



A system based on theft

Anna Pha

The move last week by the European Central Bank (ECB), the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – the notorious Troika that stalks Europe – to impose a “tax” on people’s and corporate savings in Cypriot banks sent shock waves across Europe and beyond. The level of anger and opposition amongst the Cypriot people was so strong that not even one government MP had the courage to vote for its own agreement with the Troika when it was put to parliament for ratification on Tuesday March 19. Opposition was not confined to the people. The precedent of raiding people’s bank deposits to bail out banks raised alarm bells within ruling class circles and amongst economic commentators, who feared a run on banks beyond Cyprus and possible loss of confidence in the banking system across Europe.

Thousands of people have joined the ongoing broad protest actions outside Parliament saying “NO”. The Communist Party (AKEL), which has the second largest representation in parliament, came out strongly against the deal and played a leading role in organising protest actions. It had been in government until last month’s elections and previously refused such conditions for a bailout.

Banks were closed all week to avoid a run on funds. Panic and fear reigned, with electronic fund transfers frozen and businesses refusing to accept non-cash payments. ATMs were quickly emptied as people rushed to extract what they could of their savings.

The bailout deal agreed to by the new right-wing government led by Nicos Anastasiades is nothing short of state-sponsored theft designed to destroy the Cypriot banking system and with it the Cypriot economy. The move glaringly exposed capitalism for what it is: a system based on theft.

The direct dipping into people’s accounts is unprecedented. In Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain the theft was indirect or at least less blatant. The bailouts were fully funded by external financial institutions and taxpayers through government austerity measures footed the cost of loans and turning budget deficits into surpluses.



The government was seeking a €17 billion (US\$22 billion) bailout to recapitalise Cypriot banks and provide them with the liquidity they needed to continue trading. This is peanuts compared with the massive bailouts provided to countries such as Spain and Portugal. Yet Cyprus is being subjected to the most destructive terms imaginable.

The Troika, urged on by German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble, threatened to withhold all credit to Cypriot banks unless Cyprus funded €5.8 billion (US\$7.5 billion) of the bailout in cash from domestic sources as well as approve privatisation and austerity measures to bring its contribution to €7 billion. Only then would they provide €10 billion (US\$13 billion).

On Monday March 27, a meeting of the Troika and EU finance ministers reached agreement with the Cypriot government to provide €10 billion towards the bailout. The government must raise the remainder of the package through a massive tax of around 30-40 percent on bank deposits over €100,000 (\$128,000), an increase in company and capital gains tax, privatisation of public assets and austerity measures. Details

have still to be finalised. All deposits under €100,000 will be guaranteed.

It is estimated the government will raise around €4.2 billion (US\$5.5b) from deposits in the Laiki (People’s) Bank alone. Its share holders and bond holders likely to lose everything as the bank takes over “bad debts” from the other major bank, the Bank of Cyprus, and is eventually closed. The Bank of Cyprus will absorb the “good loans” from Laiki but its large deposits will also be raided.

No other EU/IMF bailout has made such demands on a government to raise such a large proportion of a bailout in cash. The Troika also stipulated that the cash could not be the product of a loan or a government issue of bonds. The demands were framed so as to force the government to raid bank deposits unless it could raise the funds from another international source.

The government had initially agreed to a 9.9 percent tax on deposits over US\$100,000 and 6.7 percent on smaller deposits to raise the €5.8 billion. It agreed to privatisations and other austerity measures. The version that went to Parliament on March 19 was slightly watered down, exempting savings below €20,000.

Germany’s agenda

The deal, which the Troika and the German government is imposing on the people of Cyprus, is a criminal violation of Cyprus’s sovereignty. It is a blatant, political attempt by international finance capital to destroy the Cypriot banking system and with it the Cypriot economy. Germany is the main force behind this agenda which will bring pain and devastation to the Cypriot people.

Following the failure of the Cypriot Parliament to pass the initial measures, Wolfgang Schaeuble, who played a prominent role in the negotiations with the Troika, warned: “The ECB has made it clear that without a reform program, that the aid can’t continue. Someone has to explain this to the Cypriots and I think there is a danger that they won’t be able to open the banks again at all.”

Just in case the message wasn’t clear, he followed with an even more direct threat: “Two big Cypriot banks are insolvent if there are no emergency funds from the European Central Bank.”

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There will be no Guardian next week. The next issue will be April 10.

Guardian

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Labor's descent into chaos

The schemers plotting the demise of Julia Gillard in the lead-up to last week's Labor leadership spill could not have done her more damage if they had tried. Though a new (or recycled) leadership did not step forward and nominate for the position of Prime Minister or Deputy Prime Minister, the surviving PM was not reinforced in the top job. She was left looking like a "lame duck" incumbent, heading a "shambolic" government whose days are being counted down. The cabinet reshuffle has worsened the impression of desperation.

The real intentions of the Rudd forces in the farce can only be guessed at but the former PM's reference to a "commitment" to the Australian public not to run can safely be discounted. It is far more likely that ambitious players in the parliamentary Labor Party would prefer to watch Gillard go down with the ship and for them to appear later as the "saviours" of the Labor brand after the likely defeat at the September 14 federal election.

The thinking is cynical and disloyal but it is realistic. The Rudd/Gillard government's record has alienated the ALP's traditional base in the working class. The list of disappointments is long. Despite the hopes built up prior to Rudd's election in 2007, Labor has:

- worsened the plight of refugees to the country
- maintained a rebadged anti-union construction industry task force
- left mining industry profits untouched by any super-profits tax
- introduced a pointless "carbon tax" that protects the worst polluters
- advanced the privatising agenda in health, education, aged care and disability support in spite of funding "reform" propaganda
- attacked welfare recipients, including single parents forced onto the dole
- overseen the expansion of the uranium industry
- maintained the Northern Territory "intervention" and the ongoing dispossession of Aboriginal people
- left the question of flows along the Murray/Darling unresolved
- watched as Australian manufacturing shrivels
- sat on its hands as employers exploit guest workers under the 457 visa scheme
- kept us at war alongside the US and NATO, wasted fortunes on military equipment and signed up for more US bases

Voters aren't listening to the excuses any more. They realise that the insulation working people have had from the more extreme forms of austerity suffered elsewhere has been due to the resilience of the economy of the People's Republic of China. People have concluded that the main pillars of the agenda under Howard have been kept under Rudd and Gillard.

With the Australian political scene continuing to be dominated by the two big parties of capital, voters unfortunately will probably vote the Coalition into office because they don't see any realistic, coherent alternative. The ruling class, the people who direct overall policy for their servants in parliaments to implement, are presented with another, classic "win/win" situation.

Not everybody is resigned to such a bleak future. Small but growing numbers of political activists are considering alternatives. Some trade unionists are talking about running candidates and building an extended Your Rights at Work-style organisation. Others are thinking more short-term with an "anti-Abbott" alliance. The ideas are raw and progress with these efforts will probably be too slow to have a major impact at the 2013 federal election.

The Communist Party of Australia supports the concept of an alliance of left and progressive forces leading to the formation of a government of a new type – one that will mobilise the community and begin to challenge the dominance of the monopolies. A strong Communist party is key to the success of such a process. Efforts for unity in the interests of the working class and other exploited should be wholeheartedly supported. Ultimately, the sort of consciously anti-monopoly alliance envisaged by the CPA program will bring about real, lasting change and progress towards socialism. These are the ideas that need to be injected into plans for new alliances.

PRESS FUND

Last Thursday morning ABC Radio played the old song "What a Difference a Day Makes". And it certainly did! Some say that the botched attempt to get Kevin Rudd returned as Prime Minister has ensured that the Liberal/National Coalition, led by the ultra-odious Tony Abbott, will win office in the September federal elections. But no! A week's a long time in politics, and the elections are six months away, so we've got an excellent chance of helping to beat the conservatives and return good left and progressive candidates. But that will require plenty of hard work, starting right now - and preferably with a Press Fund contribution for the next edition. Many thanks to this week's contributors, and let's hear from more of you next week, because we really need your support:

NS \$30, "Round Figure" \$10

This week's total: \$40 Progressive total: \$990

Obituary

Pauline Mitchell



The Guardian deeply regrets to announce the sudden death of Comrade Pauline Mitchell in Melbourne on March 20 age 82. Pauline is widely known, loved and respected for her work in the peace movement, media and women's movement.

She recounted in an interview recorded on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Campaign for International Co-operation and Disarmament (CICD) that she first became involved in politics and decided to join the peace movement when she realised that her taxes were funding armaments.

Pauline is famous as the person who first alerted Australians to the establishment of the United States secret military intelligence base at Pine Gap.

In the 1950s Pauline lived in Alice Springs, working for the local paper the *Centralian Advocate*. She noticed the arrival of US Air Force engineers who brought a large caravan bristling with electronic equipment, a caravan that was out of bounds to Australian government employees. US planes were landing at Alice Springs airport with high ranking military personnel and heavy equipment, tractors and cranes on them. A friend told Pauline he was blindfolded one day and taken out to the US base to fix some equipment, then blindfolded and brought back to town again.

When Pauline moved to

Melbourne in the late '50s, she could not find any reference in any papers about the presence of the American military in Australia. But eventually she did get the story out through the Melbourne Unitarian Church.

For over 50 years Pauline was a leading member, worker, organiser and for a number of years secretary of CICD. Established in 1959, CICD is Australia's longest serving peace organisation. Pauline was an influential leader and activist in the peace movement as well as being a political leader, maintaining the CICD's strong working class connections and anti-imperialist political line.

Pauline's Sunday morning broadcast on community Radio 3CR was one of the first programs that went to air when it was established. *Alternative News* has been produced every week since 1976 till the Sunday before her death. It had a large loyal audience of people who looked forward to her well researched and down to earth weekly news and commentary on politics, peace and social justice, using material from publications and organisations from around the world.

You only needed to listen to one of Pauline's programs to realise how much information and facts could be fitted into 15 minutes in a presentation that was so clear and easily understood.

Pauline was in the CPA and

became a foundation member of the SPA and then the CPA following the Party reclaiming the name. She remained a loyal member until her death. She never flaunted her Party membership but her allegiance was well known and her commitment to an anti-imperialist position in the peace movement was always rock solid.

Pauline was one of those Communists who, despite the many struggles and strains, dedicated herself 100 percent to the people's cause for peace and social justice.

She continued to work in the CICD office three or four days a week up until the age of 81. Last year she could no longer climb the stairs at Trades Hall in Melbourne. But even then she continued to come into meetings and she always did the radio program.

The Communist Party of Australia and *The Guardian* send condolences to Pauline's family and her many comrades and friends. Her magnificent contribution to the struggle for peace and socialism is her great legacy. She will be sadly missed.

Pauline's final contribution was that she donated her body to Melbourne University.

