



Gutter politics

Highlights need for alternative

Anna Pha

Australian politics sank to new lows last week with a radio shock jock questioning the Prime Minister Julia Gillard about her partner's sexuality, the "bad-taste" menu at a Liberal Party fundraiser and the PM's "Women For Gillard" speech declaring war on male politicians. Gillard's speech sealed her fate as a future Labor leader. What masquerades as parliamentary debate is little more than personal, point-scoring attacks, between two parties with highly discredited policies and leaders.

The appalling lack of respect for women was not confined to the political sphere. The Socceroos coach and senior military officers were also caught out in their denigration of women. The media described it as "men behaving badly", while they irresponsibly sensationalised and exploited the tawdry details of every twist and turn in events.

The shift to the right in Australian politics by both Labor and Liberal extends beyond the economic sphere into every facet of life. It brings forth the most backward of ideas, which serve capitalism well to create divisions within the working class and divert attention from capitalism's failures. During the Howard years "political correctness" was mocked, with a return to more explicit forms of sexism and racism in the media, by advertisers and politicians.

The recent ABC TV series, *Paper Giants: Magazine Wars*, showed how irresponsible gossip and sleaze sell copy and make profits as well as dragging down community values.

The government's decision not to rescue the bodies of more than 50 asylum seekers floating in the sea was another example of racism and rank opportunism appealing to the most base elements in society.

The publication of the printed menu for a Liberal National Party fundraiser for Mal Brough with the name of a dish making derogatory references to the Prime Minister's anatomy are indicative of how low some Liberal Party forces and supporters have sunk. An embarrassed Liberal leadership was quick to condemn the menu. Shadow Treasurer Joe Hockey and Brough, who were at the dinner, could not recollect seeing it. Then the owner of the restaurant came to the rescue claiming it was not distributed, but just a joke with his son.

Brough is standing in Fisher, the seat held by Peter Slipper, former Speaker of the House. The Federal Court last year found Brough was involved in actions to discredit Slipper.

Just how low sections of the media have sunk was demonstrated by Perth radio host Howard Sattler who asked the PM if her partner Tim Mathieson was gay. He was giving her a chance to dispel "myths, rumours, snide jokes and innuendo"! "But you hear it - he must be gay, he's a hairdresser", Sattler said.



"Women for Gillard" - image via Julia Gillard's Twitter account.

Where else in the world would a radio interview with a Prime Minister pry into such personal and irrelevant matters, designed to deter homophobic voters. It is completely out of order and should not have been allowed. Why didn't the radio station press the button on Sattler at the first hint of the appalling nature of the interview. Were his questions pre-approved? Why is the station still allowed to broadcast? These are the issues the mass media should be taking up if it had an ounce of morality.

The outrage was so great that Radio 6PR was forced into damage control and sacked Sattler. The Liberals dropped him as the host for an upcoming Liberal Party fundraiser.

Sattler has a reputation for his right-wing and controversial views. He hit the headlines some years ago when he made the comment "good riddance to bad rubbish" in response to hearing about the deaths of three Indigenous youths who stole a car. He was also caught up in the cash-for-comment scandal when the Australian Broadcasting Authority looked into deals he had with Optus, Qantas and Mitsubishi.

Earlier in the week, the Prime Minister

addressed the launch of a new group, "Women For Gillard". Even the title of the group was narrow and personalised, attempting to lock in her leadership. Why not "Women For Labor"?

"... very importantly, we don't want to live in an Australia where abortion again becomes the political plaything of men who think they know better," said Gillard, trying to turn abortion into Labor's political plaything for the September 14 federal elections.

Was she being dishonest trying to pit women against men or just exposing her ignorance? Opposition to a woman's right to choose is not gender-based. The Catholic "Right to Lifers", for example, are both male and female. Her own caucus were horrified. It was not the issue to win votes.

Gillard took another equally unconvincing pitch at the male species by presenting the elections as "a decision about whether, once again, we will banish women's voices from our political life." She raised the spectre of a "prime minister - a man in a blue tie - who goes on holidays to be replaced by a man in a blue tie.

"A treasurer, who delivers a budget wearing

a blue tie, to be supported by a finance minister - another man in a blue tie. Women once again banished from the centre of Australia's political life."

Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was seen the next day on the campaign trail replacing his red tie with a blue one. No doubt he was conscious that the message being delivered was not just directed at Abbott.

Gillard's speech showed just how out of touch she is with the issues troubling women - including jobs, job security, low wages, poor working conditions, climate change, public transport, housing, public schools, university fees, unemployment benefits, single parent payments, childcare and health services. Not men in blue ties.

The economy is facing a crash landing. Ford, Target, the banks, manufacturers, universities, TAFE colleges, state and federal governments, Medicare, and other employers are sacking workers. Where is the access to training and education? Where is the plan for job creation?

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Job creation remains a priority

More bad news on the jobs front as governments and employers continue to sack workers. The positive media headlines that unemployment declined from 5.6 to 5.5 percent in May covered up the grim reality of what is an ongoing deterioration in job opportunities. The number of unemployed rose in May by 4,700. The number of employed rose by 9,900 (one hour's work in a week qualifies as "employed"), but there was a drop in full-time jobs of 5,300 and an increase in part-time work of 6,400 continuing an ongoing trend of underemployment through casualisation, part-time and contract work.

While these changes might sound relatively small, they should be taken in the wider context as continuing a pattern of insecure work and declining wages and working conditions. Sackings are set to continue. Ford, Target, other retail outlets, the banks, insurance companies, manufacturers, mining corporations, universities, TAFE, and state and federal governments have announced job cuts.

These public sector cuts include 15,000 in NSW, 14,000 in Queensland and 1,200 in Western Australia. It is not just Liberal state governments. The federal government is also taking the axe to jobs. With jobs also drying up in the private sector of the economy, the prospects for the unemployed, parents attempting to return to the workforce and future school leavers is far from rosy.

The loss of every job results in a loss of tax revenue for the government and a reduction of spending on goods and services which has a contractionary impact on the economy. This is at a time when all the signs suggest Australia is heading towards a deep recession. New investment in the mining sector has slumped, commodity prices have fallen and there is speculation about China's growth rate holding up. Even the most conservative and optimistic pundits are warning of the crisis to come and the need to stimulate the economy. The Reserve Bank of Australia's (RBA) recent interest rate cuts reflect concerns about domestic and international economic developments.

The Australian economy has not fully recovered from the global financial crisis and subsequent economic crisis. Now it is facing another and possibly more serious crisis. Pre-emptive actions are required now to create jobs which in turn will create demand for goods and services and more jobs. This situation is increasingly being acknowledged by some of the most ardent neo-liberals, worshippers of deregulation and "free market" gods who are now calling for government intervention to stimulate the economy.

One such high profile neo-liberal economist and former RBA member (Howard appointee), Warwick McKibbin, is proposing a stimulus to the economy through the issue of billions of dollars of Commonwealth government infrastructure bonds with the aim of attracting foreign investors. Bonds are used to borrow money. The lenders are paid a fixed interest rate for the life of the bond and guaranteed the return of their investment at the expiry date. He talks in terms of 50-year bonds on three percent interest per annum to help fill what he suggests is a \$700 billion infrastructure gap. While it is possible to argue with some of McKibbin's reasoning and the details of how this money might be invested (eg roads), the concept of raising cheap capital for infrastructure investment has merit.

There are huge unmet needs in regard to public infrastructure, including maintenance after years of neglect, as well as new projects such as rail freight, public transport, development of renewable and environmentally sustainable energy sources, public housing, hospitals, schools and for new housing developments and regional development. It could also be used for research and the development of the manufacturing sector. The government needs capital for these investments which would provide a much needed stimulus to the economy, create jobs, increase taxation revenue and in some instances (eg housing) provide future income.

Of course, this is not the only means by which governments could be raising additional capital for investment and stimulation of the economy. It could increase corporate tax rates, end corporate tax rorts, cut the diesel fuel rebate for mining corporations and slash military spending. Superannuation funds should be required to invest a certain percentage of their funds in public programs that would also contribute to job creation and guarantee the security of their savings. The Communist Party of Australia is calling for a national superannuation scheme, democratically run and guaranteed by government. Such a fund would provide retirees with a guaranteed fortnightly income for the remainder of their life – what is known as a defined benefit – at the same time as capital to invest in job creation and public infrastructure.

