



Abbott's revived WorkChoices must be defeated

Bob Briton

Tony Abbott has admitted he cannot always be believed but if he and the Liberal Party are sincere in what they say in introducing their "new" industrial relations policy, they are living in fantasy land. In their imaginary Australia, unions are all lawless fiefdoms run by corrupt "bosses", union officials barge into businesses hundreds of times a year and harass non-unionised workers in their lunch-rooms. Greedy, unreasonable, unionised workers are frequently paid much more than the Prime Minister and bosses (actual bosses) live in terror of unions. There is a culture encouraged by the Labor Party of "strike first, talk later". Does this sound like your workplace? Didn't think so.

To the fictitious rescue comes the Coalition's new industrial relations policy called *The Coalition's Policy to Improve the Fair Work Laws*. The title is a give-away about the Coalition's general approach – to wrap up major changes in the cloak of Labor's own "Fair Work" regime. The centrepiece will be the effective restoration of Australian Workplace Agreements to be called by the current name for individual contracts – Individual Flexibility Agreements (IFAs). There is a strong historical irony in the fact that much of Howard's WorkChoices apparatus was kept, slightly toned down and given new names, by the ALP. If the Coalition is elected in September, it will restore all the content of Workchoices but keep Labor's names for the components.

The use of IFAs will no longer be restricted by the presence of Enterprise Bargaining Agreements. Individual contracts will be more front and centre. If you can believe the oily words in the policy, a worker cannot be obliged to accept an IFA as a condition of employment. Fair Work Australia will apply the "better off overall" test. It's the old WorkChoices duck and weave all over again. Don't believe them. The same with penalty rates. Abbott and shadow Industrial Relations Minister Eric Abetz insist

that there will be no change to the present situation ... sort of.

"On penalty rates I know these are a significant issue for businesses, particularly in tourism and hospitality," Mr Abbott told a press conference last week. "There should remain provision first of the Fair Work Commission and second and third subject to the kinds of sensible changes that might be possible under enterprise bargaining agreements and individual flexibility agreements. And I would encourage businesses that think it is important to maximise employment and to maximise the success of the business and its workers, to consider enterprise bargaining agreements or individual flexibility agreements." Penalty rates will be up for grabs under the Coalition and it won't be because bosses want to maximise employment.

One area where a WorkChoices label will be restored is the Australian Building and Construction Commission. The Coalition claims it is not happy with the work done and the number of prosecutions made of union officials in the construction industry by Labor's re-badged Fair Work Building and Construction unit. The name "ABCC" will be restored with implicit instructions to take more union scalps. In fact its role will be expanded to include offshore projects where it will wage war on the Maritime Union of Australia. Original plans to subject the whole Australian labour movement to ABCC-style control have not been buried or cremated, either.

Bosses will have their tight rein on right of entry tightened even further. Their ability to dictate where union officials can meet members will be strengthened. This is already an issue in some industries where workers interested to hear from union representatives are only able to do so in paddocks distant from the worksite at the most inconvenient times possible.

If unions and bosses can't come to an agreement for a new project (a Greenfield Agreement) after three months, the Fair Work Commission will step in and make one. In the explanation for the Coalition policy, delays



Photo: Anna Pha

are inevitably the fault of unions pressing for "exorbitant demands". This will be the ideological underpinning for the Commission's new responsibilities. The Commission will also house a Registered Organisations Commission to investigate unions' financial affairs.

"A Coalition government will ensure that registered organisations and their officials play by the same rules as companies and their directors, with the same penalties," the policy says. "This will ensure that members' money cannot be spent on prostitutes, used for personal holidays, or withdrawn from ATM's to be spent on personal items. In addition, we will improve financial disclosure rules and create a Registered Organisations Commission as a watchdog to ensure the obligations are met and to help educate people about improved standards."

The basic assumption in the Coalition policy is that unions are unnecessary third parties impeding productivity (reducing the bosses' profit share). They are semi-legal entities that are tolerated at best and sent broke if possible.

Abbott would love to go further now but would find that politically difficult facing an electorate still holding vivid memories of WorkChoices – a policy he simultaneously disowns and praises.

"It's not that long ago that the leader of the opposition was telling Australians that WorkChoices was good for wages, good for the economy, good for everyone and that needed to be remembered," Julia Gillard noted recently. In fact Abbott and his policy still refer to the WorkChoices days as some sort of golden era. Australian workers don't, hence the opposition leader's caution about the terms he uses for its restoration.

Abbott is promising to refer the Fair Work Act and related bureaucracy to the Productivity Commission for review and recommendation. If it recommends even tighter control on working people, he has promised to take the changes to the next election for a mandate to do so. Workers would be ill advised to accept any of his undertakings. He must never be Prime Minister and WorkChoices must never be restored. ✖

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The budget will be covered in the next issue of the *Guardian*.

Guardian

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The winds of change

In Australia and in all capitalist countries, employers and reactionary political forces are carrying out increasingly vicious attacks on the working class and its allies. The immediate targets are wages and conditions and jobs. However, their aim is not limited to these direct economic objectives but the broader rights and freedoms of working people.

The capitalist economic system is in deep trouble and none of the schemes of the economists and politicians are going to solve the problems. Austerity programs, such as the one that will be revealed in this week's federal budget, confirm there is no way out; not within the system.

But the winds of change are blowing in all corners of the earth. In Latin America, Asia and Africa as examples, political and economic ties are being forged. Different paths are being prepared. The leaders of the capitalist states know the way the wind is blowing and they are determined to make workers pay for the deepening global crisis.

If the working class and the organisations which give political leadership are to fulfil their responsibilities, the scope and intent of the employer offensive has to be realised.

The employers speak at times with several voices. However it would be a mistake to assume that their different approaches indicate they have different objectives. The mantle of democracy and freedom that covers the system is being pulled away.

In line with this strategy, shadow treasurer Joe Hockey recently outlined plans to "wind back universal access to payments". Hockey talks of enforcing a "culture of self-reliance" by cutting welfare to the bone. "Addressing the ongoing fiscal crisis will involve the winding back of universal access to payments and entitlements from the state," Hockey said. Flagging the creation of an army of cheap labour he announced that "... this will require the redefining of the concept of mutual obligation."

This, in turn, would require "a significant overhaul" of Centrelink, Medicare and other service delivery agencies.

This is a vision of the corporate state.

While the working class must differentiate between the policies and tactics being used by employers and their political lap dogs, it can only rely on its own strength and organisation, along with that of its allies, to develop the struggle against this offensive.

That is why it is essential that the fight-back becomes stronger and broader. This is the seed from which a mighty working class counter attack will grow. One of the first things, however, is to realise the far-reaching and serious intentions of the employers to tie the hands of workers and their organisations, in the first place the trade unions.

Events in Syria

Developments in Syria have accelerated. Government forces have scored significant victories. US President Barack Obama has given his blessing for Israeli fighter jets to attack Syria on three occasions. Initially the US was hoping for a rapid regime change along the lines of Libya but Russia and China put an immediate stop to that; a major blow to short-term US imperialist designs in the region.

Things have now reached a point where the US and the forces it is supporting are in no position to be demanding anything in Syria. The so called "rebels", whose "leaders" wander around international capitals attending conferences and making grand speeches, are not leading anyone.

The US is now completely dependent on using the threat of annihilation. As its economic power declines in relation to China and other rising powers, the economic carrot has been tossed aside in favour of the military stick.

The US is now willing to risk an escalating regional war that could include Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Israel, Iran, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The fate of the Middle East is hanging in the balance.

PRESS FUND

Last week shadow treasurer Joe Hockey declared the Liberal/National party coalition would end the "age of entitlements". If elected in September, the coalition would hack into social security benefits doubtless including their proposed maternity leave provisions, which could even get eliminated altogether if dissatisfied Liberals get their way. Before the elections we intend to spend a lot of time examining the conservatives' real intentions but we really need your help by way of contributions to the Press Fund, so please send us in something for the next edition. Many thanks to this week's contributors, as follows:

IM Gale, in fond memory of Mavis Kieke, and thank you to Jessie Kieke, \$100

Mark Mannion \$5, Christine Murray \$20, "Round Figure" \$19, Tom and Sylvia Salisbury's May Day *Guardian* tin \$16, Eileen Whitehead \$10, Alice Johnson \$100

This week's total: \$270 Progressive total: \$2,520

Thales workers' victory

AMWU (Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union) members at Thales making munitions for the armed forces have won a new union agreement which locks in their improved wages and conditions beyond the date their employer's existing contract for the key Defence Department work runs out in 2015.

Strategic industrial action every day over four weeks by members saw Thales agree to wage rises totalling 10.2 percent plus full back pay to last October.

But the biggest bonus for the 229 AMWU members in Mulwala and Benalla was forcing the French firm to a deal which runs until October 2015, three months beyond the date that Thales' existing contract as the Defence Department's main munitions supplier ends.

"That will give our members some peace of mind their entitlements will be carried over through the transition of business if one of the competitors to Thales wins the next munitions contract," said AMWU assistant Victorian secretary Leigh Diehm.

Mr Diehm and Mulwala-Benalla delegates Julian Gross, Mick Liddington and Clinton Cole further backed that up by meeting Defence Materiel Minister Mike Kelly in Canberra.

They came away with a written pledge that the Minister would do everything "legally and humanly possible" to ensure all existing entitlements were retained in a transfer to any new employer for the post-June 2015 contract.

A decision on the final two tenders for the contract is due in coming months.

AMWU delegate Julian Gross said solidarity among all 420 workers in a multi-union campaign involving the NUW, AWU, ETU and APESMA had worn down Thales and the Defence Department, which initially only wanted a 12-month deal, then another which expired with the current contract.

But action which stopped production every day for one hour at 10.30am began to disrupt supply of tons of bullets and shells to the armed forces, as AMWU members at both sites walked out the gates to protest for a three-year agreement.

Overtime and call-back bans also bit deeply into Thales' schedule of meeting defence orders.

"It was a dramatic show of unity which, by the time the machinery was properly shut down and re-started, disrupted production for more like two to three hours every day and made it clear our issues needed to be addressed," Mr Gross said.

Mr Gross and AMWU organisers

Dave Corben and Cindy O'Connor watched management's attitude become more conciliatory in past weeks as production of high explosive at Mulwala and finished shells, bombs and bullets at Benalla fell behind schedule.

The in-principle union agreement includes full back pay, annual wage rises of 3.5, 3.5 and 3.2 percent, employee control over 12-hour shift patterns, protection for maintenance workers conditions from casual contract labour and some special rates rolled into a weekly allowance.

Thales dropped all its demands, including introduction of key performance indicators and an attempt to absorb employer superannuation contribution rises into wage increases.