There will be no public funeral but a memorial service is being organised. Details will be put on the CPA website when available – www.cpa.org.au. A memorial article will appear in *The Guardian* following this event. ☘

Attempted suicide on Nauru

Although some initial meetings between Tamil asylum seekers and advisers have begun, the Nauru detention camp last week remained in turmoil.

Around 20 people remain on hunger strike and another Iranian asylum seeker attempted to hang himself. He had been cut down and taken to the camp medical centre but his condition is unknown.

Meanwhile, the final one of the 10 asylum seekers who had stitched their lips together on February 19 has been transferred to the Australian mainland.

The March 20 edition of the *Nauru Bulletin* reports that five Nauruan "refugee status determination officers" have been flown to Melbourne for further training with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

Afghan man to be returned to Manus Island

Asylum seekers at Villawood detention centre have serious concerns at moves to transfer an Afghan man to Manus Island. The Afghan asylum seekers in his 50s recently had surgery for a double hernia, but had been placed in isolation in preparation for his removal. "He is not well enough to be sent back," Villawood asylum seekers told the Refugee Action Coalition, "He cannot sit or walk properly."

The Refugee Action Coalition is calling on the PNG government to prevent the Australian government returning asylum seekers to Manus Island.

"Manus Island is no fit place for any asylum seeker and the future of the detention camp is in serious doubt. Nineteen people were transferred to the Australian mainland last week because the medical facilities there are completely inadequate. We hope that the PNG government's halt on further transfers to Manus Island will be extended to the Afghan man in Villawood," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

The constitutional challenge by PNG Opposition leader Belden Namah, to Australia's Manus Island detention camp, will have a further directions hearing in the PNG Supreme Court on March 27. ☘

Public housing crisis as tenants face eviction

Peter Mac

Hundreds of public housing tenants face eviction from their homes in Sydney's Miller's Point, Waterloo and Redfern. The NSW Land and Housing Corporation is currently preparing an "assessment" of public housing in these suburbs, with forced evictions the inevitable result if government privatisation plans are realised.

Speaking about the government's approach to public housing residents, Sydney Greens Councillor Irene Doutney declared: "... they go in and do this community consultation but all the time they are just assessing what they will get rid of, what they will demolish and what they will sell.

"You already have these high-rise [private] developments being planned for Redfern and Waterloo right on the side of the area [where] all this public housing sits. Developers are not going to want to put these sites here for a wealthy market if they are being overlooked by public housing.

"In Redfern and Waterloo the proposal was to remove 700 public housing dwellings but where are these people supposed to go? The majority of these people are good members of the community and they are just being brushed aside. We have over 50,000 people waiting to get into public housing as it is."

The "Hands off Glebe" community group has also been campaigning for the government to construct a mix of public and private housing on a vacant site in that historic suburb. The government resumed decision-making power for the site from the Council, and created an advisory panel of specially selected councillors and government appointees.

Their decision constituted a partial victory for the community group. The proposed development includes public housing for pensioners.

However, this consists of a single isolated building of meagre finish, painfully different and visually stamped as the poor relation of its neighbours.

And now the Victorian government wants to resume parts of the landscaped areas around Melbourne's 1960s high-rise flats for further development!

History repeated – but with nasty variations

The nation's first public housing was located predominantly in the inner city, because that's where the majority of the population, including those most in need of housing, were living. Construction began late in the 19th century, and after the First World War the delightful and innovative little Sydney suburb of Daceyville was built for returned servicemen.

After World War II an appalling housing shortage was met by government acquisition and demolition of inner city blocks, to facilitate construction of multi-storey groups of flats. The policy was welcomed enthusiastically by the construction industry.

In a 1950 planning scheme most of the dwellings in Sydney's historic inner city suburbs, including Woolloomooloo, Paddington, Surry Hills, Redfern, Chippendale, Annandale and Balmain were officially classified as "sub-standard housing" and earmarked for eventual demolition.

The site density of public housing projects was maximised to reduce land acquisition costs. Smart design was not considered a high priority for the working class, and the resultant buildings were often huge, impersonal and appallingly ugly.

However, the subsequent relocation of secondary industry from the inner city and the spread of outer-suburban housing developments



The Redfern Towers.

resulted in a sharply renewed demand for inner city real estate. This put the interests of private property developers at odds with the official policy of constructing not-for-profit inner city public housing.

The ability of the private sector to adversely influence public housing policy was dramatically illustrated in the 1960s, when the Victorian Housing Commission, which had built some of Australia's first high-rise public housing, succeeded in getting 284 reluctant working class residents of the inner suburb of Carlton to vacate their small single-storey terraces.

The Commission paid them a total of \$300,000, but subsequently decided to sell the properties to a private company at a loss of \$100,000, (at that time a huge sum). The company then demolished the terraces and built Carinya Gardens, a complex of dwellings which they sold on the open market for a handsome profit.

No one on the Commission's waiting list gained one of the new homes. The former residents, who could only afford to buy new homes in the outer suburbs, exchanged very brief journeys to work for greatly extended journeys, while the

newly-arrived and wealthier Carlton residents enjoyed the convenience of living adjacent to the city and local industry.

In the 1970s many of the appalling practices that had bedevilled public housing design were abandoned after community resistance and the union green bans prevented mass clearances.

The very sensitive adaptation of Sydney's Woolloomooloo as a mix of private and public housing, with careful conservation of historic buildings and no visually-stigmatised public housing monoliths, showed the way for vastly improved urban planning. But then the rot set in.

The homeward path

The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) has pointed out that adequate housing is a fundamental human right, that public housing is intended to meet the needs of the majority of the population, and is not just a welfare initiative. The provision of public housing benefits the entire community, apart from private landlords and property developers, by driving down open-market house rental and purchase prices.

More than 176,000 Australian households are currently on public housing waiting lists. But now the very existence of public housing is under threat, because governments in NSW and other states aren't interested in public housing as a social asset but rather as real estate of potentially huge value for the private sector.

The logical extension of that mindset is for the state governments to sell off their entire public housing stock, and to provide housing applicants with rental subsidies to help them pay market rental rates – in short, to revert to the odious old system of charitable handouts to the poor.

Nor is the Commonwealth likely to intervene, because under the Commonwealth Housing agreement responsibility for public housing has been allocated to the states.

The tactics of the various state governments are being resisted by community groups and left-wing and progressive parties. But providing an effective plan for public housing requires a major change in the political makeup of the state and federal governments. And it's up to the public to make that happen. ✪

The provision of public housing benefits the entire community by driving down open-market house rental and purchase prices.

Pete's Corner



Sydney

Global Day of Action on Military Spending

Monday April 15 4:00pm - 6:00pm
Outside of Health Ministers Office (Tanya Plibersek MP)
150 Broadway, opposite Broadway shops

People all over the world will again come together for the Global Day of Action on Military Spending. We urge you to join us. In 2011, global military spending surged to US\$1.74 trillion. In Australia military spending is currently \$25 billion a year and rising. Given the crises facing the planet – economic, environmental, health, food – we must create a global movement to shift this money to human needs. There are millions of individuals who support this point of view. Over 80% of Australians don't want more of their taxes spent on the military.

Please bring your own placards, leaflets, etc. We will supply balloons and pumps and paper for paper planes, plus stickers for your balloons and planes. We will also bring marines and drones on sticks.

Enquiries: Hannah on 0418 668 098

A system based on theft

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The economy of Cyprus, with a population of just over one million, was in tatters following the 1974 Turkish invasion and then occupation of part of its territory which continues today. It could not rely on agriculture for its prosperity. It developed two pillars – tourism and banking – and became a highly successful international financial centre and tax haven with a 10 percent tax rate and high interest rates on deposits.

Cyprus has attracted a large number of investors from Russia, the Middle East and more recently Chinese are beginning to invest there. As an additional inducement, investors can obtain Cypriot citizenship and hence a passport into the EU by meeting certain investment requirements.

Germany is developing Frankfurt as an international financial centre, with the aim of replacing the City of London. It is out to destroy the Cypriot banking system and economy so as to draw investors to the seemingly more stable economy and financial system there.

The collapse of Cyprus's banking system would be catastrophic for the economy. Cyprus has a GDP of around €20 billion (US\$25 billion). Cyprus relies on the banking system for almost 50 percent of its GDP and is now being told to raise the equivalent of 29 percent of its GDP overnight in cash or face economic ruin.

The Laiki Bank and Bank of Cyprus are on the brink of bankruptcy. They took a hit due to their exposure to Greek debt and are being kept afloat by emergency credit made available by the ECB. The banks saw 70 percent wiped off the value of their large holdings in Greek bonds during the Greek financial crisis, amounting to €4.5 billion in losses.

State theft

The deal sets a dangerous precedent. People in Ireland, Portugal, Greece and Spain who have already been subjected to harsh austerity measures in Troika bailouts are rightly asking if, when the next round of

bailouts comes, they too will see their savings raided.

Past bailouts were paid for by the people through the imposition of pension cuts, sackings, wage reductions, loss of services and the sell-off of public assets. This raid on bank accounts is a far more direct imposition which is immediately felt by those whose savings are raided. Restrictions on withdrawals and cash only transactions are hitting hard. Workers cannot draw on their wages, parents cannot buy milk for their babies, small businesses cannot do business, etc.

The previous AKEL-led government was not prepared to accept such terms. It seems the EU waited until its defeat in the elections last month so that it could deal with the new Democratic Rally (DISY) government which is all too willing to sell its people and economy down the drain. Rumours abound that certain figures had relocated their savings offshore in advance of the Troika deal.

The Troika gave the government until Monday this week to find a means of raising Cyprus's contribution to the bailout of the banks.

"Acceptance of the Troika's unprecedented demands, which violate decisions of EU bodies, would lead us to a vicious circle of new even more painful demands. It is obvious to every European citizen that the dominant circles of the European Union chose to move in a vindictive way towards Cyprus, at the same time when they caress Turkey – a country that has been for almost four decades occupying illegally part of the Cypriot territory," AKEL General Secretary Andros Kyprianou said in a statement on March 21.

"It is evident that the Eurogroup took a decision mainly on political criteria and not on strictly economic criteria. The aim is to enslave the Republic of Cyprus economically and to exercise political domination over it. If we were to allow something of the kind, we have no doubt whatsoever, that it would have had extremely negative consequences against the



efforts we exert for the solution of the Cyprus problem and the use of our natural wealth in benefit of the people of Cyprus," Mr Kyprianou said.

The "Cyprus problem" is a reference to the illegal occupation by Turkey of the northern 37 percent of the island since 1974. Cyprus is also of importance to NATO, Britain and the US in particular, with two large British bases on its soil as well as the occupied territory with its Turkish military presence. It is strategically located on the edge of Europe, northern Africa and the Middle East.