PRESS FUND

Last week a radio presenter stereotyped the Prime Minister's partner as gay simply because he's a hairdresser, while at a Liberal Party luncheon crass sexist jokes concerning her physical appearance were bandied about. As conservatives gloat over the seemingly unbeatable position of the Liberal/National coalition in the coming federal election, these incidents provide evidence of coming struggles over the rights and status of women, as well as issues concerning gay and lesbian people. We intend to help spike the conservatives' guns, but we really need your support, so please send in a Press Fund contribution before the next edition if you possibly can. Many thanks to this week's contributors, as follows:

Mark Mannion \$5, "Round Figure" \$25

This week's total: \$30 Progressive total: \$3,330

On the federal election

Statement from the Communist Party of Australia

During its term in office, Labor has persisted with the pro-corporate, pro-wealth, anti-union agenda of its predecessor. It is also clear that the election of an Abbott-led Coalition government would lead to a worsening of the conditions of the people of Australia and further hamper their capacity to fight for their interests. It is important that members and supporters become active during the election campaign to help break the two-party system dominated by the big parties of capital. The CPA will be producing a leaflet dealing with key issues for members and supporters to distribute.

At the federal election on September 14, the CPA recommends to its supporters to put Coalition candidates last on their ballot papers along with other reactionary candidates including those from the RiseUp Australia Party, Family First, Bob Katter Party, Democratic Labor Party, One Nation, Christian Democrats and so on. The CPA supports the campaign by trade unions to put Abbott last. We recommend a vote for Labor ahead of these reactionary groupings.

Unfortunately, elections in Australia are not held on a level playing field. As in the USA, the parties and candidates with the deepest pockets make the biggest impact. The sheer cost of fielding a candidate precludes most parties or organisations representing the poor from participating. If they do gather the necessary funds to stand a candidate, they must then find a huge sum to pay for a vast number of advertising leaflets, plus an equally vast number of How To Votes. There are sundry other expenses too, all designed to keep small parties and independent candidates from breaking the cosy power-sharing arrangement between Labor and the Liberals. This dominance must be broken.

Therefore, the CPA recommends voting for left, progressive independent or Green candidates in the Lower House. Though the Greens compromised badly on a number of important questions during their time in virtual coalition with Labor, including over the mining and carbon taxes, its overall policy approach is significantly more progressive than that of the ALP. The Greens' position on the

vital question of industrial relations is preferable to that of Labor. It is vital that the Greens build their numbers in the Senate, so the CPA recommends voting for the Greens in the Upper House to prevent the Coalition obtaining an absolute majority.

The Communist Party of Australia does not believe that parliaments are the main forums for the determination of the overall political direction of the country. Legislation by parliaments is kept within bounds established by the ruling class and in response to pressure exerted by means of class struggle by exploited people. Nevertheless, the CPA understands that a number of extremely important questions are facing workers at the federal election to be held in September.

While we will be working to keep Abbott out of office and encourage other people to join these efforts, we know the job of building an alliance of left and progressive forces with a strong Communist Party at its core will still be with us after the poll on September 14. That task remains our main priority. ✪

Gutter politics

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How can single parents survive with a cut of \$100 in their payments? The callous and criminal treatment of asylum seekers. Australian women wanted to hear policies to address these and the other burning issues where Labor has failed.

The "Women for Gillard" address was an opportunistic and transparent attempt to play on Abbott's poor record on women's issues. It backfired badly. *The Australian Financial Review*/Nielsen poll, suggests last week's events did not hurt the Liberals. They did hit Labor hard, with male support down seven percent compared with last month and a one percent increase in female support. Labor's likely primary vote was down from 32 percent to 29 percent.

Labor is on the nose, and Gillard seems to be digging a hole

for herself. No wonder desperate Labor MPs are shifting their support towards the more popular Kevin Rudd who might be able to reduce the massacre. The Liberals look set to romp in by default as the electorate turfs Labor out.

The media's coverage of personal slanging matches between politicians covers up the failure of the Liberal Party. Politics is presented as being about personalities, and coverage of the parliamentary scrum replaces real commentary and serious debate about alternative policies such as those offered by the Greens and the Communist Party. Policies that are in the interests of working women and men.

The Greens have maintained a principled approach and have many progressive policies; pro-people, pro-planet policies, but have not convinced the majority of voters of their credibility as an alternative government.

There is a growing danger that as Labor remains on the outer in the coming period and workers are subjected to the Liberal/National agenda – including a renamed WorkChoices on steroids – the extreme right, neo-fascist forces will make gains. The rapid rise of New Dawn in Greece and other neo-fascist parties in Europe is a phenomenon that could develop in Australia.

This makes the task of building a broad left and progressive movement even more important and urgent. In the forthcoming elections, there is the possibility of the Greens winning enough Senate seats to prevent the Coalition from gaining an absolute majority in both Houses. It is hoped that other progressive and left candidates will stand in September from trade unions and community organisations as well as from left parties. ✪



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Cruel and dangerous "solutions"

Peter Mac

Two recent events have highlighted the continuing trend by the two major Australian political parties to treat asylum seekers as undeserving of human rights. Last week a former Immigration Department employee claimed on national TV that while he was stationed on Christmas Island official instructions were received that after "screening" procedures had taken place, a minimum of 200 asylum seekers were to be involuntarily repatriated to Sri Lanka – by implication, regardless of whether they had genuine grounds to claim refugee status.

The notoriously superficial screening interviews are said to be very short. If interviewees say they're looking forward to a better standard of living in Australia they're likely to be classified as an "economic refugee" and immediately repatriated by force.

It's a callous and cynical exercise intended to collect extra votes from people who are frightened by the arrival of asylum seekers. It's also a sell out of our obligations to humanity as a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention. Most Sri Lankan asylum seekers are Tamils, an ethnic group that has been subjected to persecution since the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka. Tamils who are repatriated will face imprisonment and possibly torture on their return.

A second significant event was the official reaction to the arrival and sinking of a boat near Christmas Island, which resulted in the death of at least 55 people. Border protection authorities have been severely criticised because of a delay in the commencement of search procedures, and because rescue vessels did not retrieve the bodies of the dead passengers.

When first sighted by an aircraft on Wednesday June 5 the vessel was 50 kilometres west of Christmas Island. No distress signal had been received, but the boat was stationary, a sure sign it was likely to be in difficulty.

A navy vessel arrived in the area early on the morning of Thursday June 6, but failed to locate the boat. Its submerged hull was only spotted the following afternoon by a plane. The Navy vessel sighted 13 bodies floating in the water, but the Border Protection Command issued orders for it to leave the area without retrieving the bodies, and to search for survivors elsewhere. By the time it returned only life jackets and pieces of timber were visible.

Tony Kevin, a former Australian ambassador and expert on issues concerning safety at sea, says the Border Protection Control Command had taken an excessive amount of time to send a rescue vessel. He commented: "If they'd taken prompt interception or assistance action by a surface vessel on Wednesday afternoon, those 55 people would still be alive."

Mr Kevin also noted that the Australian Maritime Safety Authority had not sent out a "Potential Assistance Needed" call until 10am on Friday morning.

The Liberal/National coalition has used the tragedy of the June 5th sinking to promote their policy of "turning the boats back". When questioned about the diplomatic implications of this policy, Liberal leader Tony Abbott replied patronisingly that everything would be fine because a new coalition government would cultivate an excellent relationship with Indonesia, just as John Howard had done.

However, when the Indonesian ambassador indicated that returning the boats was not acceptable to his country, Michael Keenan, the coalition's border protection spokesman abandoned diplomatic niceties, declaring arrogantly that Australia didn't need a formal agreement with Indonesia to implement the policy.

For its part the government is still clinging to its "Malaysian solution", and to the off-shore processing and mandatory detention policies, both of which have failed to deter asylum seekers from boarding frail boats in search of a better life. Another asylum seeker boat was intercepted on



A World Refugee Day action was held in Perth on June 16, outside the Wesley Church. It was attended by about 200 people who later marched through the CBD with colourful banners and spirited chants calling for the humane processing of asylum seekers and the closure of the detention centres especially those offshore. There were speakers from the Asara community of Afghanistan, Tamil community and Palestinian community as well as Victoria Martin-Iverson and Senator Scott Ludlum.

Sunday June 9 and it certainly won't be the last.

Towards a humane policy

Faced with the prospect of persecution, imprisonment, torture or death in their home countries, people will inevitably seek refuge elsewhere. The risk of drowning at sea will never be an effective deterrent. Nor will the policies of repatriating asylum seekers against their will to Sri Lanka, sending others to offshore destinations and imposing mandatory detention.

As the chief of the Border Protection Command publicly advised the coalition last week, the policy of forcibly returning boats is fraught with the risk that in an act of desperation one or more of the occupants may try to sabotage the boat rather than return to Indonesia.

The other risk – the one that no one seems willing to discuss – is that such an action might result in hostilities between Australian and Indonesian armed forces.

Paris Aristotle, one of the government's immigration advisers, has recommended that all the parliamentary parties should accept the transfer of asylum seekers to detention in Malaysia and Indonesia, after high level discussions with both those countries, and subject to reassurances about respecting the human rights of detainees.

That's no solution. Neither country is a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention and both have a history of violating the human rights of detainees.

However, Mr Aristotle also recommended that the government should commit to "more places further up the line in Pakistan and Iran, before people have to depart and begin their journey."

