules apply to those projects, and that they extend to shale and tight gas as well, to protect Western Australian and Victorian communities.

Yours in protecting what is too precious to lose,

**Larissa Waters
The Greens**

Thanks for that

Thank you for a repeatedly good paper. My family enjoy our discussions that stem from the Guardian's view and that of our supposed mainstream media.

The topics local and international are informative and we will be renewing our subscription soon.

However I believe that it is missing one thing that I believe on a whole

make it more appealing to the people and that is supposed "fluff" pieces; one or two local issues, be it Sydney of Perth or others. It might lighten moods or at least give a smile.

Something to think about at least. Anyway, good luck and thank you.

**Daman Blaxall and family
Tasmania**

Culture & Life

by

Rob Gowland

Forgetting the fallen

The Soviet Union bore the brunt of the fighting in the Second World War, liquidated the greatest percentage of fascist troops, and lost the largest number of casualties in defeating the Nazis. Twenty-six million Soviet citizens lost their lives at the hands of Hitler's racist butchers.

Every male born in the USSR in 1921 was subsequently killed or seriously wounded in the Second World War. Every factory, every collective farm, every village lost people in the War.

After the defeat of Fascism, memorials to those who died were understandably erected everywhere, ranging from vast edifices like the statue of the Motherland at Stalingrad to small stele bearing the names of three or four soldiers or workers who distinguished themselves at a particular factory under air attack or in a fire-fight.

In Soviet times, these memorials to those who defended not just Russia but the world from fascist slavery were meticulously maintained, always kept supplied with flowers, and often given an honour guard of Interior Ministry troops or Komsomol members, depending on location and size of the memorial.

In post-Gorbachev Russia, however, the situation has changed dramatically. The maintenance of the memorials was always the responsibility of local or regional governments, or even of individual plants or factories. But with the Russian economy now firmly in the grip of private enterprise, whether a monument is cared for or not is purely a question of the wishes and consciousness of the local authorities.

In some regions, the wartime heroism and sacrifice of workers or military units there are still honoured and commemorated as of old. In others, where local authorities are more concerned with projects that will line their own pockets, memorials have fallen into decay or even been destroyed.

Among those destroyed is the former Mitrofanievskoye Cemetery in Leningrad, where the fallen defenders of the city during the siege were buried. It no longer exists. It has been replaced with a small concrete stele, but even that is reportedly in a neglected state.

A recent letter from a correspondent in the Ukraine to the British Communist weekly *The New Worker* listed numerous memorials in St

Petersburg (formerly Leningrad) that have been damaged or neglected.

The Petrovsky Plant in Leningrad featured a monument to the workers who toiled there during the bombing. Many of them were killed but they continued at their lathes, they did not give in to the fascist invaders. The plant has been replaced by the "Ohta Centre", and the memorial has been demolished.

"The old monuments erected in the Soviet Union to glorify the work of those hungry civil defenders who constructed the Road of Life to bring food to – and to carry children out of – besieged Leningrad ... still stand. But they have been abandoned.

"The monument to the Red Army troops who broke the Nazi Blockade Ring needs repairing." At the Kirov plant there is a memorial devoted to the plant's workers who were killed in the War. It is in the form of a stele with dozens of names on it under the figure of a soldier and the famous words: "1941-1945. No one is forgotten and nothing is forgotten. Eternal glory to the heroes. Together with all of you, the Motherland won. You are kept in or hearts."

But the plant has been closed and this monument too is under threat of destruction. "The list of forgotten war memorials around the city is very long. The bitterly known Sinyavin heights and swamps where the battles were really the hardest and the cadets' tombs of 1941-42 are not cared for at all. The common grave in Pulkovo Heights is also in a neglected condition, some metal parts have been pulled down and it is covered in graffiti."

Imagine the fuss the RSL would raise if that were allowed to happen to one of *our* war cemeteries.

Even some famous war relics have been allowed to decay almost beyond repair by the indifference of these post-Soviet "get yours while you can" local officials. The correspondent Irene Nechayeva writes: "The once preserved Tipanov pill-box is now a ruin. During the Great Patriotic War, Alexander Tipanov like thousands of YCL members repeated the feat of Alexander Matrosov; he covered the embrasure of an enemy pill-box with his body, [preventing the Nazi machine gunners from firing at the cost of his own life]. His courageous act allowed his detachment to advance and break the Nazi line. He was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union."

As I said, the fate of many of the monuments and memorials to those who fell fighting Fascism depends now on the political will and consciousness of individual local government bodies across Russia. But if the new breed of "post Soviet" officials can ignore with impunity the decay and even destruction of war memorials, what hope is there for protecting the art works and relics of the Revolution?