Members at Benalla and Mulwala voted almost unanimously in mass meetings to accept the in-principle agreement.

Up to five companies are competing for the post-June 2015 munitions contract, with that set to be culled to two by September.

"Those companies will know when they bid that they are under pressure to factor in the terms and conditions of this agreement - including long service, sick leave, annual leave - for the workforce," Mr Gross said. ☼

High school students set to join strike against education cuts

Hundreds of high school students are expected to skip class to join the National Union of Students (NUS) strike and protest outside the State Library in the Melbourne CBD from 2pm on May 14 - budget day.

Along with university students the high school students will be protesting the government's plans to cut \$2.8 billion from higher education. Future university students will be directly affected by this latest round of cuts with increased class sizes and more expensive degrees.

The Labor government has tried to justify the cuts by claiming the savings at the university level will pay for the Gonski reforms to school education. The Gonski

reforms are themselves designed to lock in a line of funding for private schools at the expense of the public system.

Socialist Party student organiser Kirk Leonard said "Students are coming out to say that we are opposed to robbing Peter to pay Paul. We need to adequately fund all levels of public education and say no to any steps towards privatisation.

"High school students have been the most enthusiastic about skipping class on budget day. They want to send a message to both Gillard and Abbott. They want the chance at a decent education and a future. They are prepared to fight for it," Kirk said.

Socialist Party student organiser

Kat Galea said "High school students are looking at a situation where they will end up with a huge debt in return for a sub-standard education. They are not prepared to accept that.

"Far from being apathetic we are beginning to see young people take an active interest in their future.

"We are demanding that instead of cutting education we need to tax big business. If the big miners, the banks and the casinos had their super-profits taxed at a higher rate there would be more than enough money available to fund free, quality public education for all." Kat said. ☼

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UN warns Great Barrier Reef under threat

Peter Mac

The World Heritage Committee (WHC) is considering placing the magnificent Great Barrier Reef in the “endangered” category, because of the adverse impact of proposed new ports and coal loading facilities, which would add to the current pollution problems of soil, fertiliser and pesticides from coastal farms and developments. Each year 16 tonnes of pesticides are dumped in the reef lagoon and herbicides have been detected 15 kilometres offshore.

The WHC had given the state and federal governments until 2015 to improve their act, but after an international inspection of the reef in 2012 it decided to make an early declaration of its findings.

Its latest report has recognised the federal government’s contribution to improving the reef’s condition. Nevertheless, it has warned that these efforts are insufficient, and it wants a policy statement that the government will make “an urgent commitment to ensure that no new port development or associated port infrastructure are permitted outside the existing and long-established areas within or adjacent to the property.

“... While [Australia] has not approved port developments outside existing major port areas, there is no clear commitment towards limiting port development to existing port areas.”

Actually, there are now 43 proposals with potential adverse impacts on the reef, and none has yet been ruled out by the state or federal governments. One includes large industrial construction at Keppel Bay, and construction of new landing facilities on Balaklava Island near Rockhampton, capable of exporting 35 million tonnes of coal annually. There are also proposed new ports at Fitzroy and Wongai which could load another 23.5 million tonnes annually.

The projects are primarily concerned with loading and shipping coal, but now there are added fears about the proposed construction of a new port for the transport of uranium.

Apart from the danger of coal pollution during processing and loading operations, the UN is also concerned that most of the freighters sail through passages across the

reef. One Chinese freighter became stuck on the reef recently, causing massive damage across a wide area of coral formations, and it narrowly avoided losing its cargo or even the whole ship.

The report discusses Australia’s “limited progress” in protecting the reef, noting: “The World Heritage Centre and [the International Union for the Conservation of Nature] recommend that the committee consider the Great Barrier Reef for inscription on the list of World Heritage in Danger ... in absence of a firm and demonstrable commitment on these priority issues.”

According to World Wildlife Fund spokesman Richard Leck the report “... sharply criticises the Queensland government for weakening environmental protection for the reef by allowing further land clearing of vegetation along rivers leading to the reef and allowing dredge spoil to be dumped in coastal waters.”

The performance of the state and federal governments will be discussed at the WHC’s next meeting in Phnom Penh next month. The committee has now agreed to defer making a final decision on declaring the reef “endangered” until February, to take account of the latest scientific information on the reef’s condition.

Parliamentary reactions

The Queensland government reacted angrily to the WRC report, saying it had done more in a year than its Labor predecessors had done in two decades, and that it had taken the expansion of the Abbott Point coal port off the agenda and committed \$35 million per year to water quality programs.

But that’s not the point. The issue involved is not whether the Newman government did better or not than other governments, but whether it has done enough to protect the reef – and according to the scientific assessment on which the WRC report is based, it clearly has not.

Nor has the Gillard government. As a signatory to the World Heritage Convention, Australia is obliged to conserve places for which it is responsible on the World Heritage List. Failure to do so would place the reef among the most shameful



examples of nature conservation failure, including the polluted Florida everglades and the shrunken Sumatra rainforest.

A bill proposed by Queensland Greens senator Larissa Waters would adopt the WHC’s recommendations as law. “The Newman and Gillard governments have continued to fast-track mega industrial ports alongside the reef. Protecting the Great Barrier Reef must be beyond politics,” she said.

Unfortunately the Gillard government is unlikely to support the bill because it does not want to tackle the matter as a hot election issue, and deferral of the WRC’s final decision on the “endangered” listing may have saved it from having to do so.

On the other hand, it may not have. The states have the power to approve mining or development applications, and the Newman government is in a hurry to serve the interests of the mining industry.

The federal government has constitutional powers to override the states in cases where approval would violate our international obligations, and past federal governments have intervened to protect places of great natural significance, for example to prevent sand mining on Fraser

Island and the damming of Tasmania’s Franklin River.

The Gillard government could certainly intervene to protect the reef, but it may have to make a decision to do so prior to the elections if the Queensland government decides to grant approval for some or all of the current proposals.

The bigger picture

The most significant issue regarding Queensland coastal development is actually far greater than its impact on the reef. The coal shipped from the state’s ports is burnt in furnaces and power stations all over the world, emitting the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide. Greenhouse gases present in the atmosphere are altering the climate, and causing – among other things – warming and acidification of the ocean, which in turn is damaging the Great Barrier Reef.

As Colin Hunt, University of Queensland lecturer in economics has pointed out:

“... ironically, only coal mining and transport – not coal burning – are being assessed for their environmental impact.”

“The proponents of coal mines and port developments are supposed to include socio-economic

assessments in their environmental statements. If these were done properly, there would be an assessment of external costs, including costs to the world at large, as well as to Australia.

“An external cost of Australian export coal is ... imposed globally by emissions when it is burnt. The greenhouse gas emissions of export coal are already greater than Australia’s total emissions from all sources. ... Australian coal exports are forecast to more than double by 2035, and so will the consequential emissions of carbon dioxide equivalent.”

But how can we put a figure on the cost of climate change, which unless mitigated will involve the global inundation of low-lying coastal cities and settlements, a rising incidence of heatstroke, bushfires and tropical diseases, the drastic loss of marine life and biodiversity, and famines and droughts on a massive scale?

Australia is now the worst per capita greenhouse gas emitter, but in absolute terms is also the 15th biggest emitter out of 295. And part of the larger, long-term cost of climate change will be imposed by the proposed port developments along the coast adjacent to the wonderful but terribly threatened Great Barrier Reef. ☘

Pete’s Corner



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Defence White Paper

Toning down the rhetoric while still preparing for war

Anna Pha

Part 1

The Gillard government released a new Defence White Paper on May 3, one year ahead of schedule. The main reason for bringing forward the Paper is to adjust Australia's military operations in line with the US's "pivot" to Asia, now referred to as "rebalancing". The basic thrust of Labor's policy remains unchanged – serving the US war machine in its pursuit of global domination, in particular in the Asia-Pacific region. The main target remains China whose economy looks set to become larger than the US's in the coming decade.

"China's continued rise as a global power, the increasing economic and strategic weight of East Asia and the emergence over time of India as a global power are key trends influencing the Indian Ocean's development as an area of increasing strategic significance. In aggregate, these trends are shaping the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a single strategic arc."

The White Paper outlines Australia's rebalancing to meet these new challenges to US economic and military domination. The Indo-Pacific arc is a new concept replacing the Asia-Pacific region as an area of focus.

The 2013 Paper also seeks to tone down the aggressive and arrogant attitude towards the People's Republic of China in the Rudd government's 2009 Defence White Paper which had raised concerns in China and in Australia. After all, China is our largest trading partner and the largest source of new foreign investment. The mining corporations, in particular, have no interest in waging war against China.

The Rudd government's 2009 Defence White Paper hardly hid Labor's intentions, saying the government's strategy "does not necessarily entail a purely defensive or reactive approach ... we will need to be prepared to undertake proactive combat operations against an adversary's military bases and staging areas ..." (Emphasis added) (See "Preparing for war – Defence White Paper", *Guardian* 13-05-2009)

The 2013 Paper claims that the government "does not approach China as an adversary. Rather, its policy is

aimed at encouraging China's peaceful rise and ensuring that strategic competition in the region does not lead to conflict."

The 2009 Paper said, "A major power of China's stature can be expected to develop a globally significant military capability befitting its size. But the pace, scope and structure of China's military modernisation have the potential to give its neighbours cause for concern if not carefully explained, and if China does not reach out to others to build confidence regarding its military plans." (Emphasis added)

The 2009 Paper continued in the same arrogant tone, "China has begun to do this in recent years, but needs to do more. If it does not, there is likely to be a question in the minds of regional states about the long-term strategic purpose of its force development plans, particularly as the modernisation appears potentially to be beyond the scope of what would be required for a conflict over Taiwan."

In effect, Australia was telling China it was only allowed to have the capacity to handle a conflict over Taiwan! With the US's build-up off its coast and encirclement by the US with its bases along its land borders, China would be irresponsible not to establish a modern military capable of defending its territory against the threat posed by the US and its allies. There is no evidence that China has done more than build its capability to defend its territory. The same cannot be said for the US or Australia.

Again, the 2013 Paper attempts to undo the damage: "China's defence capabilities are growing and its military is modernising, as a natural and legitimate outcome of its economic growth."

Then in another thinly veiled reference to China, the 2009 Paper stated, "... we would be concerned about the emergence of a security environment dominated by any regional power, or powers, not committed to the same shared goals."

In this instance it is not just China's military and economic power but its socialist goals that are being challenged.

Not surprisingly, China did not take warmly to the 2009 Defence White Paper.

US President Obama during his visit to Australia in November 2011 confirmed China's fears.