Extortion

The Cypriot government unsuccessfully sought assistance from Russia last week. Russia, which is involved in a joint oil pipeline project to carry oil from Siberia through Germany to the rest of Europe, does not appear to be willing to upset Germany. At the same time it is interested in the offshore liquid gas reserves off the coast of Cyprus and may assist following settlement with the Troika.

The Cypriot government passed legislation on Friday for the restructuring the banking system, separating good and bad loans between the Bank of Cyprus and the Laiki Bank respectively. Greece's Piraeus Bank

looks set to take over the branches of Cypriot banks in Greece. This would safeguard deposits of Greek citizens but weaken the Cypriot banks.

The government is setting up an Investment Solidarity Fund based on pension funds, future gas revenue and state assets. This could be used by the government for emergency bond issues.

Banks have limited ATM withdrawals to a maximum of €100-120 a day, to prevent the sort of run on banks that precipitated the Great Depression. Other restrictions on banking still remain.

The restrictions on access to funds has set a dangerous precedent, Cyprus is being used as a guinea pig. Foreign investors will turn to a safer haven. The damage will have been done. The people of Cyprus – workers, pensioners, unemployed – will pay the price.

People's solution

The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) has expressed its solidarity with the people of Cyprus, "against the blackmail and the barbaric anti-people measures imposed on them by the EU, the IMF with the complicity of the bourgeois governments, including the Cypriot and the Greek ones, in order to safeguard the interests of capital." ★

"The Greek people, the Cypriot people and the other peoples of Europe can and must make their mark on the developments. They should reject the blackmail of capital, the EU the IMF. They should not line up behind any imperialist power. They should follow the road for the disengagement from the EU and the imperialist alliances," the KKE's statement concluded.

AKEL issued a warning that it "is not going to consent to measures that will condemn the whole of the people of Cyprus, and especially the workers, the unemployed, the young generation or the pensioners to poverty and misery. AKEL is not going to consent to Cyprus taking the disastrous path that other peoples of the European South have found themselves in."

AKEL is insisting that a solution must be found outside of the Troika framework, based on its own forces with the support of countries that have reasons to help it. It has presented the government with proposals which are centred around the issuing of State Solidarity Bonds of 10-year length.

It has called on the political and social forces of Cyprus to rally their forces in order to build and forge a front of resistance against anti-people policies. ★

Recall Records workers maintain tactics and defiance

Richard Titelius

On March 21, the picket by workers, fellow unionists and community activists at Recall Records in Malaga, Western Australia, ground slowly into its fourth week.

The eight workers at Recall Records, starting to feel the absence of their regular income, and with the intransigence of their employers not giving them much cause for an appropriate resolution of the dispute, decided to present themselves for work on Monday 25 March. They are cautious that their employer will allow them to return to work and have expressed a belief they may be locked out until the dispute is resolved by arbitration as the matter has now had its first hearing before the Fair Work Commission in Sydney on March 18.

The Federal Court injunction against the National Union of Workers and the Maritime Union of Australia had a further hearing on March 15 without any significant progress or developments and was adjourned further, possibly to await

developments elsewhere including the Fair Work Commission.

The workers are adamant of the rightness of their case as there can be no argument that the employer cannot afford to pay the extra three percent over three years which the workers are seeking. The employer has deliberately let the dispute carry on for so long and make the company lose money and they have paid for surveillance and security not only at the Malaga warehouse of Recall Records but also at their warehouses at Kewdale and other locations within the Perth metropolitan area.

For the financial year ending June 2012, Brambles Limited, the global services giant which owns Recall Records, announced a 16 percent increase in operating profit of US\$939 million. This indicates that the company has another agenda in deciding to delay resolution of the conflict and offering such a mediocre increase to their Western Australian workers in Malaga. If the eight employees at the Malaga warehouse were to be successful

in gaining the 12 percent over three years which they are seeking (instead of the nine percent being offered by Recall Records) there would be a flow on to the Recall Records workers at other warehouses in Perth. This has ensured that the workers have given their support in a number of ways to the workers at the Malaga warehouse including helping to add to the numbers on the picket.

The dispute in essence comes down to one of union busting – in this case the Nation Union Of Workers who have stood by their members at the picket and let the democratic will of the members guide them in the actions they taken.

The Communist Party of Australia stands by and defends the actions and rights of these workers for fair pay and conditions and against the coercion and unfair tactics of their multinational exploitative employer.

NB: As *The Guardian* went to press the workers were back at work with a further meeting set down for Thursday. ★



A community rises up against the corporate powers

The Queensland Liberal National Party (LNP) Transport Minister released the government's South East Bus Review on Thursday March 7. It was expected that some services would be axed and money reinvested into the bus services to ease congestion. But the massive elimination of services and other cuts to public bus services planned for south east Queensland were beyond belief. The Newman LNP government planned to eliminate 111 bus services and make major changes to the other remaining 230 services.

Many suburbs would be left without any public transport. Nursing homes, hospitals, sheltered workshops, schools, universities and whole suburbs with low income housing would lose their bus services. It did not matter that the residents of Inala, for instance, lost access to their local Princess Alexandra Hospital or that a bus journey of less than two kilometres from the railway station at Brunswick Street in the Valley (specifically refurbished as a super Station) no longer had a bus route to the Royal Brisbane Hospital. Or that services from the city to the Valley would be discontinued.

More people would be forced onto the roads in their cars with no alternative available. Others would simply lose their access to regular activities and medical and other services.

The response from the public was amazing. Rail Bus and Tramways Union's (RTBU) Bus Division members were massively active in informing the public of the changes. Their campaign slogan is "Save Our Services - Stand Up For Brisbane". The union launched its own Facebook site and distributed leaflets and other material explaining the implications of the Newman government's plans.

People were furious. It meant the loss of a vital service.

Brisbane City Council's buses carry 80 million passengers a year - compared with rail's 52 million. With an injection of funding there is scope to expand its services and remove even more cars off the road.

The plan was drawn up by TransLink which is an entity created by the former state Labor government to operate and co-ordinate bus services in south-east Queensland. "It is a distorted realisation of the then Public Transport Union's demand for a south-east Queensland Transit Authority to own and operate buses in south-east Queensland," Bus Division secretary of the RTBU told *The Guardian*. (The former PTU is now the RTBU).

"When Labor created the TransLink it was after the union had successfully stopped the implementation of plans to corporatise and then privatise council services. It was designed to 'keep the council at arms length' as Transport Minister David Hamill put it. It treats the council simply as a contractor to the state government."

Mr Matters said the plan would cost jobs and require a massive retraining of all bus drivers for route changes. He described it as "a bastardisation of the transport system as a prelude to privatisation."

The government gave the public two weeks in which to make submissions to the proposal. The response from an angry public was so great that the TransLink website kept crashing and the time frame had to be extended.

The RTBU made a request to the Brisbane City Council for David Matters to address a council session about TransLink's plans. He did this on March 19 and received unanimous support from both LNP and Labor councillors. An unprecedented round

of applause greeted his speech and a reply from LNP Transport Chairman Peter Matic acknowledged the union for its work, for its members and for the community in Brisbane. He expressed a desire to "work hand-in-hand" to move forward on the issue.

The week before the LNP-controlled Brisbane City Council, under massive pressure from the public, unanimously passed a resolution calling on the government "to immediately reconsider the proposed route changes that will have a significant impact on Brisbane residents, in particular, seniors, the infirm and those with mobility issues."

State Transport Minister Scott Emerson first admitted that perhaps TransLink had got it wrong. Then as public opposition continued to mount, on March 21, Emerson announced that the Brisbane City Council would be responsible for deciding on what would be done. He made it clear that the state government would not increase its funding for bus services.

LNP Lord Mayor Graham Quirk declared the review was dead and informed the union that the bus service was not "broke". The Council is still doing a review of bus services and there is the risk that TransLink may pressure to make cuts to services.

It is a great win, demonstrating the power of combined trade union and community action. While there is a great deal of elation, the government will not have given up, nor will those corporate forces who were seeking to benefit from the eventual privatisation of services.

The RTBU is calling a public meeting in King George Square on April 16, at 12 noon, to thank people for their support and to continue their campaign in support of a public transport system which is based on providing a service to the community. ✪

MUA calls for solidarity in fight for workplace safety

The Maritime Union of Australia has been campaigning for a National Stevedoring Code of Practice (NSCOP) for over five years to deal with the spate of fatalities that have occurred across the Australian waterfront. The union is up against strong opposition from key employers who are trying to prevent improvements to safety standards on the waterfront even though fatalities continue to occur in the industry.

Safe Work Australia met recently to consider the Code of Practice and voted 8-1 to put the code out for six weeks of public comment.

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the stevedoring employers have launched a last ditch effort to bomb the code of practice. They have been campaigning on behalf of the stevedoring bosses behind the scenes in an attempt to block or undermine the code.

They are attempting to:

- weaken the hatchman provisions which is a key safety position (the hatchman is the eyes and ears of a crane driver);

- exclude the code from applying to stevedoring activities on board ships;
- exclude the forthcoming cranes code of practice from applying to ships' cranes, and
- downgrade the code to "guidance material", giving it less regulatory force.

Desperate to avoid a safety code of practice, the employers have lobbied The Office of Best Practice Regulation (OBPR) which has issued a requirement for a Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) to take place. This means that Code of Practice will effectively be costed as a ploy to prevent its implementation. The OBPR comes under the Department of Finance and Deregulation.

In other words they are trying to put a price on safety, and demonstrate that protecting the lives of workers would cost "too much" and eat into their sacred profits.

The MUA has launched a nationally coordinated day of action against the ACCI and its state branches on Tuesday March 26,

with protests aimed at ACCI being called across the country.

The MUA is formulating a submission to Safe Work Australia that argues the case for a strong safety code for all stevedores and is calling for solidarity in their campaign from other trade unions, workers and members of the community.

"Given these attacks, we need to escalate the campaign to get a code of practice by the demonstration of a massive show of support," MUA assistant national secretary Warren Smith told *The Guardian*. "We are organising to develop a huge response for the code during the week beginning April 2. The RIS process is the result of employer lobbying and the bosses have again successfully held up the code, this time so they can cost worker's lives."

The Code of Practice will formally go out for public comment after the RIS process. The union opposes a Regulatory Impact Statement but will continue to build as much support as possible for its submission on the Code of Practice. The CPA will be supporting the



right of wharfies and every worker to come home safely and urges all CPA members and supporters to sign on in support of the MUA's campaign for a safer waterfront.

The last time the MUA called for public comment in support of the code, MUA members and supporters responded with a massive 1,100 individual written submissions in support of the code of practice. It was the most submissions

Safe Work Australia had ever received, and it made a huge difference. This time the MUA is aiming for 20,000 individuals and organisations to sign on in support of the MUA submission supporting the right to a strong safety code of practice on the waterfront.