The Russian government will not even support the upkeep of the Lenin Mausoleum – that has to be done by the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. Many relics of the Revolution have been sold off, others – like the Cruiser *Aurora* – have been shoved out of sight, there (like the war memorials) to lie neglected and hopefully forgotten.

But as the Soviet slogan says: "No one is forgotten. Nothing is forgotten." ☘





Rob Gowland
previews
ABC & SBS
Public Television

Sunday March 24 –
Saturday March 30

Amanda Blue's documentary *The Town That Caught Tourette's* (ABC2 Monday March 25 at 8.35pm) is described by the ABC as "intriguing", and that it certainly is. It raises a host of significant questions, but actually answers almost none of them.

The program concerns a phenomenon that took place in Le Roy, a small town in up-state New York: over a short period of time, 18 girls at the local high school developed distressing symptoms that resembled Tourette's syndrome: facial twitching, violent limb gestures, uncontrollable verbal outbursts. These continued even when the girls were asleep, and were frequently painful.

Doctors were baffled and certainly useless, so the girls' families went on the Internet in search of help (as modern people do). This produced a rash of knee-jerk comments from the uninformed and the ignorant. The most common was that the girls were faking it to gain attention. Watching the girls enduring their symptoms made you feel that this would be a very poor choice if you just wanted to get attention. And there was the problem of how did they fake it while they were asleep?

Erin Brokovich – the real one, not Julia Roberts – dropped in to see whether the girls' symptoms could be connected to a freight-train derailment some years before which spilled toxic chemicals on the site of

what is now the Le Roy High School. This seemed a likely scenario for a while but eventually Brokovich and her team concluded that there was in fact no connection.

The state education department also had the school and its grounds carefully checked out for adverse environmental factors but again drew a blank. Meanwhile the medical establishment was leaning towards the view that the girls' problems were examples of "Conversion Disorder", where real physical symptoms such as tics are caused not by a physical trigger but by a psychological trauma. The parents disputed this.

Later, the doctors changed their diagnosis to that good old standby where female patients are concerned: "mass hysteria". Another doctor claimed it was a by-product of a viral throat infection.

I thought the woman doctor who was the spokesperson for the clinical establishment was appallingly smug and self-satisfied in her dismissal of the girls' condition: that she might be wrong would clearly never cross her mind.

Eventually, for most of the girls, their symptoms began to slowly improve and the problem more or less went away. But one girl remained in an effectively crippled state, and a closing title tells us that in 2012, two new cases were reported in the town.

One is left with the impression that more money spent on researching the problem might well have borne fruit. It is a pity the townspeople could not find a military application for their children's condition: funds would have been showered on them, then.

Go into any major bookstore, and look at the "teen fiction" section: shelf after shelf of werewolf and vampire romances. In an earlier age, werewolf stories were concerned with escaping from their ravenous jaws and killing the beast with a silver bullet. The *loup garou* was – like the vampire – purely a monster. Today, however, one sells more books if the monster is a troubled hero, a romantic figure with other-worldly powers.



Wolf Blood (ABC3 Weekdays at 6.30pm from Tuesday March 26).

In that form, werewolves can prow your neighbourhood or your high-school and even fall in love with pretty girls who may or may not have an affinity with wolves. In bygone days, young women in literature tended to pine for highwaymen, pirates or Arabian bandit chiefs. Except for the ultra-fanciful *Pirates Of The Caribbean* franchise, modern young people are too sophisticated to accept those older genres of romantic fiction. The gap has been filled by paranormal romances, love stories in which the protagonists can be not only vampires or werewolves, but also sorcerers, fairies, djinn, witches and even gods.

If these books are well done they can be very imaginative and enjoyable, if not they tend to be tedious. There is much more of the tedious than of the good.

There is a new paranormal children's series starting on the ABC this week: *Wolf Blood* (ABC3

Weekdays at 6.30pm from Tuesday March 26). No prize for guessing which paranormal creature this one is about. A Canadian-German co-production it is set in an English village and secondary school. Maddy, a girl who can change into a wolf, realises that new schoolboy Rhydian is also a wolf blood, but he cannot control his changes. She is furious: what is he doing on her pack's territory?

The series is nothing if not derivative; Rhydian has obviously been cast because of his superficial resemblance to Robert Pattinson (although his "dark and brooding" just looks sullen).