Australian and US forces on joint exercises during Talisman Sabre 2011.

US alliance "unbreakable"

He described the Alliance with Australia as "unbreakable", echoing the remarks made by Julia Gillard when in Washington in 2008, "That alliance is enduring and indispensable."

Obama said he had made "a deliberate and strategic decision – as a Pacific nation, the United States will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future, by upholding core principles and in close partnership with our allies and friends."

Never mind the sovereignty of nations or the role of the United Nations. The US is global cop, and Australia its deputy.

"Our enduring interests in the region demand our enduring presence in the region. The United States is a Pacific power, and we are here to stay," Obama warned. Obama was not very convincing in his claims that the establishment of a permanent force of 2,500 US marines and expansion of other bases in Australia were not aimed at China.

Paul Kelly from *The Australian*

summed it up at the time: "The US will keep its 'unique ability to project power'. Nations are expected to abide by the rules, largely America's. China needs to change its ways and its policies."

The *Sydney Morning Herald* weekend editorial (19/20-11-2011) urged caution: "Australia would have had much to gain from keeping to its middle course between two great powers. Having taken sides early, though, we have taken a risk. We will find out in coming years how much was at stake in that premature decision."

Their words of caution have not been heeded but the spin doctors have changed the tone of the 2013 White Paper as illustrated by comparison with the earlier quotes from the 2009 document.

The US's strategic decision to pivot to Asia – its "rebalancing" – places new demands on Australia which are laid out in the 2013 White Paper.

Having conceded that China has a right to build its military, the 2013 White Paper notes that this "will inevitably affect the strategic calculations and posture of regional countries and is changing the balance of military power in the western Pacific."

Maintaining US hegemony

"The United States will continue to be the world's strongest military power and the most influential strategic actor in our region for the foreseeable future," the 2013 Paper notes. In other words, the aim is US hegemony.

Attempting to justify the role of the US (geographically positioned thousands of kilometres to the east of China and India), the White Paper goes on to say, "The role of the United States in the Indo-Pacific has been central to maintaining a stable Asian region for more than 60 years."

The people of Vietnam, Korea, Indonesia and Pakistan and elsewhere in the region might have a different opinion on that. The US also stood by and watched the slaughter of the East Timorese and today does nothing about Indonesia's treatment of West Papuans.

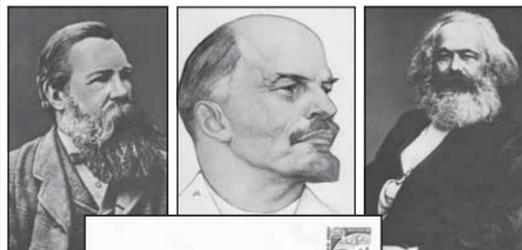
The White Paper correctly points to a number of "flashpoints" in the region – the Korean Peninsula, the Taiwan Strait, the East China Sea and the South China Sea where there are conflicting claims over islands. It omits mentioning that the US is doing its utmost to build tensions, carrying out provocative military exercises off the coast of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and encouraging Japan, South Korea and other states to assert their claims over disputed islands.

"Australia also has a real strategic interest in the broader Indo-Pacific region and in a peaceful, rules-based international order."

But, it must be the US's rules, under US domination. It is not referring to a region where relations are based on equality, mutual respect, independence and co-operation, despite numerous references to "co-operation" and the use of the word "peaceful". The role of the United Nations is overlooked, with a few token mentions that at best equate it with the US. Instead, Australia is increasingly turning to NATO as well as the US for "global governance" and enforcing the "rule of law". It is noteworthy that Australian troops served under NATO in Afghanistan.

"The United States is likely to remain the strongest maritime power and security guarantor in the Indian Ocean, but over the next two decades we can certainly expect to see an increased presence from the maritime forces of China and India."

Next week: The Indo-Pacific arc ☛



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Funding stand-off hits legal service

Rudi Maxwell

Indigenous people who are arrested in New South Wales will no longer have access to the Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) 24-hour custody notification service (CNS) from this July.

At present, Aboriginal people arrested in NSW have access to a solicitor at any time, day or night. But a funding stand-off between the federal and state governments means the ALS will be forced to cut the CNS at the end of the financial year, which chief legal officer John McKenzie said would mean already vulnerable people don't get valuable assistance.

"They're going to feel hopeless, going to panic, and two things happen when people panic," he said. "Firstly they're likely to say anything that will get them released then and there on bail and sometimes that means making a false confession. The other really serious aspect is that sometimes people self-harm.

"The real value of what we do is much bigger than just a legal service; we keep them safe and sound."

Since its inception in 2007, the CNS has been funded by one-off grants from the federal government. It costs about \$500,000 a year. Last year the federal government refused to fund the service, saying it was a state issue. A spokesperson for federal Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus said in a statement that "the reality is that the failure of the NSW government to commit the funds required to maintain this important legal service on an ongoing basis means that it has been forced to run on annual one-off grants of uncommitted Commonwealth funds".

"This isn't a case of the Commonwealth cutting funds to a service; it's a case of the NSW government continually refusing to fund a service required by its own statutory obligations," the spokesperson said.

However, a spokesperson for NSW Attorney-General Greg Smith said the Attorney does not allocate funding for services. "Funding is allocated by Legal Aid after a formal process, and ALS may apply to Legal Aid for such funding," the statement said.

"However, given this service has been until recently funded by the federal government, we question why the Commonwealth cut the funding and urge them to reinstate funding for this service."

Mr McKenzie said the buck-passing wasn't going to help people who were arrested.

"Our solicitors are trained in great depth about dealing with Aboriginal people in stressful situations, so not only do we assist the person under arrest in the police station, giving them a friendly ear and legal advice, we inquire about their medical welfare," he said.

"Aboriginal people under arrest in a police station often don't trust the police and won't tell an officer that they are, say, a serious diabetic and need medication, but quite often they will tell a lawyer, who will then ensure that they get insulin, or whatever it is they need, quick-smart – there's not a week that goes by where we don't have an instance like that."

Last year, ALS staff agreed that to keep the CNS running, no staff member would get a pay increase or go up a pay grade. Mr McKenzie said it wasn't fair to keep freezing pay

and would lead to loss of the ALS's greatest asset, its staff.

Police in NSW are required by law to contact the ALS when an Aboriginal person is taken into custody, a recommendation made from the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. However, a fax sent to an empty office over the weekend meets the legislative requirement.

"Since the CNS has been running there have not been any Aboriginal deaths in police cells," Mr McKenzie said.

"Aboriginal prisoners are still dying in jails because they are in there in such numbers, but to our knowledge, there haven't been any Aboriginal deaths in police cells.

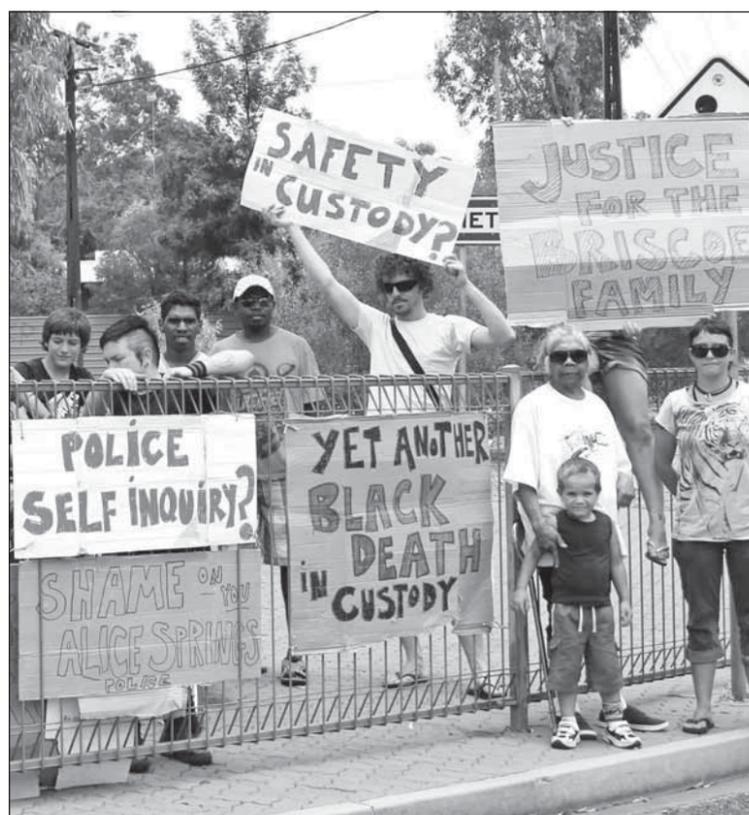
"There's no magic wand, but we have a red-hot go of getting people out on bail and we've got a much better chance negotiating with police than a distressed Aboriginal person does."

No NSW government has given funds to the ALS since its inception in 1973.

"There are examples in other states, that do give good funding, particularly Queensland," Mr McKenzie said. "What we're seeing here is a result of federalism, where the states and Commonwealth are always trying to get the other to pay. We don't care which, we just need the funds.

"Our staff go over and above what we're funded to do, but we believe the situation to be so serious, given the huge proportion of Aboriginal people who are put through the criminal justice system, we think the 24-hour service is an absolute necessity."

Koori Mail ✪



A sweetheart deal with NSW clubs was savaged by the Auditor-General. The Auditor-General has exposed the category 3 ClubGRANTS as a state government slush fund worth \$8 million a year. The ClubGRANTS scheme, formerly known as the Community Development and Support Expenditure scheme was set up to ensure that larger registered clubs in NSW contribute to the provision of front-line services to their local communities. This scheme provides tax rebates on gaming machine profits generated by registered clubs when they provide financial or in-kind support for locally-based community programs. Clubs are entitled to 2.25 percent in tax rebates on gaming machine profits over \$1 million. In 2012, 472 clubs participated in the scheme. Since 2002, \$417 million in ClubGRANTS tax rebates has been provided to registered clubs. This is government revenue forgone. Greens NSW MP John Kaye called on the NSW government to bring to an end the appalling lack of appropriate transparency and accountability. "ClubGRANTS was always more about delivering a favour to the politically powerful registered clubs lobby than about providing community facilities and other benefits ... In a state obsessed with cutting its budget deficit, it is extraordinary that the ClubGRANTS scheme has escaped the Treasurer's knife while TAFE is losing 800 jobs," said Mr Kaye.

The Gillard government recently announced cuts worth \$2.8 billion to students and universities; cuts that risk Australia's ability to produce the next generation of scientists, doctors, teachers and engineers – and in the process risk Australia's future. Australian universities provide the skills and knowledge needed for economic growth. However if these cuts go ahead there is a very real risk of falling behind our regional neighbours. To be successful in the 21 century it is essential to increase funds for education and science not to cut them. Cuts are not a clever choice.