That's recommendation is certainly a good one. There are also some indications that senior Liberals, including former opposition leader Malcolm Turnbull, are unhappy with the policy of turning back the boats. However, the fact remains that both the major parties are sticking to

policies that are morally indefensible.

One commentator observed that if the 13 bodies seen in the water on June 6 had been Anglo-Saxon, no effort would have been spared to retrieve them. In defence, the government has said that Border Defence Command took a "tough decision" on the day, on the basis that locating survivors was more important.

The Navy's work in searching for and rescuing survivors is certainly crucial, and is very difficult. However, the chances of finding survivors after the initial delay were virtually nil. The nagging suspicion remains that the delay in searching for the stricken boat, and the subsequent decision to abandon the bodies, reflects the government and coalition's depiction of asylum seekers as criminal invaders, and almost as an inferior species.

And their combined propaganda has convinced many Australians that they're right. That highly dangerous state of affairs should be borne in mind by every citizen that's interested in making Australia a better place after the September elections. ✪

Pete's Corner



Melbourne

AAWL General Meeting

Temporary migrant workers and unions

417 Visas, 457 Visas, Permanent Residency

Where do you stand?
How do we organise?

Wednesday July 3 at 6:00pm
Evatt Room Trades Hall Lygon St Carlton

Public meeting – All welcome

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Public servant staff reductions announced in WA

Richard Titelius

In late May Western Australian Liberal Premier Colin Barnett announced to the media that he was looking for ways to reduce state expenditure and that one way of achieving this was to reduce the size of the public service.

To implement this however, he would need to make changes to legislation which governs the employment of public servants; the Public Sector Management Act 1992 (PSMA), and specifically the sections governing the permanency of public servants.

On May 31, *The West Australian* obliged Premier Barnett with a lengthy editorial entitled "Jobs for life a drain on the public service", to soften up the WA public and the vehicle with which to make the cuts, namely, "being able to sack workers whose positions are made redundant."

The editorial was a right wing ideological tour de force of public servant bashing and demonising of the union which represents them, the Community and Public Sector Union/Civil Service Association.

However, the CPSU/CSA led by branch secretary Toni Walkington, has not been asleep at the wheel and in anticipation of the cuts which had befallen all the other state public services around Australia, commissioned Professor Bill Mitchell, an economist at Charles Darwin University in Melbourne, to write a report on the issue of deficit versus surplus state budgets in austere times.

The report was released during the union's 2012 annual convention when the mining boom in WA was still in full swing and the government was still reaping large dividends in mining royalties and savings in recurrent expenditure. This income was used to fund public works programs such as the Elizabeth Quay on the Perth city waterfront and a 60,000 seat capacity sporting arena at Burswood adjacent to the Crown Casino.

Now the Premier must still come up with the money to pay the private corporations to build these projects and others, for which binding legal contracts have been signed.

While most public servants



May Day 2008, Perth.

Photo: Richard Titelius

and their unions believe that an announcement of staff cuts are now inevitable, before the state budget in August 2013, they did not have to wait long as they were announced less than two weeks later on June 13, amidst a flurry of press conferences by Premier Barnett and his treasurer Troy Buswell.

This was followed by more ideological spin from the corporate lapdog media including a radio interview of Premier Barnett on Paul Murray's Radio 6PR morning show where he spoke of forced redundancies for government workers who "don't have a productive role anymore, or don't have the skills that are needed today or maybe they don't fit into the organisation."

The *West Australian* chimed in with another editorial on June 14, "State moves to a sustainable wages policy", cheering Barnett on with a

wages policy that caps wages at the CPI – currently 2.75% (when most rent and utility increases are far beyond the CPI) and there can no longer be tradeoffs for productivity.

Premier Barnett and Treasurer Buswell are targeting 1,200 redundancies from the 110,000 strong public sector. This includes teachers, police and nurses. The reality according to Toni Walkington is that "Clearly the Premier has not been taking heed of messages that many in our community are sending to him about the fact that there are huge waiting times in a whole range of services."

The only way that departmental heads can meet the Premier's targets is by abolishing sections, functions and possibly whole agencies.

While corporate spokespeople welcomed the cuts, some commentators believe these changes to the PSMA, are not only about flexibility

of employment, but also about having some parts of the public service hived off through privatisation, contracting out and public/private partnerships.

The public service needs to be staffed by qualified, committed and dedicated public servants who have been permanently appointed so that at all levels they can carry out their tasks without fear or favour.

Most Western Australians do not buy the ideological argument for the cuts, and a number of surveys

have repeatedly shown that public is preferred over privately run services.

It is now up to the public sector unions to engage delegates and the wider membership to defend the jobs and conditions of public servants and state services which employ them and are valued by the majority of the people. All public sector unions have an ongoing joint campaign to "Save Our Services" and now is the time to seriously activate this struggle to save state services and public service jobs. ✪

United community picket stands strong

Community members gathered at the gates of the TT Line Tasmanian ferry on Friday in support of four workers sacked by stevedoring contractor Qube.

Qube is owned by infamous stevedoring boss Chris Corrigan and the four workers were sacked for raising safety issues in the workplace.

In the last ten years three employees have been killed at worksites owned by Qube and its predecessor companies in Melbourne, in a workforce of only 250 people.

- Jeff Gray was killed in June 2003 at Appleton Dock.
- Peter Ross was killed at Appleton Dock in January 2007.
- Steven Piper was killed at Appleton Dock in July 2010.

As well, Qube employee Kane Barnett, was crushed on a deck of a TT Line vessel in April 2010, losing his spleen and part of his liver, lung and bowel. He has not worked since and Qube are now looking at terminating him.

These deaths and injuries are on top of another fatality in Brisbane in 2010. This company has also obstructed the National Stevedoring Safety Code of Practice, in an industry where workers are 14 times more likely to die on the job than the average Australian worker.

Qube had previously refused to reinstate the workers after considerable efforts by the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) but when the community protestors arrived Qube had a change of heart agreeing to put the four workers back on the

payroll subject to meeting the MUA to deal with the facts surrounding the issue.

This example of community and union solidarity is a tremendous example of the power of left and progressive unity in struggles with aggressive employers.

Workers' issues are community issues and the action shows that the greater the involvement of working men and women from the broader community as well as organised workers in workplaces the better the results will be for workers.

The CPA actively worked to spread the word of the community picket and we look forward to ongoing involvement in struggles supporting workers under siege by aggressive employers. ✪

Sinister assault on democracy

The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) – Australia's journalists' union – strongly supports the 2,500 employees of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT) who have been sacked after the Greek government decided to shut down the public broadcaster's TV and radio signals as part of an austerity drive demanded by the country's creditors.

Government reports say ERT had been "dismantled" and that authorities would "secure" the broadcaster's facilities. The sacked employees would be compensated, the government said.

The government claims that ERT, which began operations in 1938, will reopen "as soon as possible" but with a new, smaller workforce but there is no certainty whether all of the broadcaster's stations will reopen or how long the network will be closed.

Christopher Warren, federal secretary of the MEAA, said: "Silencing the state-run broadcaster deprives the community of vital information. At the very least this is a short-sighted move that

savages a crucial public service. And it is a ham-fisted attack on 2,500 experienced and dedicated media professionals who have worked hard for years to keep the community informed about the immense upheavals taking place in Greece. But this is also a very sinister assault on democracy and the public's right to know, aimed at shrouding the activities of the powerful from legitimate scrutiny."

ERT is funded by a payment of 4.30 euros added each month to electricity bills. "ERT belongs to the people – it should not be used as a bargaining chip in the bigger economic issues confronting Greece. It should not be muted or have its function distorted through government harassment and intimidation. The Media Alliance stands alongside our Greek colleagues as they struggle in such difficult circumstances. We urge the Greek coalition government to rethink this chilling decision and restore ERT immediately in recognition of the vital role public service broadcasting plays at such a crucial time in Greek history." Warren said. ✪

Writing the wrongs of Wadjemup's past

Michelle White

For the first time, visitors to Rottnest Island (known to Noongar people as Wadjemup), off Perth, will be able to pick up a guide book to its Aboriginal history. *The Aboriginal History Guide* covers pre-settlement, cultural information and protocols but, most significantly, a brief and honest account of the island's era as a prison for thousands of Aboriginal men from all over Western Australia.

Whadjuk Elder Richard Walley was among a small group of Noongar representatives, officials and island workers who attended the launch of the guide and a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) for the Rottnest Island Authority (RIA).

He said the guide was a good start and would help holidaymakers and tourists understand why the island was so important to Aboriginal people. "People who want to know what happened here will pick up the guide and read it, but there will always be those who do not want to confront what happened," Dr Walley said.

"The European era of Wadjemup is only a small part of the history of this island. Our connection to this land goes back tens of thousands of years. It always has and always will be a spiritually important place for the Whadjuk people of Perth. While we must never forget the tragedy that happened here during its time as a prison, we should not let that be the only memory that defines this place."