The Guardian will update members and supporters when the MUA's online submission process is up and running. ✪

The Iraq War: Ten years of US crimes against humanity

Sara Flounders

The corporate media in the US play a powerful role in preparation for imperialist war. They play an even more insidious role in rewriting the history of US wars and obstructing the purpose of US wars. They are totally intertwined with US military, oil and banking corporations. In every war, this enormously powerful institution known as the “fourth estate” attempts, as the public relations arm of corporate dominance, to justify imperialist plunder and overwhelm all dissent.

The corporate media's reminiscences and evaluations in the week of the 10th anniversary of the Iraq War, which began March 19, 2003, are a stark reminder of their criminal complicity in the war.

In the many articles there is barely any mention of the hundreds of news stories that totally saturated the media for months leading to the Pentagon onslaught. The news coverage in 2003 was wholly unsubstantiated, with wild fabrications of Iraqi secret “weapons of mass destruction”, ominous nuclear threats, germ warfare programs, purchases of yellow cake uranium, nerve gas labs and the racist demonisation of Saddam Hussein as the greatest threat to humanity. All of this is now glossed over and forgotten.

No weapons were ever found in Iraq, but no US official was ever charged with fraud. Heroes such as Private B Manning, however, face life in prison for releasing documents exposing the extent of some these premeditated crimes.

Today, in the popular histories, the barest mention is made of the real reason for the war: the determination to impose regime change on Iraq in order to secure US corporate control and domination of the vast oil and gas resources of the region. Iraq was to be an example to every country attempting independent development that the only choice was complete submission or total destruction.

Now it is no longer even a political debate that the US invasion and occupation of Iraq were a howling disaster and major imperialist blunder for US strategic interests. Despite every determination to occupy Iraq with 14 permanent military bases, the US army of occupation was forced to withdraw in the face of fierce Iraqi national resistance.

Bush stood on the deck of the US aircraft carrier *Lincoln* on May Day 2003, with a “Mission Accomplished” banner behind him, to declare the war over. But what the US, puffed up by its imperialist arrogance, did not foresee was that the resistance had just begun.

US strategists, so full of conceit about their powerful weapons, ignored the message displayed on signs, billboards and headlines of every Iraqi newspaper. It was even the headline of an English-language newspaper there, when this reporter was in Iraq with a solidarity delegation just a few weeks before the US “shock and awe” onslaught.

The oft-repeated slogan was: “What the jungles of Vietnam were to their resistance, the cities of Iraq will be for us.”

The Iraqi government opened the warehouses and distributed six months of food rations to the population in advance of the war. Each package bore the sign: “Remember to feed a resistance fighter.” Small arms, explosives and simple instructions for making improvised explosive devices were publicly distributed.

Ultimately US corporate power was defeated in Iraq due to its inability to be a force for human progress on any level. It was incapable of reconstruction.

The overpowering force of US weaponry was able to destroy the proudest accomplishments of past decades of Iraqi sovereignty and inflame old sectarian wounds. But it was unable to defeat the Iraqi resistance or even gain a vote on a status of forces agreement in an Iraqi Parliament that the US planners created.

US media non-coverage

In covering the 10th anniversary, the same media that sold the war 24/7 recount the criminal

decision to invade and occupy Iraq as just mistaken intelligence or wrong information. At the same time that they wring their hands over lost opportunities and lack of foresight, they give a passing salute to the 4,448 US soldiers who died and the 32,221 wounded. At least 3,400 US contractors died as well, a number barely mentioned or underreported.

More than 1.1 million US soldiers served in Iraq. The National Council on Disabilities says up to 40 percent of veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury.

The US invasion of Iraq was the most widely and closely reported war in military history. Yet the enormity of the crimes committed against the Iraqi people, the hundreds of thousands of silent deaths from lack of medical infrastructure, the millions of refugees, the environmental catastrophe, the radioactive and chemical waste left behind, were ignored in coverage then, and today are barely noted.

At the start of the war in March 2003, 775 reporters and photographers were registered and travelling as embedded journalists. The number grew to thousands. These reporters signed contracts with the military that limited what they were allowed to report on.

So it should come as no surprise that what is completely missing from coverage is any responsibility for the calculated destruction of Iraq, the massive corruption and systematic looting, or the conscious policy of inflaming sectarian hatred and violence as a tactic to demoralise the resistance.

Statistics cannot convey the human loss. One out of every four Iraqi children under 18 lost one or both parents. In 2007, there were 5 million Iraqi orphans, according to official government statistics. By 2008, only 50 percent of primary-school-age children were attending classes. Iraq was reduced from having the lowest rate of illiteracy in the region to having the highest. Women suffered the greatest losses in education, professions, childcare, nutrition and their own safety in the brutal occupation.

According to figures of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, there are now 2.7 million internally displaced Iraqis and 2.2 million refugees, mostly in neighbouring states. More than one-fourth of Iraq's population is dead, disabled or dislocated refugees due to the years of US occupation. This is hardly liberation.

Missing in the many 10th anniversary evaluations is the essential historical context. The 2003 war was a continuation of the 1991 war to destroy Iraq as a sovereign nation in control of its own resources. There is barely a mention of the targeted destruction in 1991 of drinking water, sanitation, sewage, irrigation, communications and pharmaceutical industry facilities, as well as the civilian electric grid and basic food supply. Erased today is all mention of 13 years of US/UN starvation sanctions imposed on Iraq from 1990 to 2003, which caused the deaths, through hunger and disease, of more than 1 million Iraqis, more than half of them children.

Despite the horrendous toll, the failure of US/UN-imposed sanctions to create a total collapse in Iraq compelled US corporate power to opt for a military invasion to impose regime change.

Second anniversary of wars in Libya, Syria

Also missing from evaluations of the US war on Iraq is any mention that this is a week of two other war anniversaries.

March 19 is the second anniversary of the US/NATO war on Libya – the seven months of bombing that destroyed the modern, beautiful cities, schools, hospitals and cultural centres built with nationalised oil and gas of Libya. The NATO operation assassinated the Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi in 2011 and laid waste to the whole country. But it has not yet secured a stable source of US profits.

March 15 is the second anniversary of the continuing US/NATO effort to destabilize and utterly destroy modern, secular Syria.



Despite US/NATO backing and funding from the corrupt feudal monarchies of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, diplomatic support, the arming of death squads and mercenaries, and the setting up of safe havens and bases in Turkey, the Syrian government has mobilised the population and resisted another US-orchestrated regime change. The conflict is at a stalemate. The death toll has passed 70,000.

The Salvador option: mass terror

The clearest expose that the years of sectarian violence in Iraq following the US invasion, death squad assassinations, mass terror campaigns and the harrowing use of torture by trained commando units were deliberate acts sanctioned and developed at the highest level of US political and military command was published the week of March 18 in the London *Guardian*, with an accompanying BBC documentary film. The expose was based on 18 months of research.

The expose names Colonel James Steele, a retired Special Forces veteran, who was sent to Iraq by then Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to organise paramilitaries to crush the Iraqi insurgency. Another special adviser, retired Colonel James Coffman, worked alongside Steele and reported directly to General Petraeus.

This US policy of counterinsurgency was called the “Salvador option” – a terrorist model of mass killings by US-sponsored death squads. It was first applied in El Salvador in the 1980s’ heyday of resistance against a military dictatorship, resulting in an estimated 75,000 deaths. One million out of a population of 6 million became refugees.

The Salvador option is the central tenet of General David Petraeus’ often-praised counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan. *Guardian* researchers analysed a number of documents from WikiLeaks and assembled a huge number of reports of torture carried out by militias trained and supported by the US under this program. The BBC and the *Guardian* report that their requests for comment to key members of the US Senate Armed Services Committee, which could investigate the allegations, were declined or ignored.

But in Samarra, an Iraqi city where Iraqis were tortured in a library and that the BBC documentary focuses on, residents held mass demonstrations against the government and planned to set up big screens in the central square to show the whole film.

“Shock and awe” = terror

From the very beginning of war preparation, US plans were calculated to use the most extreme forms of terror on the Iraqi people to force submission to US domination. “Shock and awe” is terrorism by another name.

“Shock and awe” is technically known as rapid dominance. By its very definition, it’s a

military doctrine that uses overwhelming power and spectacular displays of force to paralyse and destroy the will to fight. Written by Harlan K Ullman and James P Wade in 1996, the doctrine is a product of the US National Defence University, developed to exploit the “superior technology, precision engagement, and information dominance” of the United States.

This well-known military strategy requires the capability to disrupt “means of communication, transportation, food production, water supply, and other aspects of infrastructure”. According to these criminal military strategists, the aim is to achieve a level of national shock akin to the effect of dropping nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

War profiteers

The looting and pillage of Iraq on a grand scale were also planned from the very beginning. It was hardly an accident, a mistaken policy or the fog of war.

The official who had total authority in Iraq immediately following “shock and awe” destruction, the chief of the occupation authority in Iraq, L Paul Bremer III, enacted 100 orders which turned Iraq overnight into a giant US-dominated capitalist free market. The 100 orders guaranteed 100 percent foreign investor ownership of Iraqi assets, the right to expropriate all profits, unrestricted imports, and long-term 30- to 40-year deals and leases. In the official turnover to Iraqi sovereignty, these colonial orders were to stay in place.

Billions were stolen outright from Iraq. According to Dirk Adriaensens of the BRussells Tribunal, US administrators, as the occupation “authority”, seized all Iraqi assets and funds all over the world – totalling US\$13 billion. They confiscated all Iraqi funds in the US (US\$3 billion). They enforced transfers of funds from the Iraqi UBS account (Swiss bank) to the US forces. They demanded and received from the UN the accumulated oil-for-food program funds up to March 2003 (about US\$21 billion).

In the first weeks of the occupation, US troops got hold of about US\$6 billion as well as US\$4 billion from the Central Bank and other Iraqi banks. They collected this money in special government buildings in Baghdad.

Where did all these funds go? Instead of setting up an account in the Iraqi Central Bank for depositing these funds, as well as the oil export funds, the occupation authorities set up the “Development Fund for Iraq” account in the American Central Bank, New York Branch, where all financial operations are carried out in top secrecy. Around US\$40 billion is “missing” from a post-Gulf War fund.

According to the BBC, on June 10, 2008, another US\$ 23 billion in Western aid funds to Iraq were lost, stolen or “not properly accounted for”. Tales abounded of millions of dollars in US\$100 bills that went missing from skids at airports and of deliveries of pizza boxes and duffle bags full of cash.

Israel – State of systematic injustice



According to BusinessPundit.com's list of the 25 most vicious war profiteers, these stolen funds were just the beginning of the theft. Major US corporations reported record profits. In the years 2003 to 2006, profits and earnings doubled for Exxon/Mobil Corp and ChevronTexaco.