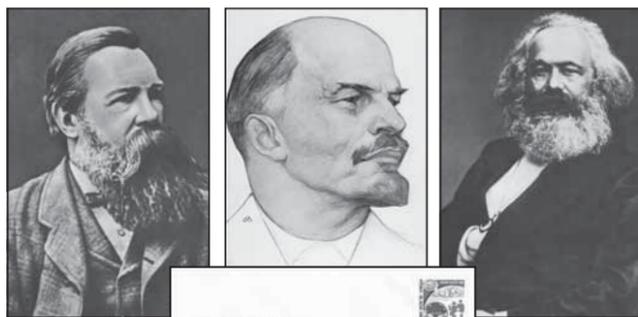
Films starring old actors are all the rage at the moment, so the BBC has come up with a six-part series starring Derek Jacobi and Anne Reid as former teenage lovers who meet again 60 years and rekindle their affection, to the bewilderment of their grown-up children.

Anne Reid usually plays unsympathetic parts (she makes a great nosy neighbour or interfering relative) but here as Celia she manages to be warm and affectionate without losing her hard edge. It is a clever performance.

She is matched of course by Jacobi as Alan, who looks every one of his supposed 70-odd years. Their respective daughters are played by Sarah Lancashire, who starred as a cop in the last series I saw her in, but plays a very believable starchy headmistress in this series, and Nicole Walker as a struggling farmer who works in the local supermarket to supplement her income.

Both women have chaotic home-lives with problem spouses or in-laws. Alan's daughter has a brother-in-law who believes she murdered his brother and tells her son so.

The series is written by Sally Wainwright, who wrote the series *Scott and Bailey*. ☼



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POLITICS in the pub

March 22

ARE WE WINNING THE WAR ON GLOBAL WARMING?

Andy Pitman, Professor, Director Centre of Excellence for Climate Change Science, UNSW;

John Connor, Director Climate Change Institute;

March 29

NO MEETING

Good Friday, Easter Holiday;

April 5

GILLARD GOVERNMENT'S URANIUM DEAL WITH INDIA – WHY IT IS SO DANGEROUS?

Richard Broinowski, former Ambassador Asian countries, author of *Fact or Fission - The Truth about Australia's Nuclear Ambitions*;

David Sweeney, National Nuclear Campaigner, ACF;

April 12

PACKER'S NON-TENDERED BARANGAROO CASINO – LAS VEGAS IN THE PACIFIC?

Wendy Lang, Dr, Senior Pastor, Surry Hills Baptist Centre;

John Kaye, MLC, NSW Greens;

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Solidarity with Palestinian Political Prisoners

Steven Katsineris

“Do not worry if my heart stops. I am still alive now and even after death, because Jerusalem runs through my veins. If I die, it is a victory; if we are liberated, it is a victory, because either way I have refused to surrender to the Israeli occupation, its tyranny and arrogance.” Samer Issawi (*The Guardian*, February 27)

As of January 2013, according to Palestinian human rights groups, Israel held 4,812 Palestinian prisoners in its jails. Of these political prisoners 1,031 are being held until the conclusion of legal proceedings, 178 are in administrative detention, held indefinitely without trial or charge, (in February at least a further 382 Palestinians were detained adding to this number), 166 are under the age of 18 years, 23 are children (under 16) and six are women.

The remainder have been sentenced, in a harsh and unfair military system, with torture commonplace, almost complete lack of due process, vague charges, very low standards of evidence (or no evidence) presented and proceedings in Hebrew. These political prisoners include 25 members of the Palestine National Council and the Speaker of the Parliament. Various writers, scholars, students and artists are also political prisoners.

Holding members of parliament is in itself a violation of international law, one of many laws Israel regularly breaks with impunity in its treatment of Palestinian political prisoners and the Palestinian people generally. The conditions of their imprisonment are outrageous, with detainees often held in solitary confinement for long periods, abused, tortured and denied proper health care.

No charge and no trial

“Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention.” Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The Israeli military has subjected Palestinians to administrative detention since the beginning of the Israeli occupation. Since 2000, Israel has issued 20,000 detention orders on Palestinians. This is a system under which a military court can order suspects to be detained indefinitely, subject to renewal every six months by a court, without trial or charge.

Israeli military law is sham justice, with Palestinians detained on the slightest excuse and held on false charges, secret evidence unseen by lawyers or the accused, or on imprecise charges and no evidence.

Israeli military law is sham justice, with Palestinians detained on the slightest excuse and held on false charges, secret evidence unseen by lawyers or the accused, or on imprecise charges and no evidence.

Those re-arrested are often made to serve the remainder of their sentences or be sentenced on new charges. Detained prisoners can't dispute charges, can't see alleged evidence against them and can be held for an indefinite period. This phoney justice system depends on the whim of the Israeli military; denied due process because that is the way the Israeli system operates, as Israel abuses prisoners' human rights and violates numerous international laws. The Israeli military uses administrative detention to suppress any acts of resistance and dissent by Palestinians against the brutal Israeli occupation.

Fighting for their basic human rights

“My detention is unjust and illegal, just like the occupation is. My demands are legitimate and just. Thus I will not withdraw from the battle for freedom, waiting for either victory and freedom – or martyrdom.” Message from Samer Issawi, December 24, 2012.