In 1838, white people established a prison on Rottnest Island.

For nearly 100 years, more than 4,000 Aboriginal men and boys from all over WA were sent to Rottnest for crimes ranging from petty theft to

murder. Official records show boys as young as eight were amongst them. Conditions were harsh, cells were overcrowded and disease led to many deaths.

Many Aboriginal prisoners were never to return to their homelands.

In the heart of the Rottnest Island's accommodation and shopping precinct there is a simple, cleared area, marked with a sign. It's a burial site for more than 370 men in unmarked graves.

These days the former prison and hanging yard is now a holiday lodge and, up until the 1980s, the burial site was part of a camping ground. Although the camping ground has now been removed, the site remains contentious. It's why the future of the burial ground is one of the key commitments in the Rottnest Island Authority's new RAP.

The authority has pledged to work closely with the Aboriginal community to develop an appropriate memorial for the site, with an undertaking to have some sort of resolution by 2015.

Paramount

Dr Walley said paying tribute to ancestors buried on the island was paramount. "Rottnest Island is a rare place in that although it's Whadjuk land, it is connected to all of our people across the state," he said.

"It's widely acknowledged that every Aboriginal family in WA would have some ancestral connection to the burial ground and prison."

The understated burial ground and the fact the old prison is still used by holidaymakers prompted a scathing article by acclaimed investigative journalist John Pilger in the British press.

He accused the RIA of covering

up its bleak black history. His perception of the Island will also feature in his new documentary, *Utopia*, to be released at the end of the year.

The authority's CEO, Paolo Amaranti, said he was not concerned about the negative publicity. "It's not about what anyone writes," he said. "We're not trying to hide what happened. Our efforts towards reconciliation go back to 2004. We are committed to doing the right thing and working with community to ensure the Noongar history of the island is fair."

Mr Amaranti admitted there was still a lot of work to do, but said he believed the new RAP had many positive initiatives, including a grants program to make the pricey holiday island more accessible to Noongar people. Groups will be able to apply for financial assistance to travel to and stay on the island for cultural events or camps.

Partnership

The RIA has also formed a partnership with Clontarf Football Academy and will work towards employment opportunities for students. More recently, it instigated traditional workshops to give Noongar cultural practice a higher profile on the island.

A series of free basket-weaving courses attracted more than 60 Aboriginal women, and the hand-crafted pieces created during those workshops are now displayed in the historic Salt Store building.

Whadjuk Elder Janet Hayden praised the basket-weaving exhibition as a positive, high-profile promotion of culture. Like many of the women who took part in the weaving classes, Mrs Hayden is only a recent visitor to the island. The



Photo: Michelle White

Weavers Cheryl Thomas and her daughter Anne Oxenham, 10, travelled to the Island for the RAP launch and were overjoyed to see their baskets featured in an exhibition celebrating Reconciliation Week.

78-year-old great grandmother made her first trip across the 17 kilometre stretch of water to Rottnest just six years ago. Now she enjoys regular visits to Wadjemup and encourages other Noongars to also reclaim their ancestral connection to it.

Dr Walley has been visiting Rottnest since the 1960s, a time, he said, when Noongar people were made to feel unwelcome. He says he can feel a real difference these days. In officially launching the RAP and

guide, Dr Walley said reconciliation was not just about making good statements on paper; it was the follow-up that counted.

Dr Walley and Mr Amaranti said they hoped future generations would recognise and respect the sad European legacy of the island but also celebrate Wadjemup's spiritual Significance and rich cultural history dating back more than 30,000 years. *Koori Mail* ✪

TAFE privatisation in Qld

On Friday June 7, the federal government caved into pressure from the Queensland government, and handed over more than \$356 million of Commonwealth partnership funding. The next day, the Queensland government announced detail of a VET (vocational education and training) reform process which is more damaging to the TAFE sector than any other VET reform process in the country.

The Queensland government's announcement that it would strip TAFE institutes of all of their assets, and then open these assets up to private for-profit RTOs (registered training organisation) is the first stage in the dismantling of TAFE, and a far more damaging VET reform process than those implemented in Victoria or South Australia.

The Queensland government's reform plan would see TAFEs operate at a huge commercial disadvantage from their private competitors, who appear to have been influential in determining the detail of these proposals. ACPET, the peak body representing private for-profit providers called for a functional separation between TAFE infrastructure and delivery in a pre-budget

submission, and were well represented in the Taskforce established by the government to determine the future of TAFE.

It is impossible to see what, if any concessions the federal government has elicited from the Queensland government in return for the handover of the Partnership funding. There is no mention or guarantee of community service obligation, or full service delivery funding to give real meaning to a claim that the plan would "recognise the services" TAFE provides to its students. The removal of this funding in Victoria has significantly damaged TAFE institutions.

TAFEs will not be able to own any facilities, and will be forced to compete with private providers for use of public facilities. Private providers will be able to own their own facilities, operate them for profit, and will not be required to offer them for use to other RTOs.

Details of Queensland reforms

- From July 1, 2013 – selected training providers (TAFE and private) to offer government-subsidised training in a number of priority CIII qualifications
- From July 1, 2014, all public funding will be fully contestable
- Strip TAFE Queensland of all assets, transfer to a specialist commercial management entity, "rationalise" asset base and facilitate third party (private for profit provider) use
- TAFE Queensland will remain a "key" player in the training sector and funding will specifically recognise the services TAFE provides to its students and communities that **cannot be delivered by the private sector**
- Queensland Certificate III guarantee for "eligible" Queenslanders "up to and including their first CIII level qualification in a priority area"
- TAFE Queensland Act 2013 establishes TAFE Queensland as an independent statutory body with a commercial focus from July 1, 2013, and the future creation of seven amalgamated TAFE institutes, the formation of a commercially focused board
- Access to VET FEE HELP for Diploma, Advanced Diploma and selected CIV-level qualifications.

What do the Queensland reforms mean?

- Queensland reforms go further than SA and Victoria – TAFE was left in control of its assets in those states
- TAFEs will be positioned at a commercial disadvantage – handicapped. Private providers own their own assets, are not obliged to share facilities with competitors, even where they have purchased their facilities from government funds
- TAFEs will become "itinerant" providers – virtual institution without assets. Everything that goes with being an institution will be stripped away. The intellectual, social and cultural capital of TAFE will be dissipated
- The establishment of the specialist commercial entity to manage assets will duplicate effort
- There is no mention and no detail and therefore no guarantee of funding for community service obligations (stripped away entirely in Victoria)
- It is clear that the Queensland government has been strongly influenced by the peak private

provider body, ACPET, which called for a functional separation between TAFE infrastructure and delivery, and complained that its members were locked out of public facilities

- ACPET had two members on the training taskforce established by the Newman government, TAFE had no representatives
- VET private RTOs are for-profit organisations (unlike private schools which technically cannot be for-profit) – they will be able to profit from the delivery of government funded training, purchase property and infrastructure – TAFEs will not be able to do either of these things
- Many of the facilities purchased and owned by private for profit RTOs have been purchased with government funding
- Queensland TAFEs will become residual providers of last chance rather than first choice – they are to deliver courses which the private sector doesn't want to deliver because they are not profitable.

To join the campaign to support TAFE sign up at www.stoptafecuts.com.au
Australian Education Union ✪

Meet the contractors analysing your private data

Tim Shorrocks

Amid the torrent of stories about the shocking new revelations about the National Security Agency, few have bothered to ask a central question. Who's actually doing the work of analysing all the data, metadata and personal information pouring into the agency from Verizon and nine key Internet service providers for its ever-expanding surveillance of American citizens?

Well, we got part of the answer: Booz Allen Hamilton. In a stunning development in the NSA saga, UK *Guardian* reporter Glenn Greenwald revealed that the source for his blockbuster stories on the NSA is Edward Snowden, "a 29-year-old former technical assistant for the CIA and current employee of the defence contractor Booz Allen Hamilton." Snowden, it turns out, has been working at NSA for the last four years as a contract employee, including stints for Booz and the computer-services firm Dell.

The revelation is not that surprising. With about 70 percent of our national intelligence budgets being spent on the private sector – a discovery I made in 2007 and first reported in *Salon* – contractors have become essential to the spying and surveillance operations of the NSA.

From Narus, the Israeli-born Boeing subsidiary that makes NSA's high-speed interception software, to CSC, the "systems integrator" that runs NSA's internal IT system, defence and intelligence, contractors are making millions of dollars selling technology and services that help the world's largest surveillance system spy on you. If the 70 percent figure is applied to the NSA's estimated budget of \$8 billion a year (the largest in the intelligence community), NSA contracting could reach as high as \$6 billion every year.

But it's probably much more than that.