The inquiry into the abuse of children was told that a "Catholic mafia" within the ranks of Newcastle police may have colluded with church leaders to cover up sex abuse of children by clergy in the Maitland-Newcastle diocese. Chief Inspector Peter Fox played a crucial role in making the inquiry possible. He told the inquiry that he had become suspicious about the actions of some senior officers when he presented them with the evidence of abuse and was told not to proceed with investigations.

Western Australia's wheat-belt farmers are struggling to survive due to long-term, man-made reduction of rainfall in the area. Land clearing in the state's south-west for agricultural and urban development coincided with significant decline in rainfall. Agricultural scientists point out that there is a clear correlation between cloud formation over native vegetation areas and nothing at all over cleared land. Reforestation with native vegetation will be of great value to the farmers in the area – provided they could afford such a long-term solution.

Pro Papua open letter to the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Frans Timmermans about the 1 May crackdown in Papua

The Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr FCGM Timmermans The Hague

Dear Minister Timmermans,

Foundation Pro Papua strongly asks you to note and condemn the Indonesian government security forces assault on peaceful May 1 demonstrations by Papuans. Widespread non-violent Papuan demonstrations commemorating the 50th anniversary of Indonesia's coercive annexation of West Papua in 1963 were met with security force brutality resulting in the killing of two Papuans and the wounding and detention of many more.

UN Human Rights Commissioner Pillay's May 2 statement regarding the violence expressed "serious concern" over the "crackdown". The statement cited UN Human Rights High Commissioner as stating: "These latest incidents are unfortunate examples of the on-going suppression of freedom of expression and excessive use of force in Papua. I urge the government of Indonesia to allow peaceful protest and hold accountable those involved in abuses."

Pro Papua, noting the close relations between The Hague

and Jakarta, call on the Dutch Government to press the Indonesian government to end its suppression of freedom of speech in West Papua and to hold accountable before civilian courts those responsible for violence against civilian demonstrators.

We think that you should also press the Indonesian government to allow visits by UN Human Rights Special Rapporteurs, as the Indonesian government agreed to do in late 2012.

On behalf of Foundation Pro Papua, Koen J de Jager

The smallholders' last stand

A visit to Mozambique dispels any notion that big business is going to “feed Africa”. Hazel Healy reports on a land rush in full swing.

By 7am work parties are already fanning out along the road's edge. The people of Chiure district in rural Mozambique are setting out before the heat kicks in. Gangs of children stride along with hoes over their shoulders; women make slower progress with babies tied to their backs, balancing large bundles on their head, trailing toddlers with the free hand.

It's hard to see where this stream of people is headed at first. Then, looking closer you see the rise and fall of dull metal, the flash of a headdress as small plots of maize appear in among the brush and waist-high grasses.

The lands of small-scale farmers like these are characterised as “under-used”. Since the state – which legally owns all territory – declared it had seven million hectares going spare, investors have snapped up 2.5 million. Mozambique has stayed in the “top 10 most targeted” countries for large-scale deals ever since.

The age-old tussle over resources is nothing new. But the speed at which large swathes of the Global South are being transferred into private hands has not been seen since colonial times.

The cast has changed. Modern day land-grabbers are a varied bunch: the Saudis want to raise poultry and grow grains in Sudan; forests in the Philippines are disappearing under Asia's insatiable appetite for palm oil; the finance hubs of London and New York have bought into El Tejar, which farms 800,000 hectares in South America. Companies from rapidly growing India and South Africa are at the fore, alongside Western firms.

While agricultural deals are happening all over the world from South Asia to Latin America, the most powerful “empty land myth” centres on Africa. In Mozambique, where the global grab collides with explosive economic growth, the land rush is accelerating.

Green grabbing

In Chiure district, in the northern province of Cabo Delgado, investors are seeking agricultural land for everything from bananas to biofuels. Sandrina Muaco, one of the six percent of Mozambicans who live past 50, is smoking with her maize-husk roll-up turned lit side in – something of a trend in Maurunga village. She is one of 171 households displaced by a bevy of companies – both foreign and domestic – who have moved in on the fertile fields near the Lurio River.

Muaco's six hectares of cashew trees were cleared to make way for Eco-Energia de Moçambique's Ouroverde (Greengold) sugar processing plant.

“We used to spend a week picking nuts every harvest,” she recalls. “I would sell the cashews and make alcohol from the fruits. The land produced a lot.”

Villagers here, like 80 percent of Mozambicans, rely on agriculture to survive. But Muaco wasn't a subsistence farmer. Her plot was four times the size of the average land holding.

Eco-Energia – described by a land expert as “one of the better companies” – paid US\$664 in compensation for Muaco's trees and house, which were cleared to make way for the sugar cane plantation. But two years on, the money is long spent – on a new home, a sarong and the rental of an exhausted plot of land nearby where Muaco scratches out a living growing cassava and maize. She concludes: “I lost everything”.

The chair of Eco-Energia's parent company is entrepreneurial Swede Per Carstedt, former CEO of Europe's leading bioethanol

importer SEKAB. He hopes to clean-up the polluting transport systems of the industrialised world via African fields in both Tanzania and Mozambique.

Ouroverde has absorbed at least US\$1.3 million to date (50 percent from the Dutch government's private investment arm) and has rights to 1,000 hectares for the next 25 years. In the long term, Eco-Energia hopes to scale up to 30,000 hectares across the province, export organic sugar to Europe and distil bioethanol. It's a prime example of what the *Journal of Peasant Studies* has defined as “green-grabbing” – or “the appropriation of land and resources for environmental ends”.

In the dark

“We were taken by surprise,” says one widow, whose land has to sustain nine grandchildren. “The first we heard of it, we were told to go to our fields to get the large trees painted [for compensation].” She blames the *chef de aldeia* (lowest ranking government official) for signing away her cashew, banana and mango trees. She now rents a plot half a day's walk from her house. Aching muscles mean she can only farm on alternate days. Other villagers claim that the compensation process lacked transparency and was haphazard, missing out some families altogether.

Eco-Energia responded by email that the compensation process is unfinished, and they have received no complaints through their grievance procedures. It also maintains that the principles of free, prior and informed consent were followed during an extensive consultation.

But despite the company's efforts, the villagers did not know what they were getting into. Traditional leader, Martiño Silva thought the lease was for four years.

“After independence we occupied the land. We farmed there. Then Monika came,” he recalls, in reference to Monika Branks, Executive Director of Eco-Energia. “She said, ‘I want some land’. We agreed. We thought it would be a small area by the river. Then they said they needed more ...”

The plantation has created jobs, but villagers say these are only “good for young men”.

“It's too risky for someone with children,” says the widow. “Three days here, 25 days there. And it doesn't leave you time to sow your own fields.”

Forest lost

Elsewhere in Chiure, villagers have lost access to valuable common resources. A German mining firm Graphite Kropfmühl has cordoned off forests around scores of exploration sites. From one day to the next, farmers were cut off from lean season staples such as wild tubers and beans, game like hares, guinea fowl and small deer, as well as firewood, bamboo and medicinal plants.

Meanwhile, the intense investor interest has sparked a speculative land rush by local élites. In nearby Kitica, villagers are under threat from a cattle rancher, who has tried to evict them by force, without the niceties of compensation. “We depend on our own strength to feed our children,” says Laurinda Mitilage. “They will send us to places with poor soil. Then how will we live?”

Luis Muchanga from national peasant union UNAC likens the competition for land to a race. “Companies have a strong appetite,” he says. “There's a lot of them, chasing resources. Internally this sparks speculation, which goes beyond the capacity of local government.”

The stories from Chiure are repeated in large-scale deals the world over. The land acquired was not “empty”, despite Mozambique's low population density. Investors compete for land with local farming



communities, who are pushed into marginal areas – women in particular, are losing out. Consultations, when they happen, are fraught with power imbalance and unequal access to information.

The work generated on plantations is not sufficient – either in salary or security – to replace lost livelihoods; nor is compensation. Land activist Diamantino Nhampossa puts it bluntly: “The people are being cheated.” Whether investors are motivated by the “will to improve”, the environment, or profit – or a mix of all three – the outcome can be equally catastrophic for the people forced off their land.

White elephants

The free-market logic dictates that the eviction of farming communities is an unfortunate necessity – we need more productive farms to meet the world's food requirements. Yet even the World Bank – an avid backer of large land deals – acknowledges that no research has given the green-light to large-scale agriculture in Africa.

In fact, there's a pretty low success rate across the board. A land expert tells me that bar sugar, he is unaware of a single successful large-scale farm over 1,000 hectares in Mozambique – they have all gone bust.

But the poor track record has not stopped ever-bigger players from entering the “development” fray. Last year, the group of G8 nations launched the “new alliance for food security and nutrition”, which proposes using giant agribusiness corporations such as Monsanto, to end hunger in Mozambique and five other countries. Writer Joe Hanlon notes the G8's first act of charity was to subsidise grain giant Cargill to take over 40,000 hectares of Mozambican soil (they got 10,000).

Agribusiness presents these investments as “win-win”. But it's a struggle to locate a single community that has benefited. Some outgrower schemes – where companies provide a guaranteed market for smallholders, after providing seeds and inputs – come in for cautious praise. But these work best as an alternative to large-scale land acquisitions, not in addition.

There are reams of practical ideas for how to make deals fairer through partnerships such as equity shares. But improvements remain the exception. As the UN Development Program

pointed out in its 2012 *Human Development Report*: “Private investors naturally prioritise their own objectives, not the wellbeing of the poor and the vulnerable.”

Elsewhere in East Africa, there's evidence that big farms even fail against their own yardstick of profitability. A recent study of the Awash valley in north-eastern Ethiopia found that economic returns earned by pastoralists were higher than those of the irrigated state farms for sugar and cotton, which displaced them.

Ambivalent state

The socialist origins of Mozambique's ruling party FRELIMO incline it towards mechanised farms. But the government sends out mixed messages over large-scale investment. On the one hand, it's enjoying being a development success after years of civil war and persistent poverty. Hailed as one of the African lions, it's hell-bent on modernisation and has an economy growing at seven percent.

Yet it has also passed (in 1997) the most progressive community land rights law in Africa. It has been trying to row back from this high tide mark ever since and, in practice, rights are not enough to stop widespread dispossession. Politicians are also prone to staking claims to large tracts of lands themselves; companies enjoy a host of tax breaks and the land is almost free at just 40 cents rental per hectare.