Halliburton's KBR, Inc division, which was directly connected to Vice President Cheney, billed government agencies to the tune of US\$17.2 billion in Iraq war-related revenue from 2003 to 2006 alone.

The cost of war

Nobel laureate Joseph E Stiglitz calculated the cost of the Iraq war, including the many hidden costs, in his 2008 book, "The Three Trillion Dollar War". He concluded: "There is no such thing as a free lunch, and there is no such thing as a free war. The Iraq adventure has seriously weakened the US economy, whose woes now go far beyond loose mortgage lending. You can't spend US\$3 trillion – yes, \$3 trillion – on a failed war abroad and not feel the pain at home."

Stiglitz lists what even one of these trillions could have paid for: 8 million housing units, or 15 million public school teachers, or health care for 530 million children for a year, or scholarships to universities for 43 million students. Three trillion could have fixed America's so-called Social Security problem for half a century.

According to a *Christian Science Monitor* report, when ongoing medical treatment, replacement vehicles and other costs are included, the total cost of the Iraq war is projected to cost US\$4 trillion. (October 25, 2012)

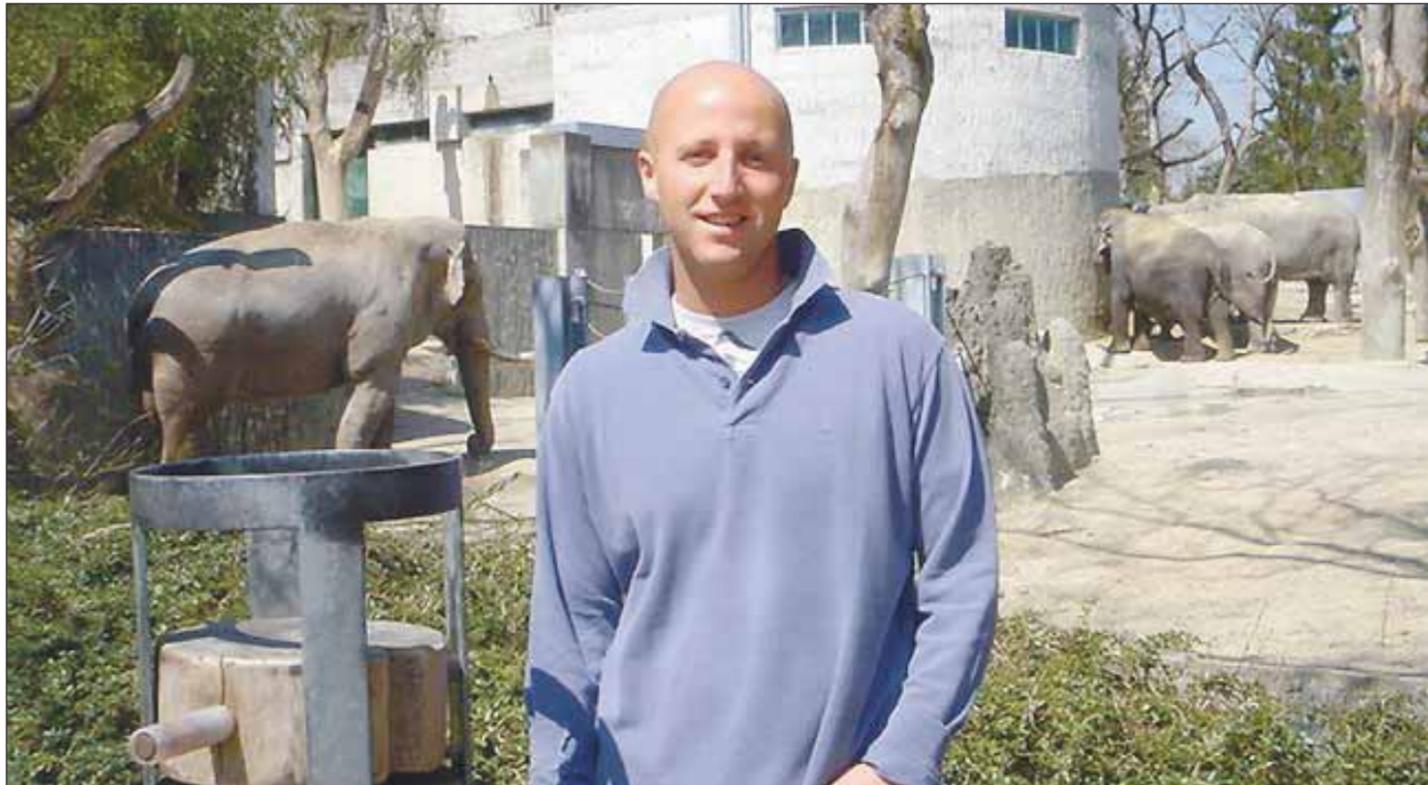
Peoples' resistance & the anti-war movement

The corporate media play another important role in rewriting history. Their aim is always to do everything possible to marginalise and disparage the awareness of millions of people in their own power.

While the "shock and awe" attack of March 19, 2003, is still described today, it is rare in the major media to see any reference to the truly massive demonstrations of opposition to the impending war that drew millions of people into the streets. It is projected that before the war, more than 36 million people in more than 3,000 demonstrations mobilised internationally to oppose it – in the two coldest winter months. This was unprecedented.

In Iraq, despite the overwhelming force of "shock and awe," the planned use of sectarian war and mass use of death squads – despite the destruction of every accomplishment built by past generations, along with the destruction of schools and the confiscation of resources – the US war failed on every count. Despite horrendous conditions, the Iraqi resistance drove the occupation out of Iraq. This is an accomplishment of great significance to people all around the world.

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Ben Zygiel.

Steven Katsineris

The recent media revelations of the Israeli justice system's treatment of Ben Zygiel, who was known as Prisoner X, has further exposed to the world the charade that is the carefully manufactured image of Israel as a supposedly democratic and liberal state. Many politically aware people already know about Israeli human rights abuses, massacres and other crimes, but the almost total lack of reporting in the mainstream media of the true nature of Israel has kept some people in the dark about the immorality of the Israeli state that lurks behind the mask.

For many people this particular incident, with its widespread exposure of the Israeli treatment of one of their own citizens has, it seems, opened their eyes to the real Israel. Israeli-Australian dual citizen Ben Zygiel, for whatever reason became a loose cannon to the Israeli secret service. Perhaps he had pangs of conscience about things he saw or knew regarding Israel's sordid intelligence activities, such as the misuse of Australian passports and the assassination of Palestinians and was going to talk and therefore had to be silenced.

Israeli authorities secretly arrested Ben Zygiel and held him in solitary confinement without charge or trial, with information about him withheld under a suppression order by the Israeli intelligence service, Shin Bett. Not even his Israeli jailers knew his name and he did not receive any visitors. He was being held in a wing of Ayalon Prison that holds only a single cell, which is cut off from the rest of the prison by double iron doors. The prisoner was placed in conditions of total isolation from the outside world, where even other prisoners could not see or hear him.

So it was that Prisoner X was ensnared in Israel's Kafkaesque security system until information about his death in 2010 and his burial in Melbourne emerged on Australian TV this year. He reportedly, according to Israel, committed suicide in a secure, suicide proof and constantly video monitored cell. Mind you, Ben Zygiel is just one example of how the Israeli military and government grossly mistreat people. There is also the case of anti-nuclear and human rights campaigner Mordechai Vanunu.

In 1986, Vanunu took a courageous moral stand against nuclear weapons. He exposed Israel's secret nuclear weapons arsenal to the world after becoming disillusioned with

his work as a technician at Dimona Nuclear Research Centre in Israel. The information revealed Israel had hundreds of advanced nuclear warheads (the sixth largest stockpile in the world). Under a policy of nuclear ambiguity, Israel still denies it has nuclear weapons.

His brave actions led to him being kidnapped by Israeli Mossad agents in Italy and transported back to Israel where he was charged with espionage and treason and convicted in a secret trial. Vanunu's abduction was a violation of Italian and international law.

For this "crime" he spent 18 years in jail, with over 11 years of it in solitary confinement in a six metre square cell under constant camera observation; conditions that Amnesty International described as "cruel, inhuman and degrading."

Vanunu was released from prison in 2004, but Israeli authorities imposed a strict military supervision order on him. Under this order he is banned from meeting journalists, supporters and foreigners, can't use phones or the Internet, go near foreign embassies, ports or airports or move address without informing the police. Vanunu is also subject to continuous police surveillance, his internal movements are confined to Jerusalem and he is forbidden to leave Israel.

These Israeli restrictions deny Vanunu's rights to freedom of expression, movement and association. Amnesty International said that as Vanunu has served his full sentence, these limitations are a breach of international law. He has been rearrested and jailed several times since 2004 for breaching these regulations.

In mid 2010 Vanunu spent another three months in solitary confinement in central Israel. He had been sentenced to serve more time for unauthorised meetings with his Norwegian girlfriend and journalists and for

travelling to Bethlehem to attend Christmas Eve mass.

While he was in prison, Amnesty International campaigned for Vanunu's unconditional release. Malcolm Smart, from AI stated, "Mordechai Vanunu should not be in prison, let alone be held in solitary confinement...to return him to such conditions now is harsh and unjustified."

Scientists say that the Israeli claims that Vanunu has any more secret details to reveal are ridiculous and this is merely a pretext for continuing to punish him. Vanunu remains committed to disarmament and anti-nuclear campaigns.

Vanunu followed his conscience and has since been imprisoned and persecuted by Israel. After being released from prison, his civil, political and human rights have been grossly abused. He has served his prison time and under international law he is entitled to his liberty.

Many respected people, including Bishop Desmond Tutu, linguist and writer Noam Chomsky, peace activist Mairead Maguire, Yoko Ono and the late playwright Harold Pinter have supported his just struggle for real freedom.

Just like Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi, Vanunu is a political prisoner living in captivity and under constant risk of further detention in prison. He has served his prison time and is entitled to a life free of Israel's repressive rules.

Mordechai Vanunu's plight needs to be publicised and for concerned people to do whatever you can do to support him. Demand that Israel respect his basic human rights, lift the unjust regulations and give Vanunu genuine freedom, including the freedom to travel and to leave Israel.

As Malcolm Smart put it: "Mordechai Vanunu is a prisoner of conscience." ✪

For many people this particular incident, with its widespread exposure of the Israeli treatment of one of their own citizens has, it seems, opened their eyes to the real Israel.

Peace prizes awarded to war criminals

Timothy Alexander Guzman

French President François Hollande was awarded UNESCO's Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize for "valuable contribution to peace and stability in Africa" according to the United Nations website: www.un.org. Former Mozambique President Joaquim Chissano chaired the Jury of the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize. He stated that "After analyzing the global situation, it is Africa that held the attention of the Jury with the various threats affecting the continent" with instability affecting Northern Mali by various Al-Qaeda elements created by the west, gave France an opportunity to invade the former colony.