Concentration of cyber power

"The largest concentration of cyber power on the planet is the intersection of the Baltimore Parkway and Maryland Route 32," says Michael V Hayden, who oversaw the privatisation effort as NSA director from 1999 to 2005. He was referring not to the NSA itself but to the business park about two kilometres down the road from the giant black edifice that houses NSA's headquarters in Fort Meade, Maryland. There, all of NSA's major contractors, from Booz to SAIC to Northrop Grumman, carry out their surveillance and intelligence work for the agency.

With many of these contractors now focused on cyber-security, Hayden has even coined a new term – "Digital Blackwater" – for the industry. "I use that for the concept of the private sector in cyber," he told a recent conference in Washington, in an odd reference to the notorious mercenary army. "I saw this in government and saw it a lot over the last four years. The private sector has really moved forward in terms of providing security," he said. Hayden himself has cashed out too: He is now a principal with the Chertoff Group, the intelligence advisory company led by Michael Chertoff, the former secretary of Homeland Security.

One of NSA's most important contractors may be Narus, a subsidiary of Boeing that makes a key telecommunications software that allows government agencies and corporations to monitor huge amounts of data flowing over fibre-optic cables. According to Bill Binney, one of four NSA whistle-blowers who've been warning about NSA's immense powers, one Narus device can analyse 1,250,000 1,000-character emails every second. That comes to over 100 billion emails a day.

"Narus is the one thing that makes it all possible," Binney told me over the weekend, of the Verizon surveillance program unveiled by the *Guardian*. "They probably pick up 60 to 80 percent of the data going over the [US] network." The Narus technology, he added, "reconstructs everything on the line and then passes it off to NSA for storage" and later analysis. That



includes everything, he said, including email, cellphone calls, and voice over Internet protocol calls such as those made on Skype.

NSA's use of the Narus technology first came to attention in 2006. That was when an AT&T technician named Mark Klein went public with his discovery that NSA had hooked Narus devices to AT&T's incoming telecom stream in San Francisco and set up a secret room that allowed NSA to divert AT&T's entire stream to its own databases. Binney believes the equipment was hooked up to as many as 15 sites around the country.

The Narus devices can't pick up everything, however, because large amounts of traffic (such as domestic calls and Internet messages) don't go through the switches. That's why NSA apparently decided in 2006 to create the PRISM program to tap into the databases of the Internet service providers such as Yahoo and Google, Binney says. "Even though there's so many Narus devices collecting on the Net, they don't get it all," he explained. "So if they go to the ISPs with a court order, they fill in the gaps from the collection on Narus."

Downloaded and analysed

But once the data is downloaded, it has to be analysed. And that's where Booz and the other contractors that surround the NSA come in.

Booz Allen Hamilton is one of the NSA's most important and trusted contractors. It's involved in virtually every aspect of intelligence and surveillance, from advising top officials on how to integrate the 16 US spy agencies to detailed analysis of signals intelligence, imagery and other critical collections technologies. I first introduced Booz's intelligence business in a 2007 profile in *Salon* when President Bush appointed Michael McConnell, a Booz veteran and former NSA director, to be director of national intelligence (he's now back at Booz).

Among other secret projects, Booz was deeply involved in "Total Information Awareness," the controversial data-mining project run for the Bush administration by former National Security Adviser John Poindexter that was outlawed by Congress in 2003.

Another major presence at NSA's Business Park is SAIC. Like Booz, it stands like a private colossus across the whole intelligence industry. Of its 42,000 employees, more than 20,000 hold

US government security clearances, making it one of the largest private intelligence services in the world. "SAIC provides a full suite of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) and cybersecurity solutions across a broad spectrum of national security programs," it claims on its website.

Despite its grandiose claims, however, SAIC is also known for several spectacular intelligence failures, including NSA's ill-fated Trailblazer project to privatise its analysis of signals intelligence. Other companies acting as pillars of NSA's SIGINT analysis team include Northrop Grumman, Raytheon, CACI International, and hundreds of smaller companies scattered around the Washington Beltway (you can read detailed explanations of what they do for NSA in my book "Spies for Hire"). They, in turn, are surrounded by a small army of "big data" companies that are hired by NSA to sift through data for suspicious patterns and map the creation of "illicit networks" that can be followed or investigated.

In April, I wrote about one of those companies, Palantir Technologies Inc, in *Salon*. It sells a powerful line of data-mining and analysis software that maps out human social networks that would be extremely useful to NSA analysts trying to make sense of all the telephone and Internet data downloaded from Verizon and nine Internet companies that was described in the latest blockbuster stories in the *Guardian* and the *Post*.

"Their bread and butter is mapping disparate networks in real time," a former military intelligence officer who has used Palantir software told me. "It creates a spatial understanding that can be easily used by analysts." But how did NSA, long considered the crown jewel of US intelligence, become so privatised in the first place?

Privatised

In the late 1990s, faced with a telecommunications and technological revolution that threatened to make the NSA's telephonic and radar-based surveillance skills obsolete, the agency decided to turn to private corporations for many of its technical needs.

The outsourcing plan was finalised in 2000 by a special NSA Advisory Board set up to determine the agency's future and codified in a secret report written by a then-obscure intelligence officer named James Clapper.

"Clapper did a one-man study for the NSA Advisory Board," recalls Ed Loomis, a 40-year NSA veteran who, along with Binney and two others, blew the whistle on corporate corruption at the NSA.

"His recommendation was that NSA acquire its Internet capabilities from the private sector. The idea was, the private sector had the capability and we at NSA didn't need to reinvent the wheel."

Hayden, who was the NSA director at the time, "put a lot of trust in the private sector, and a lot of trust in Clapper, because Clapper was his mentor," added Loomis. And once he got approval, "he was hell-bent on privatisation and nothing was going to derail that." Clapper is now President Obama's director of national intelligence, and has denounced the *Guardian* leaks as "reprehensible."

Hayden was relentless in shifting NSA from an agency that relied on in-house experts for its technology to one of the most privatised agencies in government today. His first action, a project known as Groundbreaker, outsourced all of NSA's internal communications system. In one fell swoop, hundreds of long time NSA employees left their government jobs one day and walked in the next morning wearing their green badges from CSC and its many subcontractors.

"To this day, the IT at Fort Meade is owned by a private sector company," Hayden boasted recently. "That worked. That was a really good idea." CSC remains the head of the "Eagle Alliance" consortium, and is now one of NSA's biggest suppliers of cybersecurity services.

But Hayden's master project, the grandiose Trailblazer project to privatise NSA's analysis of signals intelligence flowing over the Internet, didn't fare so well. Managed by SAIC in a consortium that included Northrop Grumman and Booz Allen Hamilton, it burned through over \$5 billion without producing any actionable intelligence, and was cancelled in 2005.

Despite the scandals and massive amount of money spent on private intelligence contractors, however, the mainstream media has been slow to report on the topic. It took until 2010, years after the spending spree began, for the *Washington Post* to highlight intelligence outsourcing in its famous series on "Top Secret America". The paper, despite its work on the PRISM story, is still behind the curve.

Salon ❖

Some 1.5 million disappear in Germany

Victor Grossman

BERLIN: There is almost too much to write about from Berlin! To start off, there's the uncanny disappearance of 1.5 million residents of Germany, missing since the last census over 20 years ago. Instead of 81.7 million people, there are only 80.2 million (of whom 6.2 million, or 7.7 percent, were not German citizens).

You may ask, "who cares?" One answer: hard-hit Berlin, where 400,000 are unaccounted for, and which will now lose millions of euros in subsidies from the European Union and richer German states.

Adding to the funding problems is the high cost of those deadly killing machines, the drones, which President Obama is trying so hard to justify. Germany's Thomas de Maiziere is in a worse bind: his Defence Department wasted US\$650 million dollars on Northrop Grumman's Global Hawk drone, renaming it the Euro Hawk.

It may soon be called the Euro Vulture, since his project is a cadaver: his drones, lacking an anti-collision system, are officially banned in Europe, and unless Herr Minister can do some skilful manoeuvring, Merkel may have to drop him from her cabinet – just a few months before the big election. Of course, Northrop Grumman will continue taking in money in the amount of double-digit billions and Germany will remain the world's third biggest weapons exporter.

There seems to be no end to the continued proposals for whole new areas into which drone technology can be deployed. The use of smaller, unarmed, low-flying drones has also been suggested here in Germany for the war against graffiti artists.

Another item may be of interest to both amateur and professional historians. Germany's Social Democratic Party, on the eve of its festive sesquicentennial (150 years) celebration in Leipzig, announced a new international "Progressive Alliance" to compete (and perhaps replace) the Socialist International, which was constituted in 1951, largely to "fight the menace of Communism." It once made headlines with leaders like Willy Brandt and Olaf Palme, but also with Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and similar "socialist" members. Although the 50 parties forming the new organisation are not officially quitting, the old Socialist International will hardly make many headlines in future.