On a district level, government officials are increasingly unhappy about investor-fuelled rural conflicts in places like Chiure. But Jacinto Tualufo, the head of the land surveying office in Maputo that processes land requests, confirms that applications are increasing in size and volume. “We must capitalise on this investment,” he says. “If we are afraid of development, we will lose these opportunities”.

By selling rights to these resources, it's hoped that wealth will trickle down even though there is little evidence of that to date. Mozambique's GDP may be climbing upwards, but the poverty reduction rate has flatlined in recent years; rural poverty is increasing in some areas. Corruption is also on the rise. The acid test for the government at present is how it will manage resources – and mass community displacement – in the wake of the recent discovery of vast reserves of coal and gas. The contours of Cabo Delgado, for example, are now almost completely obscured by overlapping concessions. The second major threat is the ProSavana scheme.

ProSavana – Africa's biggest land grab?

ProSavana is an ambitious project, inspired by the transformation of Brazil's biodiverse cerrado grassland into what writer Fred Pearce has described as “the most unremitting commercialised monoculture on earth”. The Mozambican government initially offered a whopping 14

The free-market logic dictates that the eviction of farming communities is an unfortunate necessity

On the anniversary of Martin Luther King's Poor People's Campaign:

"We will March to Ignite the Revolution King Called for"

The following press statement was released by Reverend **CD Witherspoon**, president of the Baltimore chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Next Saturday morning (May 11), many of us will mark the 45th anniversary of the Poor People's Campaign that Martin Luther King inspired, but did not live long enough to lead, by marching from Baltimore to Washington, D.C.

On May 11, the families of young Black and Brown people who have been killed by police will link arms with poor people, immigrant workers fighting for their rights, students, Walmart workers, union members, unemployed people and Occupy Wall Street activists, and walk 40 miles south down the highway to Washington, DC.

We will occupy Freedom Plaza on Pennsylvania Avenue, a few blocks away from the White House and down the road from the Capitol. There we will erect a big tent and convene a People's Power Assembly.

We are doing this to bear witness to the truth, and to help spark the social revolution that Dr King prescribed in the months before his death.

Dr King often said that truth crushed to

earth will rise again. The brutal truth is that the powers that be are waging a war against virtually everything that Dr King fought and died for.

Fifty years ago, on the steps of the Lincoln Monument, King shared his dream with the world. Today more and more of us are living in a nightmare.

Anyone who thought that having an African-American family or a Democrat in the White House would negate the urgent necessity for a social revolution has long awoken from that dream.

Our young people are more likely to be in prison than in a job.

Poverty, unemployment and desperation are more widespread today than they were when King was alive. The pauperisation of the population is the biggest crisis today.

The banks got bailed out after the 2008 global financial crash, and the stock market has soared through the roof. But for the rest of us – the people that Occupy Wall Street calls the 99% – there's nothing but economic terrorism in the form of unemployment, evictions, foreclosures, low wages and cutbacks.

The 1% have never been richer, greedier and more determined to eliminate, privatise or otherwise destroy every program that is helpful to the poor.

Wall Street has ordered the politicians

and the corporate media to justify the war against the poor.

We've been told that the cutting of Social Security, health care and unemployment benefits and the closing of hospitals, schools and post offices are being forced upon us by harsh economic realities.

We've been told that there's no point in proposing a real jobs program because we can't afford one.

These things are presented to us as though they were inarguable facts. They are not.

They are absurd and cruel lies put forward by the 1% in defence of a social and economic order that puts profits and greed before people's needs. These lies are meant to demoralise us and persuade us that it's useless to fight for a world based on equality, justice, solidarity and love.

These lies, and the 1% whose interest they serve, must be defeated.

When King proposed the Poor People's Campaign in 1967, he said that a revolution of values was needed, one that would transform a profit-centred economy into a people-centred one.

We will be marching on Saturday to ignite that revolution. ✪



million hectares of tropical savannah, cutting through the middle of the Northern regions. It's framed as win-win-win. Brazilian agribusiness will grow commodity crops for export to Japan. Mozambique gets some low-wage jobs and foreign currency.

But the land being targeted is also home to hundreds of thousands of farming families. Civil society has raised the alarm. Peasants' union UNAC predicts landlessness, social upheaval and environmental destruction; it is doing some tripartite mobilising of its own, with social movements in both Brazil and Japan.

In response to strong criticism, ProSavana is stressing partnership with Mozambican smallholders. But it's not clear how this will dovetail with the program's US\$2 billion investment fund for large-scale projects.

Will Mozambique emerge as industrial agriculture's next frontier? ProSavana knows it will have problems pulling large plots of land together. But in the meantime, family farmers who live within the target zone are already being told to move.

Invest, but not like this

It's not hard to see why Mozambique may be tempted to outsource its agriculture. Small-scale farming is not a runaway success. Some 35 percent of people live in perpetual hunger. Farmers toil with hoes, and yields are the lowest in southern Africa. Despite its much-vaunted 36 million hectares of arable land, Mozambique is a net food importer.

But traditional farming needs to be given a chance. Smallholders have been ignored for 20 years – structural adjustment programs imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund saw to that. It would be easy to boost production with support for rural infrastructure and inputs. And there's plenty of evidence that employment-intensive, small-scale commercial farming can be more productive as well as pro-poor.

Land grabs that uproot millions of smallholders – who grow 70 percent of the world's food – are a high-risk experiment that is inflicting great losses on the world's poor.

Promised agribusiness jobs are failing to materialise, and industrialisation to mop up the landless is an unlikely prospect. Surrendering control over resources will not lead to development that benefits the poor. Instead, communities need investment and protection. At least we know that campaigns are beginning to bear fruit and have halted many a controversial deal.

Companies are pushing harder than ever before to access land and resources in the Majority World. It's time to stop flirting with big business; it won't deliver. We need to reverse the trend: secure land rights, invest in the family farms.

If not, the land crisis will deepen and conflicts proliferate; we will be in for a rough ride. *New Internationalist* ✪



Death is preferable to life at Obama's Guantánamo

Marjorie Cohn

More than 100 of the 166 detainees at Guantánamo are starving themselves to death. Twenty-three of them are being force-fed. "They strap you to a chair, tie up your wrists, your legs, your forehead and tightly around the waist," Fayiz Al-Kandari told his lawyer, Lieutenant Colonel Barry Wingard. Al-Kandari, a Kuwaiti held at Guantánamo for 11 years, has never been charged with a crime.

"The tube makes his eyes water excessively and blood begins to trickle from the nose. Once the tube passes his throat the gag reflex kicks in. Warm liquid is poured into the body for 45 minutes to two hours. He feels like his body is going to convulse and often vomits," Wingard added.

The United Nations Human Rights Council concluded that force-feeding amounts to torture. The American Medical Association says that force-feeding violates medical ethics. "Every competent patient has the right to refuse medical intervention, including life-sustaining interventions," AMA President Jeremy Lazarus wrote to Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel. Yet President Barack Obama continues the tortuous Bush policy of force-feeding hunger strikers.

Although a few days after his first inauguration, Obama promised to shut Guantanamo, it remains open. "I continue to believe that we've got to close Guantanamo," Obama declared in his April 30 press conference. But, he added, "Congress determined that they would not let us close it." Obama signed a bill that Congress

passed which erected barriers to closure. According to a *Los Angeles Times* editorial, "Obama has refused to expend political capital on closing Guantánamo. Rather than veto the defence authorisation bills that have limited his ability to transfer inmates, he has signed them while raising questions about whether they intruded on his constitutional authority."

"I don't want these individuals to die," Obama told reporters. In fact, Obama has the power to save the hunger strikers' lives without torturing them. Eighty-six – more than half – of the detainees remaining at Guantánamo have been cleared for release for the past three years. Section 1028(d) of the 2013 National Defence Authorisation Act empowers the Secretary of Defence to approve transfers of detainees when it is in the national security interest of the United States.

Fifty-six of the 86 cleared detainees are from Yemen. Yet Obama imposed a ban on releasing any of them following the foiled 2009 Christmas bomb plot by a Nigerian man who was recruited in Yemen. Obama must begin signing these certifications and waivers at once.

Indeed, Obama said in his press conference, "I think – well, you know, I think it is critical for us to understand that Guantánamo is not necessary to keep America safe ... It hurts us in terms of our international standing ... It is a recruitment tool for extremists. It needs to be closed."

In addition, Obama's March 7, 2011 Executive Order 13567 provides for additional administrative review of detainees' cases. The Periodic Review Board (PRB) would provide an opportunity for a detainee to challenge his



continued detention. Yet Obama has delayed by more than a year PRB hearings at which other detainees could be cleared for release. Despite a requirement that the PRB begin review within one year, no PRB has yet been created.

Obama should appoint an official to oversee the closure of Guantánamo and commence periodic reviews immediately so that detainees can challenge their designations and additional detainees can be approved for transfer.

Moreover, as suggested by Lieutenant Colonel David Frakt, who

represented Guantánamo detainees before the military commissions and in federal habeas corpus proceedings, Obama should direct the attorney general to inform the DC Circuit Court of Appeals that the Department of Justice no longer considers the cleared detainees to be detainable. Obama has blocked the release of eight cleared detainees by opposing their habeas corpus petitions. "[W]hen the Obama administration really wants to transfer a detainee, they are quite capable of doing so," Frakt wrote in *JURIST*.

The Constitution Project's Task Force on Detainee Treatment, which includes two former senior US generals, and a Republican former congressman and lawyer, Asa Hutchinson, issued a report that concluded the treatment and indefinite detention of the Guantánamo detainees is "abhorrent and intolerable". It called for the closure of the prison camp by next year.

Twenty-five former Guantánamo detainees issued a statement recommending that the American medical

profession stop its complicity with abuse force-feeding techniques; conditions on confinement for detainees be improved immediately; all detainees who have not been charged be released; and the military commissions process be ended and all those charged be tried in line with the Geneva Conventions.

The detainees who are refusing food have been stripped of all possessions, including a sleeping mat and soap, and are made to sleep on concrete floors in freezing solitary cells. "It is possible that I may die in here," said Shaker Aamer through his lawyer, Clive Stafford Smith. "I hope not, but if I do die, please tell my children that I loved them above all else, but that I had to stand up for the principle that they cannot just keep holding people without a trial, especially when they have been cleared for release." Aamer, a British father of four, was approved for release more than five years ago.

Information Clearing House ✪

US bases in Afghanistan?

Marilyn Bechtel

In this week's news has come a sobering wake-up call for anyone hoping the end of 2014 will really mark the end of the US war in Afghanistan. In what may be a premature revelation of what's happening in negotiations for a Bilateral Security Agreement, Afghan President Hamid Karzai on May 8 proclaimed that his country "can agree" to give the US nine bases he said Washington seeks.