"Having assessed the dangers and the repercussions of the situation on Africa, and on Mali in particular, as well as on the rest of the world, the Jury appreciated the solidarity shown by France to the peoples of Africa."

Does appreciating "the solidarity" shown by France mean killing hundreds of Malian people since the invasion? France has killed many civilians; that includes children.

The human rights organisation Amnesty International has accused French forces of killing civilians since there was "evidence that at least five civilians, including three children, were killed in an airstrike." UNESCO's Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize is similar to the Nobel Peace Prize whose past winners were known for war crimes.

Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, the notorious war criminal responsible for an estimated three to four million deaths during the Vietnam War, including the bombing of Cambodia, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973. He was responsible for the overthrow of President Salvador Allende of Chile and installed fascist General Augusto Pinochet who created a police state among the Chilean population.

Kissinger also was instrumental

in giving support to one of the worst dictatorships in human history, the Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot. Henry Kissinger committed many other crimes including genocide under both Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford as an "advisor" under the NSA (National Security Agency) and as Secretary of State.

President Barack Obama was also awarded the Nobel Peace Prize although he was in office less than a year. Obama has expanded Drone wars in Pakistan and Yemen, opened several US military bases in Colombia and one in Chile, he ordered a war in Libya without congressional approval, maintained a military presence in Iraq and escalated the war in Afghanistan.

Obama said that he was "Surprised" and "deeply humbled" after he received the award. He said the Nobel Peace Prize is a "Call to action", meaning more war. It is fair to say that the US government has been involved in many "actions" across the world, whether militarily or economically that have done more harm than good.

The Nobel Peace Prize has also been awarded to three Israeli Prime ministers who have systematically committed numerous crimes against Palestinians – Menachem Begin in 1978, Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres in 1994.

UNESCO's Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize also awarded Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres in 1993 along with Yasser Arafat of the Palestine Liberation Organisation for the Oslo Accords as an attempt by both sides to set up a roadmap to end the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. The Oslo Accords actually failed since Israel never ended its occupation and continued to build Israeli settlements.

The Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize in 1994 and the Nobel Prize in 2002 were both awarded to former US President Jimmy Carter. Carter supported the dictatorship of the Shah of Iran and the Somoza dictatorship of Nicaragua. He also supported Indonesia's Suharto militarily



François Hollande.

and diplomatically during the invasion and occupation of East Timor.

Under President Carter, US military aid to Suharto's military increased causing the deaths of over 200,000 East Timorese.

UNESCO's Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize and the Nobel Peace Prize are in fact an insult to world peace. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) and the Nobel Peace Prize have both proved that Western political influence dominates both prizes.

Both awards for "peace" are a propaganda tool for Western powers to wage war to establish peace. The war on Mali will expand under Hollande as this new peace award condones him and other key players such as AFRICOM waging war to establish peace. Mali will see more war because peace is on the agenda, right?

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Venezuela's ties with Africa

Olivia Kroth

At the third Summit Africa-South America (ASA) held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, 63 countries participated, including Venezuela, which was represented by the Venezuelan Foreign Minister, Elías Jaua. He read a letter written by the late President Hugo Chávez to the ASA members in Malabo. The Venezuelan president highlighted the ties between both continents, "in our continents, enough historic, political and natural resources are found to save the whole planet."

He reminded all members that Africa and South America share common roots and must cooperate closely to build a multi-polar world. He also warned African leaders that more military interventions by the ex-imperialists and neo-colonialists will very likely occur, pointing out the fate of the Jamahiriya and Mali.

President Chávez wrote that the malicious exploiters want to enrich themselves at the cost of Africans

by taking away their natural resources and waging wars on those who are not willing to comply. He urged African leaders to speed up the process of unification and to reject all interventionist activities by NATO.

"Unfortunately, since the last ASA Summit on the Island of Margarita in Venezuela (2009), the African continent has been the victim of multiple bellicose interventions and violent attacks by NATO countries. The ex-imperialists' bombardments of various African countries had the objective to hinder the process of consolidation and unification between African nations and, consequently, to undermine the union of African peoples with those of the Latin American and Caribbean region," the Venezuelan president wrote.

At the end of his letter, Hugo Chávez expressed his "fraternal love for all African brothers, who share the same anti-colonial, anti-imperialist ideals." He asked them

to "march together until all of our aims will be accomplished."

On his blog, Reinaldo José Bolívar, a Venezuelan professor and Vice-President of Foreign Affairs for Africa, presents some interesting thoughts about the common roots and projects of African countries and Venezuela. He was one of the driving forces behind the creation of the Institute of Strategic Investigations on Africa and its diaspora, the "Centre of African Knowledge" in Venezuela.

At this institute, Venezuela's "African-ness" is being researched, i.e. the history of Venezuela's Afro-descendants, their culture, living circumstances and prospects for the future. The institute also offers workshops on such diverse topics as Afro-Venezuelan food and medicine, the use of tropical plants, or building houses in African style, by using sugar canes in the Bahareque technique.

Professor Bolívar emphasises that it is important for Venezuela to

honour its commitment to Africa. During the presidency of Hugo Chávez, since 1999, good relations with many African countries were fostered, and common projects in the fields of agriculture, energy, mining and trade have begun.

Venezuela has been continuously increasing its presence in Africa and will continue with this process. Venezuelans have African blood in their bodies. Africa is present in their genes. "African-ness is part of our identity. I am an integral Africanist," says Reinaldo Bolívar. Africa, to him, means "the future of humanity."

Professor Bolívar says that Africa – due to its immense wealth in human and natural resources – will play a very important role by 2020 in the world, but Africans must steer their own course and prevent foreign countries from interfering in their internal affairs. He especially criticised the role of rapacious Europe that "eats the fish products of Africa and removes its

minerals, as well as its precious stones."

He notes that the ASA Summit in Equatorial Guinea was supposed to have already been held in November 2011, in Tripoli, the capital of the Great Jamahiriya. The country was so bombarded by NATO that the ASA Summit had to be postponed and later transferred to Malabo.

In Malabo, the ASA Summit ended with the signing of 27 treaties for cooperation in the areas of communications, science, technology and tourism. All members present also pledged solidarity with Cuba, condemning the US blockade, and with Argentina, regarding the Malvinas Islands. The ASA members furthermore condemned the Western terrorist attacks against Syria.

The next ASA Summit will be held in Ecuador, in 2016.

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Citizens' Campaign to arrest Blair continues

Simon Hooper

It was only as David Cronin saw Tony Blair and his entourage striding towards him that he finally plucked up the courage to go through with his plan to attempt to arrest the former British prime minister over his role in the invasion of Iraq and claim a bounty on his head.

"I walked up to him very briskly and managed to put my hand on his arm and say, 'Mr Blair, this is a citizen's arrest,'" Cronin told Al Jazeera of the 2010 encounter at the European Parliament in Brussels, where he worked as a journalist.

"I didn't have time to say anything else before his bodyguards pushed me away, so I just shouted at him, 'You are guilty of war crimes!' He looked at me for a split-second before I was bundled off. I can only describe it as a look of puzzlement and contempt."

Ten years since British forces joined the US-led assault, many in the UK are more critical than ever of the country's involvement in a conflict documented by the Iraq Body Count database to have killed more than 112,000 civilians.

More than a fifth – 22 percent – of Britons polled by YouGov this month said they believed Blair should be tried as a war criminal for his role in the conflict, which was preceded by massive anti-war demonstrations in London and other cities.

Fifty-three percent said the invasion was wrong, while half said Blair, a key international ally of US President George W Bush, had deliberately misled the British people over the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction.

Blair's schedule these days is a closely guarded secret to avoid ambushes by the protesters who stalk his public appearances armed with eggs, shoes and banners reading: "BLIAR". Even his testimony at last year's phone-hacking inquiry was interrupted by an intruder shouting, "This man is a war criminal!"

Online campaign

Cronin, meanwhile, is one of four people to have claimed a reward from an online campaign, www.arrestblair.org,

which offers a share of a bounty pot for each attempted arrest.

Launched in 2010, the campaign has already paid out about US\$16,600, though it concedes its efforts are largely symbolic. According to its rules, attempts must be non-violent and must be reported by at least one mainstream media outlet.

Cronin, who donated his US\$4,200 bounty to a Gaza-based charity, said he was moved to act not just by Iraq but also in protest at Blair's appointment as Middle East envoy for the Quartet of the UN, the US, the EU and Russia.

"It's a complete joke that a guy who had helped to start two wars in the wider Middle East region is now swanning around posing as a peace envoy," Cronin said.

Moves to hold Blair accountable are also gaining momentum in Scotland, where some campaigners believe he could be tried under the country's separate legal system.

Margo MacDonald, an independent member of the Scottish parliament, said that she planned to table a motion calling for Scottish law to be amended to make illegal "the waging of aggressive war with the intention of regime change", specifically so that Blair could be brought to trial.

"Theoretically, we believe he could face a court in Scotland," MacDonald said. "We are simply adding to the pressure."

In an article published in the *Sunday Herald* newspaper, Alex Salmond, the leader of the ruling Scottish National Party, appeared to lend weight to MacDonald's cause, writing: "The illegal invasion and war in Iraq is a disgrace without parallel in modern times, the shame of which will echo down the ages for Blair and all of those who were complicit in sending young men and women to risk their lives on the basis of a gigantic fraud."

Legal obstacles

But James Sloan, an expert in international criminal law at Glasgow University, said that any attempt to prosecute Blair, whether in Scotland, elsewhere in the UK, or at The Hague-based International Criminal Court (ICC), could face near-insurmountable legal obstacles.



Tony Blair.

While the crime of aggression – the likeliest charge that Blair could face – fell under the ICC's jurisdiction, Sloan said it was not yet prosecutable because signatories of the court's founding statute in 1998 had not been able to agree on a definition.

A definition was finally agreed on in 2010, but is not due to come into force at the ICC until 2017. That could pose problems for any effort to apply the charge of aggression to Blair's actions more than a decade earlier, Sloan said.

"It's a fundamental principle of criminal law that you cannot retrospectively try someone for something that was not criminal at the time. There could be a pretty good defence that he couldn't expect to know how the crime would be defined in 2013 or later when he was acting in 2003."

Blair has maintained that the war in Iraq was justified and that even the subsequent sectarian violence was a price worth paying for ending Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. *Information Clearing House* ✪

Staff shortage will see 999 calls "ignored"

Peter Lazenby

Britain: A nurse staff shortage in the West Midlands could mean 999 calls going "unanswered" as paramedics fill in, an ambulance chief has warned. West Mids assistant chief ambulance officer Steve Wheaton also said patients are being kept on trolleys in corridors outside accident and emergency units because there are not enough beds.