Founded in Leipzig's historic City Bathhouse, its political temperature could remain lukewarm; it will include the British Labour Party and – just imagine – the fiery Democratic Party of the USA, with Howard Dean a main speaker and Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin in the new leadership. As yet I have heard neither sobs at the collapse of the one nor hurrahs at the birth of the other. But who can tell?

The dominant news in Germany is about the terrible floods filling many urban areas with filthy water and leaving sticky sludge, mud, destruction, and a loss of many millions of euros by those whose homes line the Danube, Elbe, and their other flooded tributaries in the south and east. Many, with no insurance, are ruined by these worst floods in a century, in four centuries in some cases.

The debates continue; is the main culprit human-caused climate change, or over-farming and construction in riverside areas, which once harmlessly drew excess water out of the raging rivers? Or both?



Riot police use pepper spray to prevent protestors from breaking through barricades near the European Central Bank (ECB) headquarters.

But I must finally turn to my main subject, though it was largely submerged in the press by the floods.

The dozen or so towers and skyscrapers of Frankfurt on the Main are too tall to worry about inundations of a watery kind; owned by banks, they hope for fluidity of a financial nature. Both the locals, like the Deutsche Bank, or foreigners like JP Morgan and Bank of America, are mostly well protected in that connection. But on Saturday, the European Central Bank, one of the very biggest, 40 stories high, suddenly feared a siege!

But although this attack was certainly angry enough, it was completely non-violent. It was the newest action of the Blockupy Movement, a European offspring of Occupy Wall Street, and it was protesting the entire austerity policy of the so-called Troika, the new dictators of Europe, forcing millions in Greece, Spain, Cyprus, and Portugal to endure brutal poverty measures, an economic flood which hurts people in all countries while the euros pile up in those big towers. The troika consists of the Commission of the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, and last but not least, Frankfurt's European Central Bank, which was forced to face its foes.

On June 1, up to 20,000 people, many from other countries, marched through the banking district – sort of like Wall Street. They even had court permission to march a definite route – and they kept to the agreement. The police, unfortunately, did not.

The march started at noon but had hardly gone 300 metres in the first 20 minutes when the police stopped it, separating and surrounding the first group of 1,000 people, whom they decided was a "black block", although a large

number were wearing t-shirts and apparel of all different colours.

"Halt," the police said, "You are violating the law by wearing masks!" What did the "masks" consist of? Sunglasses and umbrellas! They agreed to give them up, but the police insisted on frisking and registering every one of them. Then the police demanded that the rest of the marchers leave the first group and take a different route. But they refused, and the bargaining dragged on for two hours, with those in the first group still surrounded, unable to leave.

Suddenly, the police moved in, heavily armed, under the pretence of an alleged fireworks explosion. They had pepper gas by the litre, which they used as often as possible. One participant remarked, "They made no distinction, beating young and old alike. I saw a kick with a military boot aimed at me, and could not escape it. It hit me hard on my right thigh through my clothing. I was beaten on my nose and chest.

"The women with me were torn from my side. I had to push my way out of the gas clouds and the orgy of violence to the side of the street. We could not get past the edge of the street, because the demonstration had been cut off so no one could get through. For thousands, it was impossible to get to the transportable toilets or get food or water."

Another attack followed, he recounted, with police making another attack on those seeking in vain to escape. He said one cop threatened to "pound his head to a pulp."

The beatings lasted from 2pm to 8pm; not even the intervention of two Bundestag deputies of the Left Party or the credentials of journalists impressed the cops. It was late in the evening before the last demonstrators were permitted to leave – after having their identities registered.

Despite over a hundred casualties, however, the Blockupy people refused to be provoked, or to abandon the first group, which was hit the hardest. Thus, the obvious aim of the police to make it easy for the media to pin the whole event on a radical, violent "black block" of wild anarchists just didn't work this time. There were no provocations at all; perhaps even the usual police provocateurs found it impossible to do the job expected of them.

This Blockupy protest was supported by 40 organisations, most actively the anti-banker group Attaq, the Ver-di union, second largest and most militant federation in Germany (city and state employees, hospital, postal, and garbage units, also cultural professional groups like music teachers and writers), and the LINKE (Left) Party. At least two of its Bundestag deputies, including the co-chairperson of the party, Katja Kipping, were in the middle of the event.

In the days that followed, a Frankfurt leader of the right-wing CDU attacked the Greens and the Social Democrats: "Are they part of the black block of the enemies of democracy or with us on the side of a just state?" He even accused the Greens of returning to their old stone-throwing beginnings of the 1970s. But this was just election year play-acting since banners or flags of the SPD or Greens were visible on Saturday. And while later in the week both SPD and Greens loudly demanded an investigation of events, the situation is especially complicated for the Greens since they are partners with the CDU in Frankfurt's city government.

And while criticising the police brutality, the Green leaders quickly added that what happened need not endanger their coalition.

A dramatic aspect of the Blockupy event was that, at almost the same time, police with similar weapons were violently attacking protesters in Istanbul, Ankara, and many other cities in Turkey. The past year has seen militant actions in Greece, in Portugal, in Spain and Cyprus. Germans, though also hit by the economic crisis, have been far better off than those in the southern countries, and have been less active and less militant. Those in power in Germany, in office like Angela Merkel, or in those skyscrapers like the heads of the big banks, would like to keep it that way – and frighten off any protests like those in Frankfurt. They have shown that they can get as tough as the cops in Istanbul.

People's World ✳

The obvious aim of the police to make it easy for the media to pin the whole event on a radical, violent "black block" of wild anarchists just didn't work this time.

Campaign against Edward Snowden

Thomas Gaist

The US government, abetted by the media, is intensifying its campaign against former intelligence employee Edward Snowden for leaking evidence of massive and illegal spying.

The Obama administration is preparing to file criminal charges and is pushing for Snowden's extradition from Hong Kong. Snowden has said that he fears for his safety and has fled his hotel for an undisclosed location.

US Attorney General Eric Holder vowed that the US government would punish those responsible for leaks relating to government surveillance programs, which he characterised as "extremely damaging". At a news conference in Dublin, he said he was "confident that the person who is responsible will be held accountable."

"The safety of the American people and the safety of people who reside in allied nations have been put at risk as a result of these leaks," Holder claimed. In fact, Snowden has revealed spying operations that target both the American people and the population of the entire world.

The more that is revealed about government criminality, the more determined is the insistence from leading officials that Snowden himself, the one revealing this criminality, should be subject to criminal prosecution.

The spying programs revealed so far include one that gathers the phone records of nearly every person living in the United States. Another monitors Internet activity, emails and other electronic communications from people all over the world. Snowden has also provided information related to US government hacking, over a period of several years, of Chinese universities, public officials, businesses and students.

In response to these revelations, the media, in close coordination with the government, is levelling ever more hysterical and unsubstantiated charges against Snowden. An article posted by *Fox News* asked the question, "Edward Snowden: Whistleblower

or foreign agent?" suggesting that Snowden was working with the Chinese government.

"As the story unfolds, one key question stands out: is Snowden the heroic whistleblower he claims to be or something more sinister?" The article claimed that "some" are "questioning his motives and wondering whether claims that he wanted to right a perceived wrong are true – or whether he could be a modern-day double agent, cleverly hiding his actions and painting himself as a victim of the US government while working as an agent for the Chinese."

Democrats are leading the campaign against Snowden. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi called for the prosecution of Snowden, saying, "I think on three scores – that is leaking the Patriot Act section 215, FISA 702, and the president's classified cyber operations' directive – on the strength of leaking that, yes, that would be a prosecutable offence." Pelosi told reporters at her Capitol Hill news briefing, "I think that he should be prosecuted."

Pelosi expressed anxiety that the program could be so easily brought under public scrutiny: "How on earth can we have a situation where we are so vulnerable, so exposed, with so much information about how we acquire intelligence, to the point that the [Director of National Intelligence] is saying that it seriously hurt our national security?"

US intelligence officials briefed members of the House of Representatives and Senate in secret meetings hidden from public view. Lawmakers were informed that the spying programs are far more expansive than what has been so far revealed.

Speaking after a classified briefing on the National Security Agency surveillance, Representative Loretta Sanchez acknowledged, "What we learned in there is significantly more than what is out in the media today ... I can't speak to what we learned in there ... I think it's just broader than most people even realise, and I think



that's, in one way, what astounded most of us, too."

"The federal surveillance programs revealed in media reports are just 'the tip of the iceberg,'" she added.

In a column, Glenn Greenwald, the *UK Guardian* journalist who published the leaks from Snowden, confirmed that Sanchez is "absolutely right" in her assertion that what has been revealed thus far is "the tip of the iceberg," adding that he will soon publish "significant revelations that have not yet been heard."