Karzai told an audience at Kabul University that the US "staying on after 2014 is for the good of Afghanistan. The condition is that they bring peace and security and take action quickly ... on the basic strengthening of Afghanistan, helping the economy of Afghanistan."

He added, "We are trying to ensure the interests of both countries are satisfied in this agreement. We want roads, electricity, hydro-power dams, and strengthening of the Afghan government."

The White House was quick to back away from Karzai's statement. Answering a reporter's question, Press Secretary Jay Carney asserted that "the United States does not seek permanent military bases in Afghanistan, and any U.S. presence after 2014 would only be at the invitation of the Afghan

government and aimed at training Afghanistan forces and targeting the remnants of Al-Qaeda."

Carney declined to answer a question about how close President Obama is to deciding US troop levels there after 2014.

Despite the denials, it sounds like Karzai has let a very big cat out of the bag.

Negotiations between the two countries for an agreement on what will happen after the stated deadline for US withdrawal of combat troops began last November.

Karzai's spokesperson Aimal Faizy told the *Los Angeles Times* in a telephone interview this week that the bases the US requested last month include facilities in and near the capital, Kabul, and in Helmand and Kandahar in the south, Herat near the Iranian border, Gardez and Jalalabad in the east, and the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif.

Much of what is happening in the ongoing talks remains unclear. But what is clear is that despite more than 11 years of war and occupation and attempts to train Afghan armed forces, the military situation in Afghanistan remains highly unstable. Taliban forces can mount actions in supposedly secure areas, while the situation of the civilian population remains dire.

And Al-Qaeda, the pretext for continuing US engagement in

Afghanistan, is virtually nonexistent there.

Despite efforts to paint US training with a rosy glow, Afghan forces continue to face problems with corruption, "attrition," coordination and combat ability.

Meanwhile, over 2,200 US soldiers have died in Afghanistan-related actions, and civilian deaths have by some estimates soared well over 100,000.

So what to do? International affairs commentator Conn Hallinan pointed out earlier this year that the only sane course is for the US "to get out, and as quickly as possible."

And leading peace advocates in Congress have been pressing for exactly that approach.

US Democrat Representative Barbara Lee earlier this year reintroduced her "Responsible End to the War in Afghanistan Act," which would restrict Afghanistan war funding to that needed for "safe and orderly withdrawal" of all US military and contractor personnel. The measure has 40 co-sponsors.

The bill, HR 200, is currently before the House Committees on Armed Services and Foreign Affairs. Helping to build support for this measure is one very positive way to respond to the latest news.

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Washington-backed forces in Syria losing ground

Thomas Gaist

Calls for a war with Syria mounted last week, despite mass popular opposition to war in the United States, amid reports that US-backed Islamist opposition forces fighting the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad have suffered serious reverses.

Speaking on NBC News, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan pressed for Washington to take military action against Syria. He repeated unsubstantiated allegations that the Assad regime has used chemical weapons, which have been refuted by UN investigator Carla del Ponte. Claiming that a “red line” had been crossed, he said: “We want the United States to assume more responsibilities and take further steps. And what sort of steps they will take, we are going to talk about this.”

Erdogan dismissed out of hand reports that chemical weapons used in Syria were in fact used by the US-backed opposition. He stressed that his government would support US imposition of a “no-fly zone” in Syria, which would involve destroying Syrian air defences and shooting down any Syrian aircraft that took to the skies.

Erdogan’s calls for military action were echoed across the American press. The *Washington Post*’s editorial board called for “an air campaign as well as arms for the moderate opposition” aimed to “quickly tip the military balance against the Assad regime.” *Wall Street Journal* columnist Bret Stephens proposed a long list of attacks against Assad, including sending in US ground forces: “disable the runways of Syrian air bases, including the international airport in Damascus ... use naval assets to impose a no-fly zone over western Syria ... supply the Free Syrian Army with heavy military equipment, including armoured personnel carriers and light tanks; and be prepared to seize and remove Syria’s chemical weapons stockpile, even if it means putting boots (temporarily) on the ground.”

The calls for war come amid reports of major setbacks in Syria for the US-backed opposition, reflecting

its small size and lack of popular support, and growing military assistance from Russia, Iran, and Lebanon for the Assad regime.

After two months of heavy bombardment, government forces have retaken the strategic town of Khirbet Ghazaleh from the “rebels”, re-opening government transport routes to Deraa, the city where initial opposition protests began two years ago. Opposition leaders acknowledged it as a major setback. “Tomorrow, the big tragedy will happen, the regime’s supply route to Deraa will reopen, and the officers will go back and ammunition will be resupplied and the bombardment will resume,” said Abu Yacoub, commander of the Martyrs of Khirbet Ghazaleh brigade.

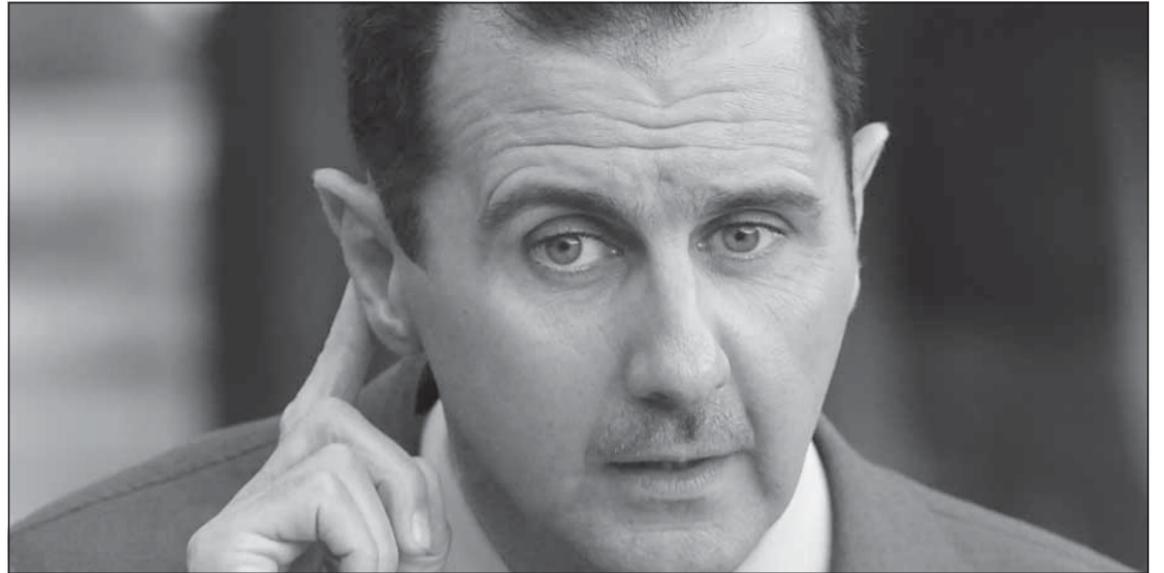
BBC Middle East bureau chief Paul Danahar wrote that the Free Syrian Army (FSA) amounts to little more than “men with guns”, united only by the fact that they “point their guns in the same direction.” He said the FSA is not a “cohesive force” and lacks a “command structure”.

A *Jerusalem Post* article of May 3 entitled “Is Assad Winning in Syria?” describes the defeat of opposition militias around Qusayr by Hezbollah forces, as well as the capture of Otaiba by Assad’s forces last week, indicating the growing strength of Assad vis-à-vis the US proxy forces. According to the article, “morale among supporters of the regime has improved markedly in recent weeks.” It concluded, “Assad shows no signs of cracking.”

Under these conditions, Assad’s allies are stepping up military deliveries to Damascus. The Russian government has announced plans to sell S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems to Syria, in a US\$900 million deal that would substantially bolster the Syrian regime’s capacity to defend itself against US and Israeli airstrikes.

Secretary of State John Kerry criticised the sale as “destabilising,” and the Israeli government appealed to Russia to halt the transaction. Syria’s purchase comes after Israeli air strikes that used long-range “stand-off” missiles to attack Damascus from beyond the Syrian border.

Iran has vowed to respond to the Israeli raids with “blows under the belt in several locations”. Iran’s envoy



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

to Syria, Ali Akbar Salehi, promised “full and unlimited support from Iran, politically, militarily, and economically, to the Syrian leadership and people, against the *takfiris* [Al-Qaeda-type Sunni extremist forces], terrorists, Israel, the US, and all who dare attack this country.”

Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah announced that Syria would supply his militia “special weapons it never had before”, calling the decision “game-changing”. The weapons are apparently being transferred as a response to Israel’s air strikes on Damascus. “This is the Syrian strategic reaction,” he explained.

These deliveries highlight the broad regional implications of the proxy war Washington has waged against the Assad regime, relying primarily on Islamist forces tied to Al-Qaeda, and the risk of a US war in Syria escalating into a regional or even global conflict.

There is broad opposition in the working class to the US drive to war in Syria overseen by President Barack Obama and the Democratic Party. A recent poll pegged popular opposition to war at 62 percent of the US population.

The conflict has already taken a horrific toll on the Syrian people. Over the past several months, the number

of Syrians displaced from their homes by the war has increased from 2 million to 4.25 million. A total of 6.8 million Syrians, including 3.1 million children, are classified as “in dire need of humanitarian assistance” by the UN’s Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Jordanian officials have stated that Syrian refugees now make up 10 percent of Jordan’s total population, with this figure set to explode to 40 percent by mid-2014 on current trends.

The ramping up of US military operations against Syria is accompanied by diplomatic efforts to bring about a post-Assad government on terms favourable to US imperialism. John Kerry has sought an agreement with Russia, which would pave the way for a power-sharing arrangement.

This plan also received significant endorsement in US strategic and media circles. Zbigniew Brzezinski, a prominent architect of US imperial policy, issued a strong criticism of proposed US military action against Syria, proposing instead to try to involve Russia and China in US plans to remove Assad through diplomacy.

He said, “The various schemes that have been proposed for a kind of tiddlywinks intervention from around the edges of the conflict – no-fly zones, bombing Damascus and so

forth – would simply make the situation worse. None of the proposals would result in an outcome strategically beneficial for the US. On the contrary they would produce a more complex, undefined slide into the worst-case scenario. The only solution is to seek Russia’s and China’s support for UN-sponsored elections in which, with luck, Assad might be ‘persuaded’ not to participate.”

Along these lines, David Ignatius of the *Washington Post* proposed “a military transition government” that would include “reconcilable elements of Assad’s army,” under the leadership of US-backed General Salim Idriss, a defector who now commands Syrian opposition forces.