He called it "a national problem" affecting hospitals and ambulance services.

"Our paramedics are ending up doing nurses' jobs, while our response times are going down the pan," Mr Wheaton said. "Somebody is going to have a serious 'off' in the street, and we aren't going to be there."

He said the problem was the equivalent of having eight ambulance crews "sitting around doing nothing but nursing patients in hospital corridors."

The problem is not unprecedented and has been getting "progressively worse" for the last few years, said Mr Wheaton.

In one case he said the paramedics stayed with a patient for six

hours at a hospital in Dudley, while elsewhere 23 out of 26 ambulances were queued up at a Warwickshire hospital waiting to hand over patients to nurses.

Earlier this month there was "no cover across Coventry and Warwickshire for 15 minutes" because crews were waiting to hand over.

Mr Wheaton said the trust is on course to miss its response target for the first time in 18 months. His comments came on the day the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham announced it was reopening two wards at its old, neighbouring hospital site to meet what the health trust's boss called "unprecedented demand across the region."

And in Yorkshire, ambulance staff have voted to strike after ambulance trust bosses derecognised their union Unite. The union is resisting plans to downgrade skilled paramedics and replace them with "ambulance assistants."

Unite issued a public warning that the move would put patients at risk – and the trust withdrew union recognition.

Morning Star ✪

Doctors issue plea over abortion laws

A group representing Brazilian doctors has pleaded with the government to change the country's restrictive abortion law to allow abortions during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.

The head of the Federal Council of Medicine said last week that the high number of botched illegal abortions and their sometimes tragic consequences was behind the recommendation, the first of its kind by the umbrella group representing around 400,000 doctors in Brazil.

Brazil, which is the world's most populous Roman Catholic country, allows abortions only in

cases of rape or risk to a mother's life.

Despite those limits, government statistics suggest that around one million abortions are performed each year in Brazil, many of them under unhygienic and dangerous conditions. Botched abortions are the fifth highest cause of death for Brazilian women, representing around 200,000 women each year.

"The reality shows that women are getting abortions with great inequality" of circumstances, said council president Roberto Luis d'Avila.

"Rich women are getting them in safe conditions and the poor are

completely unsafe with complications, losing their uteruses, losing parts of their intestines, dying.

"This inequality is unacceptable from the medical point of view. We defend the right of women to decide," Dr d'Avila said.

He said that 80 percent of the group's 27 regional branches voted to support decriminalising abortions through the first trimester.

The council will send its recommendations to the Senate to be examined by a committee that is looking into possible changes to Brazil's penal code.

Morning Star ✪

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The Guardian
74 Buckingham Street
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the long term problems that follow, it goes at least some way to help the claimants in their healing process.

Where I come from, any form of abuse is severe and unacceptable and I look forward to working with the federal government on bringing compassion to this issue.

Brian Briggs
Military Compensation
Slater & Gordon Lawyers

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

Write a letter to the Editor

Progress on ADF assault cases

The announcement last week of the Defence Abuse Reparation Scheme is a major step forward for men and women have been subjected to sexual and other abuse within the Australian Defence Forces.

The scheme means that current and former ADF members will get the justice and reconciliation they deserve after years of inaction. It will also give abuse victims the opportunity to access necessary counselling and medical assistance, helping them turn a page on what would have been a traumatic and testing experience for them.

While the scheme is not intended as a replacement for compensation payments that reflect the abuse or

Grassroots work and elections

The up and coming CPA 12th Congress seems to have a focus on unity with other organisations in an attempt to get eventually elected to government. Venezuela is given as example of what we can achieve. For the sake of debate I wonder if this the right direction?

I would argue Venezuela is an example of just how impossible it is to get into bourgeois democracies. If Chávez was not a military man who did not have support from them, he would a long time ago have been removed by imperialism as just another example of a lot of Leftish governments in South America. Even though he received the democratic

vote he was still attacked as an evil "dictator". In other words we are kidding ourselves to expect that we can get into any position of power in bourgeois democracies.

The 12th Congress should return our direction back to our grass roots and look to the old CPA's position in working within the trade unions. With many years of hard work the communists eventually took leading roles in the unions and won brilliant battles for the working-class. Even bourgeois Liberals have written books on our greatest period in Australian history. I certainly joined the Party because of it.

In today's right-wing environment there is a vacancy for an aggressive working-class narrative that we should fill. It has been created by the union movement who are now dominated

by people who openly believe in Liberalism rather than class politics. For this reason the workers are abandoning the trade unions on mass. Let's listen to the working-class who are disillusioned with the trade unions and feel that they have no organisation out there that they can join to protect them from the bourgeois assault which is only going to get worse in the near future.

We should reclaim our exceptional past history within the trade union movement and present it to workers as what we can achieve if you come and join us. If we take the opportunity that capitalism is dealing us, we can grow in numbers and only once we are powerful in the trade unions do we then consider bourgeois elections.

Howard Patterson
Vic

Viva Chávez

The billionaires who control the media have ignored the death of Hugo Chávez and have not sent condolences to his family, government or party; yet they claim to be concerned with freedom for the media.

This is a splendid illustration of hierocracy.

Chávez rendered great service to the people of Venezuela and is a roll model for the people of Latin America and elsewhere where radical change is urgently needed.

Bernie Rosen

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Freedom of the rich man's press



Alexander Solzhenitsyn did not want free speech, he wanted the destruction – by nuclear war if necessary – of the Soviet Union. Here he is greeted by Senators Case, Jackson, Helms, and one unidentified colleague during a visit to the US in July 1975.

I don't imagine many of the *Guardian's* readers would also be regular readers of *The Daily Telegraph*. And that's as it should be: capitalism already tries to force-feed the people with pernicious drivel by every means possible, so the least one can do to protect oneself is to avoid the crudities perpetrated by Murdoch's leading tabloid.

But sometimes, in so doing we miss out on curious or even outrageous spectacles, such as that provided by the issue of the *Tele* for Tuesday March 19. The first five pages plus two centre pages and a third of another page were devoted to an extraordinary attack on the Gillard government's proposed "media reforms".

Reading more like an election leaflet than a newspaper, much of the massive, multi-paged "flyer" was so partisan it verged on the hilarious. By no stretch of the imagination could it have been called "objective".

Even the name of the paper, in a banner across the top of the front page, had been changed by the addition of a slogan, so it read: "The Daily Telegraph – we're for a free press".

Under that was a picture of Thomas Jefferson and a quote from him on freedom of the press. Jefferson was identified for readers of the *Tele* as the USA's third president "and author of the US Declaration of Independence". Yes, Jefferson did co-write the Declaration of Independence, but contrary to what he wrote there, he did not believe that "all men are created equal" (women of course were not even considered).

Jefferson was a slave owner, and true to

his class the men he considered equal were white men of adequate means. Africans and Native Americans were not really included, no matter what high-sounding phrases were used in referring to the "the noble red man". Later, when the USA decided it wanted all the land the Native Americans occupied, the latter became "redskins" and the attempt at their extermination and dispossession began in earnest.

Inside the *Tele*, there was a series of quotes spread across the top of two pages about the importance of freedom of the press, including one from arch-conservative Winston Churchill, bosom buddy of media magnate Lord Beaverbrook (whose media empire helped Churchill launch the Cold War in 1945).

There were also two quotes intended to show that restricting the press is what dictators do: one was from Hitler (fair enough), the other was from Lenin! The quote from Lenin referred to the decision of the then new Soviet government to curb the activities of the wealthy press barons. Why should the rich be allowed to trash the government of the poor just because the press magnates had plenty of money. Such an unequal struggle was not in the interests of the people.

Lenin said a revolutionary government "would not allow opposition by lethal weapons. Ideas are far more fatal things than guns. Why should any man be allowed to buy a printing press and disseminate pernicious opinion calculated to embarrass the government?" [That's as quoted by *The Telegraph*. I haven't been able to check it, but if any reader does

and finds it significantly different please let us know ASAP.]

Further in, on page 13, the *Tele* devoted a third of a page to an anti-Communist emigré from Vietnam, who is "so glad he lives in a democracy like Australia" where his children are not obliged to read "the ruling party's line of propaganda". What else does he think the guff in the *Tele* is but ruling class propaganda? It's just filtered through a camouflaging pretence of being the product of "independent journalism".

Still further in, the *Tele* devotes its Opinion page (Page 29 on this occasion) to an editorial by Kim Williams, CEO of News Limited, lambasting the proposed media "reforms" as "a bid to silence critics of power and privilege". When did the Murdoch media empire become associated with "critics of power and privilege"? Yeah, that's what I thought: never!

Oh, they might gloat when a nob trips and falls on his face, but they could never be accused of opposing or criticising the system. In fact, they will protect the system with their last lying breath.

One thing puzzles me, though: a large featured heading on the Opinion page, in its own box for added emphasis, calls the government's media proposals "a direct attack on free speech and job creation". Job creation? What job creation?

The main editorial cartoon in the issue of the *Tele* under consideration continues the free speech theme, showing a "Pantheon of Free Speech Heroes", identified as Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Thomas Jefferson, Winston

Churchill and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Mahatma Gandhi campaigned for the national liberation of the Indian sub-continent from British rule, Jefferson and Churchill we have already dealt with, and Lincoln was the subject of two historical reviews and one myopic attack – all in the pages of *The Guardian* – so I will restrict my comments to questioning the inclusion in such a "pantheon" of the extreme reactionary Solzhenitsyn, whom even President Nixon deemed to be "to the right of Barry Goldwater".

Solzhenitsyn did not want free speech, he wanted the destruction – by nuclear war if necessary – of the Soviet Union. While he was a "dissident" in the USSR he was the darling of the chattering classes in the West, but when he was finally unloosed upon them by a Soviet government fed up by ignorant people calling for his "freedom", he very quickly revealed his true war-mongering nature and his supporters fell away in droves.

To call him a champion of free speech is to emphasise the point Lenin was making: free speech for whom? Does free speech mean providing a new Hitler or Goebels with the means to spread lies about and arouse hatred against migrants, Jews, Gypsies, Aborigines, Lebanese, anybody? And to protect them while they do it?

I think not.

Or does it mean recognising people's right write or say what they wish as long as it does not infringe the rights of others? ✪



Rob Gowland
previews
ABC & SBS
Public Television

Sunday March 31 –
Saturday April 6

The children's division of the BBC – the CBBC, or Children's BBC – makes children's programs that adults can watch without feeling that they've had a lobotomy. The *Goodies*-style silliness inherent in *The Adventures of Dick and Dom*, for example or the strange mix of domestic sitcom, space alien absurdities and straight-to-camera asides that was *Dani's House*. Not probably the finest children's entertainment ever recorded, but entertaining, original much of the time, and not calculated to make you cringe with embarrassment.