Bloomberg reported that "Thousands of technology, finance and manufacturing companies are working closely with US national security agencies, providing sensitive information and in return receiving benefits that include access to classified intelligence." The information provided by these companies, according to "four people familiar with the process" cited by *Bloomberg*, is used to "help infiltrate computers of [the US government's] adversaries."

According to the news agency, "Some US telecommunications companies willingly provide intelligence agencies with access to facilities and

data offshore that would require a judge's order if it were done in the US, one of the four people said. In these cases, no oversight is necessary under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, and companies are providing the information voluntarily."

As part of the international witch-hunt directed against Snowden, the UK has threatened to fine airlines for transporting the whistleblower to British soil.

Geoffrey Robertson, a lawyer from London, told the *New York Times* that this measure was unprecedented, saying, "This is a power hitherto used only against those who incite terrorism, race hatred, and homophobia – never before against whistleblowers." According to Robertson, the British government is concerned that judges in the UK might rule against Snowden's extradition to the US on the grounds that this would lead to him undergoing "oppressive treatment akin to that being meted out to Bradley Manning."

The leading role of the Democrats in implementing the assault on democratic rights was on further display during the congressional vote on the 2014 National Defence Authorisation

Act (NDAA). The fiscal year 2012 NDAA, signed by Obama, contained provisions allowing for the indefinite detention of US citizens without due process.

An amendment submitted by Republicans to this year's NDAA, which funds the military, says that nothing in US law can deny citizens the right to a court hearing. The amendment passed, with only three Democrats voting for it.

The NDAA amendment was a cynical manoeuvre that will have no effect on US policy and will almost certainly be stripped from the final version before it passes the Senate. A stronger version of the same amendment was rejected. Nevertheless, it exposes the Democratic Party's full support for the destruction of democratic rights in the US.

The reaction of the ruling elite, abetted by the media, is a product of its deep fear that what Snowden has revealed – unconstitutional and illegal programs that have been systematically concealed from the American people – will further undermine the legitimacy of their system in the eyes of millions.

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Erdogan govt threatens doctors and first responders

Margaret Flowers

The Turkish Health Ministry issued a threat to take medical licenses to practice away from doctors who have been providing treatment to the protesters in Istanbul. They are also demanding the names of all medical volunteers including Emergency Medicine Technicians. This threat constitutes a violation of the human right of the protesters to receive treatment and the principle of medical neutrality.

Since May 27, peaceful protesters have been occupying Gezi Park in Istanbul. The park is the last green space within the city and it was set to be demolished to build another of many shopping centres. What started with a few protesters trying to save the park has escalated to a national uprising over many grievances and the formation of coalition groups, including 180

organisations that formed Taksim Solidarity, to represent the people in negotiations with the government.

However, the response by Prime Minister Erdogan has been severe and violent. He threatens the protesters daily. Riot police have repeatedly stormed the park and attacked protesters. They've used water cannons, pepper spray and shot tear gas canisters into crowds. The protesters have stayed strong against these assaults, doing what they can to protect themselves with helmets and gas masks made from plastic bottles, but so far more than 5,000 protesters have been injured, some critically, and four protesters are dead.

Medic tents were set up in Gezi Park, but these were not sufficient to handle the severely wounded protesters. Makeshift hospitals have been set up in hotel lobbies and during some of the most chaotic

moments, protesters formed human chains to keep the streets open so that ambulances carrying the wounded could pass through.

Prime Minister Erdogan continues to escalate his threats against the peaceful protesters. Lawyers went to Istanbul's Caklayan Court to issue a statement denouncing the repression of protesters in Gezi Park. The police attacked the lawyers before they could fully assemble and scores of them were arrested. In response, thousands of lawyers took to the streets in solidarity.

PM Erdogan then called on parents with "children" at the park to take their sons and daughters home. Instead, mothers of the protesters went to the park and formed a human barricade to protect them from the police.

Witnessing the extreme violence against the protesters and the

severity of their injuries, physicians and other health professionals started volunteering at the Park to administer treatment. But now they are the target of repression. The Health Ministry is demanding the names of all who delivered care to protesters. The physicians are faced with a dilemma: lose their medical licenses or honour their oath to treat all who are in need. The response by the physicians is to refuse to cooperate. They held a banner stating "You will receive not one patient, not one medical colleague."

Health professionals have the right by international law to treat those in need. According to Physicians for Human Rights, which documents abuses around the globe, the principle of medical neutrality states that:

"Doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals are trained to treat those in need – regardless of

politics, race, or religion. Attacks on health professionals violate the principle of medical neutrality and are grave breaches of international law."

Threats by the Health Ministry that will effectively force doctors and other caretakers to stop treating patients are a violation of this principle. Prime Minister Erdogan must stop the attacks on protesters and honour the duty that physicians and other health professionals have to care for those in need. The government has the responsibility to protect its citizens and respect their right to protest peacefully. Doctors who answer the call to provide services to those who are wounded, for whatever reason, should be encouraged and supported, not threatened. The Health Ministry must remove its threat.

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International labour pushes to free Cuban Five

Emile Schepers

Both internationally and within the United States, organised labour is now taking up the struggle to free the Cuban Five, with major unions in Canada, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean organising projects to educate their members and the public and to exert pressure on US authorities.

The "Cuban Five" are Cuban agents who, in the 1990s, had settled into the Miami, Florida area to carry out surveillance of right-wing Cuban exile organisations that had organised terrorist attacks in Cuba in which many died.

Cuba, which had on many occasions asked that the US to crack down on these terrorist groups, handed over information collected by its agents in Florida to the FBI. But instead of arresting the terrorists, the US authorities arrested the five, who were sentenced to long terms in federal prison after a farcical trial in Miami.

Rene Gonzalez, one of the original Five, has since been released after serving his sentence, but the group, which has held together steadfastly, still calls itself "The Cuban Five." The remaining four still imprisoned in the United States are Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labaniño, Antonio Guerrero and Fernando Gonzalez.

Since then, a large-scale national and international movement to "Free the Cuban Five" has grown up. In Washington DC from May 30 through June 5, supporters of the Cuban Five carried out numerous activities under the rubric of "Five Days for the Cuban Five." The activities, organised by the International Committee for the Freedom of the Cuban Five, included lobbying visits to Congress, panels, press events, cultural events and a protest at the White House. Important presentations were made by civil rights leader and author Angela Davis, Wayne Smith (President Jimmy Carter's ambassador to Cuba), farmworker leader Dolores Huerta, and a host of activists,



Internationally, major support for the Cuban Five has been organised through the labour union movement.

intellectuals and parliamentarians from more than a dozen countries.

Internationally, major support for the Cuban Five has been organised through the labour union movement, with many national union federations, such as the Congress of South African Trade Unions and Britain's Trades Union Congress, playing a leading role. In the United States too, there are more and more Cuba solidarity activities, and especially activities in support of the Cuban Five, being undertaken by unions including SEIU, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union and the San Francisco Central Labour Council.

On June 3, as part of the "Five Days for the Cuban Five" mobilisation, labour activists gathered at the union hall of Local 140 of the American Postal Workers' Union, AFL-CIO, for a discussion with US, British and Canadian unionists on the importance of the Cuban Five struggle

for US and international labour, and initiatives that labour is taking to achieve the freedom of the prisoners.

Participants were welcomed by Local 140 President Denise Briscoe and by Carl Gentile of the American Federation of Government Employees, both of whom have been involved in organising union-sponsored trips by elected labour officials to Cuba, with a focus on Maryland and the District of Columbia.

Presentations were given by British, Canadian and US trade unionists.

Rob Miller from the British Trades Union Congress (TUC) attended. Miller heads the Cuba Solidarity Committee which operates within the 1.5 million member TUC and counts on major support from UNITE, the very large British industrial and general union which has close relations with unions in the United States including the Steelworkers through

their joint "Workers Uniting" partnership. The aim is to create a "jury of millions" to reverse the unfair decisions of a bigoted Miami court which originally convicted the Cuban Five.

Dennis Lemelin, national president of the 50,000 member Canadian Union of Postal Workers, pointed out that as a public union, his union must be aware of international events. In the past, this has meant that it was heavily involved in the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa and other international solidarity campaigns. Its Cuba solidarity work is a continuation of that.

Santos Crespo, president of local 372 of the New York City Board of Education Employees (AFSCME), who had written an eloquent letter to President Obama calling for the freedom of the Five, pointed out the relevance of the issue for US workers, and the new opportunities for raising the Cuban Five issue within US

labour. In the past, the power of right wing Cuban exiles in labour circles has made it difficult to successfully bring up the issue, but this influence is fading.

Speakers at the event made clear that they see that the treatment that has been meted out to the Five falls into the category of "an injury to one is an injury to all" above anything.

All speakers urged the participants in the session to immediately become active on the issue of Cuba and the Cuban Five in their own workplaces and union locals, approaching the issue as one of solidarity between working people in the United States and working people in Cuba. They urged a rank and file outreach in which major time is invested in talking to ordinary workers and union members. Social media should also be extensively used.