Last year several Palestinian political prisoners went on hunger strike to protest their unfair detentions and mistreatment in Israeli jails. Samer Issawi started his prolonged hunger strike in August and was joined by three other hunger strikers to protest the injustice of their administrative detention and that of other Palestinian political prisoners. All the men were taking vitamins initially, but are only drinking water and refusing medical treatment and any food supplements now.

Samer, 33, is a political activist and member of the resistance organisation, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. He was active in organising numerous protests against the Israeli occupation. Samer was arrested by Israeli forces on April 15, 2002 in Ramallah. He was erroneously charged with planning military attacks on Israel. These alleged charges were without evidence, but he was still sentenced to 30 years in prison.

Samer Issawi was released in October 2011 as part of a prisoner exchange between Hamas and Israel. But, Samer was re-arrested by the



Israeli military authorities for allegedly violating the terms of his release. For Samer, this alleged violation by him was leaving Jerusalem, but the village of Hizma, where Samer was arrested is within the boundaries of the Jerusalem municipality. The Israeli claims are false and just an excuse to re-arrest Samer. He has since been detained without charge. It is Israel that has broken the release agreement by re-arresting Samer and other former political prisoners.

Samer has been on hunger strike for over 200 days and was transferred to hospital on February 27 and is now reported to be suffering various health problems and is in a critical condition. He recently escalated his hunger strike and has stopped drinking water. Samer and the other hunger strikers have been under continuous pressure from the Israeli military to end their hunger strikes.

Ayman Sharawna, 36, was also released in October 2011 as part of a prisoner exchange deal. But, Ayman was re-arrested by the Israeli military authorities for allegedly violating the terms of his release. He has since been held in jail without charge or trial, on the basis of a “secret administrative file” that neither he nor his lawyer have been given access to, or told the nature of the alleged breach. The Israeli military have also threatened to cancel his early release; this means he can be sent to serve the remaining 28 years of his original sentence.

Ayman has been on hunger strike since July, 2012, except for a brief break in December, when he was

told he would be released soon. He resumed his hunger strike in January after learning that the Israeli Prison Service had deceived him in their promise. Ayman's health has seriously deteriorated.

Tareq Qaadani and Jafar Ezzedine have been held in administrative detention on secret charges against them that even their lawyers haven't seen. Tareq and Jafar, have been on hunger strike since last November, to protest their detention without charge and demanding their release. They were both transferred to hospital after their health seriously deteriorated when they refused to drink water.

In February, eight more Palestinian hunger strikers joined the protests.

Speak up and act

“Israel must adhere to international human rights obligations regarding hunger striking Palestinian prisoners.” EU spokesperson Catherine Ashton, February 18.

Last year, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination urged Israel to end the practice of administrative detention, stating it was discriminatory and constituted arbitrary detention, which is illegal under international law. And in February, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon once again called on Israel to either charge administrative detainees and allow them a fair trial or release them immediately.

The hunger strikers have brought to the world's attention the plight of the Palestinian prisoners held in administrative detention. Israel has for over 50 years used administrative detention to arrest and imprison Palestinians without cause, charges or trial and hold them indefinitely, many facing months or even years in prison. The international community has a responsibility to condemn the continued practice of arbitrary administrative detention against Palestinians and compel Israel to comply with

international humanitarian law and human rights laws in this regard and in other improper and illegal procedures used against Palestinian prisoners.

For far too long the USA, Australia, Britain and other governments have turned a blind eye to the rogue state behaviour of Israel. It is well overdue that the world community say they have enough and pressure their governments to make Israel respect the human and civil rights of the Palestinian people.

The just cause of the Palestinian political prisoners requires immediate international exposure and support to improve their dire conditions. Many of these Palestinian political prisoners have been imprisoned illegally and deprived of their basic rights and liberties that are guaranteed by human rights and Geneva conventions and international law.

The Israeli military occupation authorities continually violate international law and conventions in their mistreatment of the Palestinian people. The international community must exert real pressure on Israel to end its blatant violations of human rights laws and stop the brutal abuses inflicted on Palestinian political prisoners.

The people of the world must let their respective governments know they have had enough of Israeli brutality and the demand the UN, the EU and other world bodies stop their negligence and complicity in Israeli crimes and take measures to force Israel to comply with international and human rights laws. The world's peoples and governments cannot allow Israel to continue to commit crimes with impunity, but have moral responsibility to act.

“My health has deteriorated greatly, but I will continue my hunger strike until victory or martyrdom. This is my last remaining stone to throw at the tyrants and jailers in the face of the racist occupation that humiliates our people.” Samer Issawi. ✪



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