In the new series from CBBC, *Dani's Castle* (ABC3 Weekdays at 5.35pm from Monday April 1), Dani's parents and her obnoxious little brother have gone on a world cruise, while Dani (Dani Harmer) is left to take possession of a castle in Ireland that's been left to her by an aunt she didn't know she had.

Several surprises await her at the castle, however. One, she has been left the castle jointly with a cousin she also didn't know she had, and two, the castle is haunted. Naturally, in the best traditions of this sort of program, the ghosts are benign. A much greater threat is the fact that Dani's aunt owed lots of money for almost every domestic service.

Although the ghosts plead with Dani not to sell the castle, and her cousin is adamant that they *must* not sell, she can see little prospect of

raising the money any other way to pay the overdue bills.

The news-clip compilation show *Russell Howard's Good News* (SBS2 weeknights at 10.25pm except Wednesdays when it screens at 11.00pm, from April 1) on the strength of this week's episode is well worth watching if you want a good chuckle. Howard's team compile their clips with wit and his comments add considerably to the fun. I could do without the mystery guest sequence but otherwise it's fine. Just don't expect anything deep and meaningful.

Most of the clips are naturally from British media, but there are also weird or laughable bits from North America and even Australia. This is the sixth series of his show so he must be doing something right.

One wonders what the makers of *Warrior Road Trip* (SBS2 Tuesdays at 9.30pm from April 2) were thinking when they began production (other than "we'll be able to sell this in the States for big bucks").

Two Maasai warriors are sent on a road trip across the USA ostensibly to "experience the Western world". Their fish-out-of-water experiences are apparently meant to make some significant comments on the West's "fast-paced, mass-consumption lifestyle".

In the first episode, however, there is some clumsy exposition while one warrior tells the other that the tribal elders are unhappy with the younger generation and they want our two heroes to take them in hand and teach them survival skills.

What follows resembles nothing so much as a US Marines boot camp (in fact one of the warriors actually uses the term part way through the training). The whole approach of the warriors is to turn their trainees into automatons who will do as directed without questioning or thinking. I could not help thinking that these warriors may or may not get along with the American people they will meet during their trip, but they should have no trouble at all with the authorities – either army or police



Russell Howard's Good News (SBS2 weeknights from April 1)

– just give 'em an order and watch them carry it out.

Perhaps, once they get to the USA, the series might pick up, but I wouldn't be too hopeful.

This week's episode of *Inspector George Gently* (ABC1 Saturday April 6 at 8.30pm) is entitled *Gently With Class* and deals with a fatal car crash involving a local titled bigwig. It is 1968, and students in Paris are convinced they are about to bring the rotten edifice of capitalism crashing to the ground. Chief Inspector George Gently suspects the ruling class is more securely entrenched than that, but his offside, Sergeant Bacchus would like nothing better than to bring down the toffeenosed rich who think they're better than everyone else.

Geraldine Somerville plays the local aristocrat's wife, Lady Blackstone, as a bigoted toff almost anyone would be pleased to see go to the guillotine. She is convinced her son will be a future leader of Britain, and does not intend to be thwarted of that success, least of all by the fact that her son does not want such a life. He would rather pursue a friendship with local girl Ellen who sings Irish ballads in the local pub accompanying herself on the violin. Ellen is played

by Australian singer and musician Ebony Buckle. The program gives her plenty of coverage, although the scenes of her playing the violin as a sort of calling card outside the various houses she visits towards the end are a bit much to take.

This week sees the start of a new cross-cultural series from Scandinavia, *Lilyhammer* (SBS ONE Saturdays at 8.35pm from March 30). Steven Van Zandt (from *The Sopranos*) stars as a New York gangster – Frank "The Fixer" Tagliano – who turns state's evidence after another mobster almost has him killed in an attack that does kill his little dog.

As part of his deal with the FBI, he is given a new identity (he is now

Johnny) and, at his request, flown to Lilyhammer in Norway (he liked the look of it when it hosted the Winter Olympics).

After a brief interview with the local employment official, he decides the job prospects in town don't suit him, but he finds the local bar is for sale. With a little more graft and corruption he is soon in possession of a bar licence and he is in a business he knows well.

Van Zandt certainly looks the part – he has the type of face that normally belongs to movie "heavies", although the script goes out of its way to portray him as that archetypal movie character, the "good bad man".

It has a leisurely pace but is clearly also light-hearted. ☺

Sydney

POLITICS

in the pub

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

April 19

COMBATING BULLYING IN SCHOOLS, UNIVERSITIES & WORKPLACES

Vaughan Bowie, Adjunct Fellow, UWS;
Ken Marslaw, "Enough is Enough" Organisation;

April 26

US-AUSTRALIAN RELATIONS – IMPERIALISM IN EAST ASIA

Erik Paul, Dr, Research Fellow & VP CPACS;
Ken McNab, Dr, Pres, Centre Peace & Conflict Studies, Sydney Uni;

May 3

PRIVATISATION OF GOVERNMENT ASSETS – IS THERE ANYTHING LEFT TO FLOG?

Joe Nagy, Finance & Economic Coach;
Phillip Toner, Senior Research Fellow, Sydney University;

May 10

VENEZUELA – A NEW DEMOCRACY OR A COMMAND CAPITALIST STATE?

Federico Fuentes, author Latin American Turbulent Transitions;
Rodrigo Acuna, PhD candidate, Latin American Affairs;

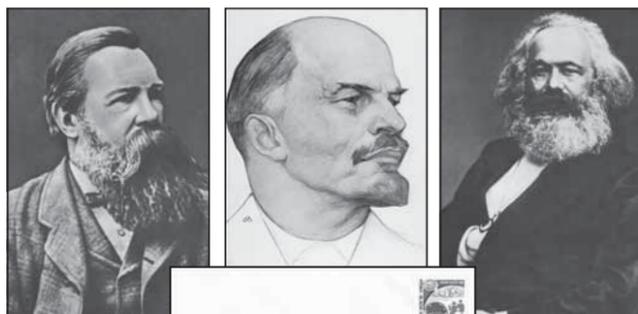
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Country Profile: Egypt

One of the world's oldest nations, Egypt is often perceived as mired in the past and politically stagnant. The country's last 150 years instead reflect a dynamic process, part of the greater human quest for fair self-governance. Egypt may be a casebook study of autocracy and centralised, top-down decision-making from the pharaohs till now, but it also illustrates how élitist, defensive power structures lose touch with the people, who thus learn to fend for themselves and their communities.

Egypt's last 150 years have seen a series of transitions, first from a feudalistic Ottoman province to a sovereign state under former viceroy Mohammed Ali. When Ali's iconoclast grandson built the Suez Canal, he envisioned Egypt as the hub of a nascent global shipping industry. But the Canal enticed imperial interests seeking a shorter route to eastern colonies. A nationalist uprising in 1882 threatening foreign commercial interests gave the British Navy an excuse to bombard Alexandria and make Egypt a "protectorate" under a puppet monarchy.

In 1919, a nationwide revolt paved the way for a constitutional monarchy and opposition representation in Parliament without diminishing the British presence. The 1952 Officers Revolution sent both the King and the British packing, launching a pan-Arab socialist experiment that concentrated economic power by nationalising industry, but betrayed workers by nationalising unions. Egypt's referendum-elected presidents, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, all military men, monopolised political life while shaping the constitution to uphold their power. To quell dissent, whether from Islamists (who assassinated Sadat) or secular opposition, Mubarak poured money into the internal security apparatus which acted with brutal impunity.

In January 2011, Egyptians took to the streets to demand Mubarak's resignation after 30 years in office,

and the right to elect his replacement. On February 11, 2011, after 18 days of continuous nationwide protests involving thousands of deaths and arrests, Mubarak stepped down. The Armed Forces, who refrained from attacking protesters, became the "protectors of the revolution" but military trials for civilians continued and the hated security apparatus remained intact. The military meanwhile organised multiparty parliamentary elections which returned an Islamist majority; and presidential elections where the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate, Mohamed Morsi, won by a whisker.

Six months of power-brokering later, Morsi had enough clout to frame Egypt's next constitution with zero gain of civil rights and more references to Islamic law. The battle for the constitution is still under way, with demonstrations and street battles dividing a society whose aspirations for democracy are leavened with an urgent need for stability and economic progress. Egypt's new government has so far failed to inspire unity or to present a vision of the future that people can get behind.

High unemployment and low skill levels are endemic among youth, the bulk of Egypt's population. They need a government that encourages their participation, but the present leadership reflects decades of authoritarian manoeuvring to eliminate competition and is as ill-prepared, unimaginative and defensive as its predecessors. The 2011 uprising has nonetheless raised the expectations of a public that won't settle for incompetence, manipulation or religious appeals to obedience.

Egyptians face the threats of water, land and energy shortages and dwindling food sufficiency. How will they govern themselves past these obstacles? By relinquishing rights to the traditional strongman? Or by self-organising on a nationwide scale, as active agents of renewal? Egyptians, in short, are confronting the same issues as the rest of the world, but time is no longer on their side.

New Internationalist ✚



Country Profile: Egypt Fact File

Leader	President Mohamed Morsi
Economy	GNI (Gross National Income) per capita \$2,340 (Algeria \$4,460, UK \$38,540). The poor have benefited little from the relatively high growth rates of recent years.
Monetary unit	Egyptian Pound
Main exports	Crude oil, agricultural and processed food products, chemicals and textiles. In 2011, exports fell 20% due to the Arab Spring unrest.
People	Although occupying nearly a million sq km, Egypt is mostly desert, with a population of around 83 million concentrated along the banks of the Nile, an area roughly the size of Serbia (77,000 sq km). Population growth rate 1990-2010 is 1.8%.
Health	Infant mortality rate 19 per 1,000 live births (Algeria 31, UK 5). HIV prevalence rate less than 0.1%. Lifetime risk of maternal death 1 in 380 (UK 1 in 4,700). Diabetes, heart, lung and kidney diseases are common. State-sponsored healthcare is generally abysmal; doctors are grossly underpaid.
Environment	Egypt suffers severe land and water shortages and off-the-scale air pollution in urban areas. The Aswan High Dam halted the Nile's annual flood deposits of rich silt and encouraged the heavy use of toxic fertilizers.
Culture	Egyptians distinguish themselves from Gulf Arabs owing to Pharaonic antecedents and a long history of absorbing foreign influences: Roman, Persian, Greek, Turkish, Levantine and European.
Religion	Primarily Sunni Muslim with a Christian minority (10 million). Conspicuous religiosity has accelerated in the last decade. Sectarian strife has increased since the 2011 uprising.
Language	Arabic. Most educated Egyptians also speak English or French.

The battle for the constitution is still under way, with demonstrations and street battles dividing a society whose aspirations for democracy are leavened with an urgent need for stability and economic progress.



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