Effectively, US officials are hoping that, in the context of negotiations jointly organised by the Russian government, they could persuade Syrian officers to organise a coup to oust Assad, and then make a deal with the US-backed opposition. Their plan involves a new ruling coalition composed of opposition and regime elements, described by Ignatius as a “military transition government that would include reconcilable elements of Assad’s army.” Assad would be removed, though lower-ranking members of his government might remain. globalresearch.ca ☛

Red Square parade makes Russian Victory Day a fiesta

Liu Hongxia

MOSCOW: On May 9 Russia honoured the 68th anniversary of Nazis’ capitulation, with the yearly Victory Day parade on Red Square. Tens of thousands of spectators from home and abroad, knowing it was impossible to get onto the site without invitations, flooded along the Moscow river, where a glimpse of the showcase could be caught.

Minutes after the Kremlin bell tolled at 10am Moscow time, a sudden artillery salvo from the other side of the river bank, followed by several more rang out.

As the first regiment, cadets of military schools, marched past, the crowds burst into applause

and cheers while souvenir vendors twisted their way in between.

Professional photographers carrying ladders and lenses struggled for decent shooting angles, some climbing onto nearby roofs.

Vehicles were barred some 200 metres from the river bank but cyclists could squeeze through.

“I rode more than one hour to get here, just to see the parade,” a male cyclist called Alexei said, adding it was the first time he had come to watch the parade.

Dmitry, 29, said he was proud of his country while watching a live video report via a portable tablet computer. His six-year-old son, Max, perched on his shoulders, kept screaming in astonishment as regiments of ground forces rolled by.

The crowds rejoiced at the climax when 68 aircraft, including Mi-28 attack helicopters Mi-28, and Su-27 and Tu-160 strategic bombers, rocked the Moscow sky.

Young people wearing USSR T-shirts and army caps exchanged greetings. A considerable number of veterans with rows of medals saluted the aerobatic teams.

People, waving flags and chanting, started to withdraw from the site at around 11am, an hour after the parade kicked off.

Members of a military band, who left the square along a bridge over the river, waved to the crowds, some even playing a little impromptu music.

Xinhua ☛



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



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Myer's shame

The CEO of Myer's opposition to the 0.5 percent taxation levy towards funding the government's new National Disability Insurance Scheme got the hostile response it deserves. He shouldn't be surprised if sales drop dramatically before the levy kicks in. I hope so.

His position is so reactionary. The economics are correct; if people have less income they spend less. So why does he oppose people with disability having more money to spend on services that will create jobs and result in more spending.

Why didn't he suggest a \$50 increase in unemployment benefits which would be spent? Why didn't he oppose the government's slashing of the income of single parents? Why didn't he suggest a genuine super profits tax on mining corporations to give the government funding to do this?

All of these would have resulted in more spending and improved the quality of life for people in need.

Obviously, he doesn't care a damn about such groups.

Second thoughts, they probably can't afford to shop at Myers!

**M Santos
Vic**

Collective punishment in Cyprus

I want to express thanks to the ABC's Foreign Correspondent for a very insightful and deeply moving show on Cyprus. This report brought a personal perspective to the small nation's political and economic upheavals.

The program showed the real social and economic suffering the European Union's austerity policy has inflicted on the people of Cyprus and elsewhere. It is criminal that a couple of banks' bad loans can be used against a whole people, who were not responsible for the problem.

This amounts effectively to collective punishment of the population. Watching this program, I was struck with the feeling that the EU's solution amounted to destroying the country in order to save it.

It was also wonderful to witness the compassionate and united strength of the island's community and vividly showed the resilience, tenacity and solidarity of the Cypriot people, the things that have gotten them through so many previous tragedies and hard times.

The actions of the EU won't break the indomitable willpower of the Cypriot people and this spirit will ensure they overcome this latest catastrophe.

**Steven Katsineris
Vic**

Trying to justify war crimes

Former PM John Howard recently spoke about the decision to go to war in Iraq. We all remember the huge demonstrations against going to war in numerous countries at the time, including Australia and consequent revelations of lies used to justify the aggression.

"I acknowledge that my government's decision to go to war in Iraq polarised attitudes in Australia – it was certainly not a poll driven decision. It is unlikely that the passage of time has softened attitudes towards that decision. It remains my opinion, however that it was right because it was in Australia's national interests. The removal of Saddam's regime provided the Iraqi people with opportunities for freedom which would not otherwise have been possible", (John Howard, April 9, 2013.)

Mr Howard evidently has a strange notion of "liberation". The dead, the deformed, the cancer stricken, the refugees – they are all "liberated". Iraq is being torn by

violence, basic services are not being provided. The land is poisoned by depleted uranium. In Fallujah, a city of 300,000 people during the 2004 assaults not only depleted uranium (three times unanimously designated a weapon of mass destruction by UN sub-committees) but other illegal, experimental chemical weapons and napalm were used.

In Basra, doctors at the maternity hospital told the BBC that they have seen a 60 percent rise in birth defects. They are certain that the rise is due to the munitions used. Basra's birth defects are the stuff of nightmares. Like in Vietnam before, congenital deformities are present in ever increasing numbers.

Mr Howard and his colleagues from the "coalition of the willing" are war criminals. Hopefully in the not so distant future they'll get what they deserve for their crimes.

**Mati English
Sydney**

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Chaos and destruction



Q: Why were there so many troops at Margaret Thatcher's funeral?

A: To make sure she stayed buried.

For all her cult hero status in the reactionary British media, British capitalism was glad to be rid of her. Her neo-fascist politics laid waste the British economy and embarrassed other world leaders anxious to prove their adherence to "democracy and the rule of law".

In an interview with the Irish Republican paper *An Phoblacht*, Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams said of her: "Margaret Thatcher did great hurt to the Irish and British people during her time as British Prime Minister. Working class communities were devastated in Britain because of her policies.

"Her role in international affairs was equally belligerent, whether in support of the Chilean dictator Pinochet, her opposition to sanctions against apartheid in South Africa, or her support for the Khmer Rouge.

"Here in Ireland, her espousal of old draconian militaristic policies prolonged the war and caused great suffering. She embraced censorship, collusion and the killing of citizens by covert operations ...

"Her failed efforts to criminalise the Republican struggle and the political prisoners are part of her legacy."

However, although much of the British ruling class disapproved of her tactics at the time (one of her first acts was to stop the supply of free milk to school children, for example), they

had no quarrel with her underlying philosophy. Her mean-spirited, hostile approach to the working class and to poor people generally, is today embraced across the capitalist world. "Austerity measures" are forced on people, measures that make the poor poorer – real wages fall while rents, food, petrol and fares soar – and homelessness grows.

Homelessness is another of Thatcher's legacies: she encouraged the privatisation of council housing. As Daphne Liddle put it in *The New Worker*, "A high proportion of those [privatised council] homes are now owned by private profiteering landlords while the working classes do not stand a hope in hell of ever being able to buy a home and we have a massive housing crisis. ... London is now full of luxury apartments that stand empty – owned by foreign millionaires who buy them as an investment and to have an address in London so they can benefit from its tax-haven status."

No wonder there were celebrations amongst poor people when she died.

Looking elsewhere in the capitalist world, did you see where a police sergeant in Florida has been sacked for using paper targets emblazoned with a photo of 17-year-old black murder victim Trayvon Martin for shooting practice. The Martin family's lawyer condemned the act as "depraved".

Trayvon Martin died when he wandered unarmed into a white neighbourhood where he was shot dead by a watchman, George Zimmerman, who claimed he felt threatened by Martin's presence in the area.

Florida is on the Gulf of Mexico, adjacent

to the other Gulf states, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. They all have one thing in common: extreme variance between rich and poor. Some really rich people hang out in Florida, or call Texas home. At the same time, the signs of all-pervading poverty are everywhere in these states. Ignorance is rife, jobs are scarce, for most people "the American dream" is just that – a dream.

Gun culture is entrenched, police brutality is commonplace. If the USA's Gulf States were a separate country it would be classified as a "failed state".

Even before the devastation caused in Louisiana by Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans was among the poorest cities in the USA. Now it is almost certainly the poorest as well as the most violent. Paranoia and fear are the order of the day. The homicide rate there is *seven times higher* than in New York.

Most of the people in the USA have no desire to live in such conditions, but they have few opportunities to escape their plight. That same fear and paranoia is used to keep large numbers of them too frightened to give up their guns, too frightened to trust outsiders or people with new ideas, too convinced that "you can't fight city hall".

However, despite this (or perhaps because of it?) there are still plenty of people in the USA who are prepared to fight for a better life, to fight against the banks and the bosses and the media tycoons. The "Occupy" movement that swept the USA was a powerful call to the people to challenge the power of the exploiters. When that popular anger grows even more,

and merges with the organised working class movement and Marxist ideology, then we will see exciting things from the American people.

Meanwhile, the people of Syria are fighting for their lives, their culture and their secular state against what can now be seen as a much-refined "Bay of Pigs" type invasion of their country. The "contras" in Syria are much better armed than were their counterparts in the abortive invasion of Cuba: the "rebels" in Syria have received massive airlifts of weapons since the end of last year, courtesy of the Middle East oil kingdoms (all US client states, of course), with the deliveries co-ordinated by the CIA. The latter organisation has also been revealed to be running a military training camp for jihadists and anti-Syrian "rebels" in northern Jordan.

The US still talks about its objective as being "regime change", but in fact US imperialism and its allies are more interested in simply destroying the Assad government than in replacing it with some other stable regime. As in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, US aims are satisfied if its intervention leaves behind a country in chaos. Powerful corporations, backed by the US military, can exploit the resources of countries even when those countries have been reduced to rubble and disorder.

In many ways, not having to deal with a strong central government makes the task of exploiting a nation's natural resources a lot easier. In conditions of chaos, imperialism can pose as the champion of order, fairness and even legality. It worked for France in Mali. Why not everywhere? ☸



Sunday May 19 –
Saturday May 25

I first saw John Howard – no, not *him*, the other one, the good one, the actor – in the film of David Williamson's play *The Club*, where he played a lanky young hot-shot Aussie Rules player purchased by an ailing club as their "white hope". Besides acting he has also distinguished himself as a committed anti-war campaigner, not afraid to stand up for his beliefs.

John Howard's family background is the subject of this week's instalment of *Who Do You Think You Are?* (SBS ONE Tuesday May 21 at 7.30pm). This is the last instalment of the current series, and a fitting episode to end on.

John Howard's paternal grandfather enlisted for the Great War only a couple of weeks after getting married, although there is no suggestion that he was trying to escape the married state. It was more likely a fit of youthful enthusiasm combined with total ignorance of what the War would actually be like or how long it might last.

He was a very capable soldier, quickly rising through the ranks until he was selected to go to officer training school in London and an almost certain commission at the end of it. Unfortunately, he went out that night to celebrate, and – like no less than ten percent of the Australian troops – he went to bed with a prostitute and woke up with gonorrhoea. His officer training

was washed up, and after months of painful treatment he was discharged as "unfit".

His only legacy of his time in the carnage of Flanders was his account of seeing the Red Baron shot down. The program features macabre footage of the British burying with full military honours (rifle salute, honour guard with arms reversed, etc) the German air ace credited with killing about 90 of their own people!

John's researches on the distaff side of the family, however, are more fruitful. He discovers that his maternal great grandfather was a prominent agitator for the mid-19th century Chartist movement in Britain, and after he moved to Australia a popular agitator for trade union rights and the 8-hour day. Howard is visibly chuffed at this discovery, seeing a genetic link to his own career.

The country with the greatest proportion of its population banged up in prison is of course the USA, the so-called "land of the free". The peculiarly American rule that if a person is convicted of an offence for the fourth time (even if it is a relatively minor offence) they will go to jail for life means that US prisons are overflowing. Especially with poor people, for the opportunities for honest work are not that plentiful in "the greatest nation on Earth".

And it is only a co-incidence that the majority of poor people are Black or Latino. Of course it is!

Of late there have been a spate of TV programs showing "life inside" the US prison system. Some years ago Amnesty International cited the US prison system for essentially practising torture, especially in the form of cruel and unusual punishment. The US authorities were outraged (after all, Amnesty used to be their creature, used to attack the socialist countries), but these programs showed convincingly that the US system definitely qualifies as inhuman.

Now comes *Inside Solitary Confinement* (ABC2 Tuesday May 21 at 9.30pm), a program that invites viewers to "examine the science of solitary confinement and find out what



John Howard is the subject of this week's – *Who Do You Think You Are?* (SBS ONE Tuesday May 21 at 7.30pm).

it means to be absolutely alone". That sounds like the kind of experiment the Nazis would have been very interested in.

One would have thought there was more than enough data available already to satisfy any researcher into the hell of solitary confinement, from the testimony of Robert Stroud (the "Birdman of Alcatraz") who spent years in solitary, to Julius Fučík and other antifascists. The program actually boasts that it shows "ongoing new research on how solitary could actually cause long-term mental problems".

No kidding? This is *new* research? The continuing popularity of so called "alternate therapies" among so many otherwise level headed people, people who in other respects put their faith in science and the products of modern education and research, points to a very strong distrust of medicine practised as commerce. There are

even people in our own movement who are so outraged by the price-gouging of so-called ethical drug companies that they prefer to believe in practitioners of "ancient cures" who claim, for example, to be able to diagnose all manner of illnesses simply by observing the whites of the patient's eyes. I am not making this up: a respected Comrade once argued this very position with me.

Another dismissed immunisation on the grounds that drug companies made big profits from mass immunisation. Of course they do. That is an argument for taking over the health system, not for throwing out immunisation.

Alternative therapies are also helped by a phenomenon known as flawed logic. "He was sick, he drank the juice of the jujube plant, he got better. Ergo, the jujube juice cured him." That is a common form of thought process but it is not necessarily true at all. Many people

get better despite rather than because of the medicine they are given.

The new four-part documentary series *The Witch Doctor Will See You Now* (SBS 2 Tuesdays at 9.45pm from May 21) purports to be concerned with "uncovering the science and secrets" behind such "traditional" practices as drinking the blood of snakes, swallowing the still beating heart of a chicken or slurping broth from a boiled termite nest.

The first episode deals with Chinese "remedies" ranging from acupuncture to whacking the patient with a feathery cane "along his meridians" to "transfer qi from the doctor to the patient". I do not know if later episodes include taking powdered rhino horn to make your penis grow bigger, but I wouldn't be surprised. For a series that purports to be at least tangentially concerned with science, this is so unscientific in its methods that it can only be described as worthless. ☛



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POLITICS *in the pub*

May 17

CORRUPTION IN NSW – A FEW ROTTEN APPLES OR A SYSTEMIC PROBLEM?

David Shoebridge, Greens MLC;
Linton Besser, Investigative Journalist, *Sydney Morning Herald*;

May 24

IRAQ – 10 YEARS ON – WHAT COSTS, WHAT ACHIEVEMENTS?

Noah Bassil, Dr, Lecturer, Politics and International Relations,
Macquarie University;
Donna Mulhearn, Pax Christi, "Human Shield" and volunteer in Iraq
2003;

May 31

WHY AUSTRALIAN INVESTORS HAVE LOST \$10 BILLION IN THE LAST DECADE – AND WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT

Gerard Minack, Global Cross Asset Strategy, Morgan Stanley;
Joe Nagy, Economist and Financial Risk Analyst;

June 7

NO MEETING

Long weekend, holiday;

Every Friday 6pm 'til 7.45

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Entrapment – The Australian conundrum

Peter Barrack

Part 1

The US is a country very comfortable with war. According to the US Congressional Research Centre, it tells us that in the 297 years since the Declaration of Independence the US has regime changed, destabilised, invaded, conducted coups, assassinated leaders, etc., on 200 occasions for various political, ideological and/or economic reasons.

The delusional justification for these crimes against humanity is zealously propagated as the pursuit of democracy, peace, happiness, and stability, in spite of the masses of invalidating evidence to the contrary.

Stephen Kinzer, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and *New York Times* correspondent makes a telling point in his book, *Overthrow: American Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*: “Defending corporate power is hardly the only reason the US overthrows foreign governments. They do so for the most elemental reasons, which is to acquire more of whatever is good to have. In the modern world, corporations are the institutions that countries use to capture wealth. They become the vanguard of American power, defying them is tantamount to defying the United States”.

Australia’s obsequious servility to the US, bound by two unrequited linkages of US convenience, more commonly known as the ANZUS Treaty and the “Alliance”, have dragged Australia into three indefensible wars: Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, at an unacceptable cost of life and suffering.

American foreign policy objectives currently function within the foreign policy doctrine “global spectrum dominance”. The following limited statistics seek to expose the extent to which the US has progressed with its doctrinal strategy:

1. The Pentagon outlays about US\$700 billion per annum. This accounts for 41% of all global defence spending. Coupled with its allies’ defence spending, it comes to a total of 71% of global spending. China’s defence expenditure as part of GDP is 8% of global spending.
2. The US has approximately 300,000 troops stationed abroad, more than the rest of the developing countries combined. That does not include the 90,000 sailors and marines at sea nor is it precisely known how many are in Iraq and Afghanistan. The troops occupy or use some 761 sites in 39 foreign countries.
3. The engaged countries are: Azerbaijan, Arabia, Australia, Argentina, Afghanistan, Bulgaria, Bahrain, Cuba, Curacao,



Columbia, El Salvador, Ecuador, Emirates, Greenland, Germany, Guam, Paraguay, Honduras, Italy, Iraq, Japan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Pakistan, Oman, Puerto Rico, Romania, South Korea, Spain, Saudi Arabia Tajikistan, Turkey, UK, Uzbekistan, Paraguay, Quater, Diego Garcia, and Antarctica.

4. The Pentagon has divided the planet into unified commands, each under the control of a four-star general or an admiral. They are: Pacific Command responsible for Asia-Pacific region; Central Command responsible for greater Middle East; European Command responsible for EU; African command responsible for 53 nations; Southern Command covers Central and South America and Caribbean; Northern Command is responsible for North America; Strategic Command is responsible for sea and land-based missiles and long-range bombers; and Space Command covers joint space operations.

President Obama, within his first term of office, very quickly moved to shut down the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The real

purpose was that the US could not sustain the cost and needed the revenues to fund his Asian re-alignment strategy and the containment of China. Australia, along with other accomplices, namely, Japan, Philippines, South Korea, and India are pressured to join this spurious strategic objective.

Rarely, if ever, has Australia been the centre of such slavish attention with visits from presidents, senior foreign ministers, secretary of state (twice), secretary of defence (three times), army generals, and admirals.

The first visitor was Robert Gates, Secretary of Defence, and Hilary Clinton, Secretary of State. Then, after avoiding Australia to visit India and Indonesia, President Obama, then Hilary Clinton again and a new Defence Secretary, Leon Panetta, the British Home Secretary, William Haig, and the British Defence Secretary, EU Secretary General Fogh Rasmussen, then Admiral Samuel Lochlear and then, twice Richard Armitage – a passionate hawk from the Bush administration.

They were all here, the lackeys of the crumbling colonial powers and declining imperialist power, all with the intent of badgering for Australia’s commitment to the grand Western powers one-dimensional strategy of strategic containment of China.

All were singing from the same spreadsheet. The topics were defence expenditure (or lack of it), joint defence cooperation, joint defence manoeuvres, joint defence ventures, joint strategic ocean tactics, joint strategic planning, and so on. Forgive my cynicism for thinking the spreadsheet may have been crafted in Washington or the Pentagon.

Let us examine the nature of the tactical pressure being applied to the Australian government, by the US, to achieve their objectives.

A statement from President Obama’s office, 19-07-2012: “Australia has used the regular deployment of US Marines to Darwin for half of

each year as a shield for slackening its defence expenditures”.

In 2011, President Obama lectured the Australian Parliament on America’s intent of an escalated presence in South East Asia and the expectations of Australia’s role in that process. He said, in part: “Partnerships can’t be just about one nation extracting other nation’s resources”, while not naming the “nation”, it was patently obvious it was China.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* took the President to task over his overbearing comments by raising questions of the negative implications contained with his assumptions; it raised the following questions:

1. “Firstly, it was audacious that the President should try to warn Australia off its relationship with its biggest trading partner” (China 25.5% of Australia exports, US 4%).
2. “It is hypocritical that a president of another country should redefine a free trade relationship between two consenting sovereign states as exploitive”.
3. “In 2003, the US was Australia’s second biggest export market behind Japan. It received about 12% of our exports; however, in 2004 Australia signed a free trade agreement, hence, and in 2012, our exports had fallen to 4%”.

The next put-down on Australia’s right to determine how it handles its economic responsibilities came from Admiral Locklear, head of the US Pacific Command and Richard Armitage, who publicly launched a tirade of offensive statements: “It threatens the country’s credibility as an ally”, “Australia is freeloading on the American taxpayer”, “Australia defence spending has fallen below what the US expects”, “Australia’s defence budget is inadequate”, and so on.

Next week: Authoritarian disrespect to sovereignty
The Beacon 🇺🇸

Rarely, if ever, has Australia been the centre of such slavish attention with visits from presidents, senior foreign ministers, secretary of state (twice), secretary of defence (three times), army generals, and admirals.



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