People's World ☼

Russia to create fleet to protect Syria

Sergei Vasilenko

During the Cold War, the Mediterranean was the most important area of strategic struggle between the West and the USSR. Many years have passed, a lot has happened, but the importance of the Mediterranean Sea has remained the same. Russia, a successor of the USSR, has lost some of its influence in the region over the years. It appears, though, that the country is not going to sit on its hands watching others taking its place under the Mediterranean sun.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, speaking in front of the military, announced plans to restore the permanent presence of the Russian Federation Fleet in the Mediterranean. Putin believes that such a move is not an act of "sabre rattling." The President said that Russia had its own interests in the Mediterranean that are related to the national security of the country. The region is strategically important to Russia, and the country

plans to deploy its warships in the Mediterranean Sea on a permanent basis.

According to the press service of the Defence Ministry of Russia, the Russian naval task force in the Mediterranean will include about ten ships of various classes of the North, Baltic and Black Sea fleets on a rotational basis. Depending on tasks, the number of warships in the compound can be increased.

During the Soviet period (1967-1992), the Soviet Union had the 5th Mediterranean Squadron of naval ships operating in the Mediterranean Sea – 30-50 ships. The squadron was created to deal with "cold war" problems in the region.

Within the structure of the Mediterranean compound, Russia plans to have about a dozen ships and submarines. Mistral helicopter carriers that Russia purchased from France can also be involved in the project.

The headquarters for the new compound will be created this summer. Most likely, Russia's

group of the Naval Fleet in the Mediterranean will be commanded from Sevastopol. It was also said that the compound would be used to solve problems in the Indian and Atlantic oceans, if required and needed.

The French Mistral may become the command ship of the compound (Russia is expected to receive the first vessel from France in 2015).

The ships of this class have ample opportunities for long-term command operations at sea. In general, the Russian Navy, until the end of 2020, will receive 54 surface ships and 24 submarines.

Why does Russia need the Mediterranean fleet?

Many experts attribute this to the situation around Syria. In fact, there are plenty of reasons.

Russia has to take account of the danger of US military intervention in the internal affairs of Syria – Russia's ally in the Middle East. At the end of 2012, the Russian fleet forced a group of American aircraft carriers out from the coastal

waters of Syria. The operation was officially called the "exercise", but the result of that exercise was the return of CVN-69 *Eisenhower* aircraft carrier to its base in Norfolk.

Rumours about a possible attack on Syria from the United States continue to emerge. This brings up a question of whether the Russian Federation needs to send its forces to the Mediterranean every time a US aircraft carrier appears there.

First off, such monthly missions waste the resources of the ships, not to mention the fact that they require significant funding. It was therefore decided to deploy Russian ships in the Mediterranean region on a regular basis. With their help, it will be easier for Russia to defend its interests in the Middle East. Thus, the Russian Defence Ministry has solved the problem of financing "military drills" in the Mediterranean. The ships will most likely be deployed in the port of Tartus.

One should bear in mind the fact in recent years, the Russian Navy has begun to develop rapidly.

The Soviet Union used to have enormous influence in the Middle East. Modern Russia has its own interests, and, of course, it will be defending them. The deployment of Russian ships in the Mediterranean Sea is the beginning of a new concept of Russian foreign policy.

In addition, the military and political situation in the world has been escalating, and Russia simply needs to have its armed forces present in certain key regions of the globe. Of course, it goes about the obvious military confrontation with the US navy and NATO, but the very presence of the Russian Navy in this region can be a decisive factor in making certain strategic decisions.

Creating the Mediterranean fleet is a very difficult and long process that requires great effort in solving various problems. It will require locations for its deployment. A naval base in Tartus, Syria, will have to be reconstructed, which is a long process.

Pravda.Ru ☼

Letters to the Editor
The Guardian
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Surry Hills NSW 2010



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waste to be transported from Port Adelaide through suburbs from Salisbury to Port Augusta and beyond.

The omitted information is that uranium waste from nuclear power plants will be hazardous for thousands of years, companies that would control the waste sites will not be around in 100 years let alone thousands of years. And what about our Australian beef exports and other produce from a nuclear waste state?

Len Lean
SA

with West Papua for nearly 40 years, and of the thousands of people I have talked to, the vast majority want self-determination.

For how many more years will our politicians continue to lie that things are getting better there? When will we have leaders prepared to buck the decades-old policy on West Papua? I am not a Greens member but Richard di Natale's performance in grilling Carr was a bright contrast to the leaders we have lost faith in.

Peter Woods
Vic

Attempt to fool the people

Associate Professor John Gava, reader in law's article (*Advertiser* – June 11) suggesting that SA take the world's waste uranium, seems very similar to US chemical companies using attorneys to write up data on very hazardous substances to make them more saleable. They gloss over or omit vital information. The glossy ethics, he writes in part "other countries are so crowded that the thought of convoys of trucks or trains full of high-level waste navigating their crowded roads and railways is scary".

For the public of SA it's scary and unethical for dangerous high-level

Moral cowardice

The behaviour of Bob Carr at a Senate estimates hearing is an example of the moral cowardice and hypocrisy of so many in political leadership. I was left open-mouthed at his arrogance. Carr again accused those advocating for self-determination for the long-suffering people of West Papua of perpetrating a cruel deceit.

The "cruel deceit" is not that the West Papuans should hope and struggle for freedom but that they can have any hope the Australian government will effect any change in Indonesia's rule over them. I have had association

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Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Excessive bullets and moral decay



When We Were Kings.

Did you watch the Oscar-winning documentary *When We Were Kings* on Sunday June 2? When the film was made, Zaire – where the fight took place – was under the dictatorial rule of General Mobutu. He had overthrown and murdered the popular democratically elected leader of the country's national liberation struggle against Belgian colonial rule, Patrice Lumumba. Mobutu was helped by the usual forces of imperialism at the time: the US, Belgium, Britain and France.

The country was full of valuable mineral resources as well as diamonds. It was a rich prize and Lumumba was too close to the Soviet Union to allow him to survive. So the people of the former Belgian Congo, renamed Zaire and eventually the Democratic Republic of Congo, went through a devastating and seemingly endless civil war, until Mobutu and his ilk were finally kicked out. And another African country had been added to the list of colonial countries that gained their independence only to have it blighted by the greed and machinations of imperialism.

The film of course concentrates on the Ali-Foreman prize-fight, but viewers might be interested to know that right underneath the boxing arena was Mobutu's chief prison. While the crowds cheered the spectacle in the arena, right under their feet – and largely unknown to the participants – supporters of Lumumba languished in chains in one of Mobutu's most notorious dungeons.

At the time of the fight, Zaire's public employees had not been paid for two years.

The imperialist powers that installed Mobutu in power were well aware of his prison regime, but as long as he kept the Commies out of that part of Africa and its wealth out of the hands of African nationalists, they didn't care what sort of regime he ran.

Just so long as he supported capitalism.

Back in April there was an intriguing little news report that the US Budget for 2014 would include an appropriation of \$US100 million to NASA for a project to lasso a small asteroid and tow it into orbit around the Moon. (And if the rest of the world didn't want an asteroid attached to the Moon? Screw you!)

And why would NASA want to do this? Senator Bill Nelson, who announced the project to the media, said that it "combines the science of mining an asteroid, along with developing ways to deflect one, along with providing a place to develop ways we can go to Mars."

I think the key words there are "mining an asteroid". To capitalists, the planets, asteroids and moons of our solar system are just so much "unclaimed" land available for potential mining leases. A bonanza waiting for the right corporation to exploit!

Once they have ripped out all the minerals to be found in a bunch of asteroids they will presumably upgrade to exploiting Mars itself. No doubt a planet of that size will have lots of money-making potential.

Obama has declared it his goal to send a manned mission to a near-Earth asteroid by 2025. Unfortunately for the greatest capitalist

state, expert analysis says NASA will not have the funds to carry out such a mission.

So some bright spark came up with the clever idea that if they sent an unmanned spacecraft to lasso a 500-tonne asteroid and bring it closer to Earth, then they could get humans on to an asteroid four years earlier than 2025. Yea!

And once the asteroid was in place they could mine it, and that would enable them to get back some of the money spent to secure it in the first place.

Their big worry is probably that by the time they get set to lasso their asteroid it might already have a sign on it: "Property of the Beijing Asteroid Development Company".

The efforts of legislators in the USA to restrict the sale of guns have met opposition in all the usual places and also in some less expected ones. New York enacted tough gun control laws in the wake of school shootings earlier this year, whereupon the film industry went ballistic (no pun intended).

Why? Because entertainment is big business in New York. In May this year there were no less than 27 television and film projects in production in New York State using assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. And the makers of these "action films" claim they cannot make films without them. "To tell stories, you need them," says Ryder Washburn, vice-president of a company that supplies firearms for productions based in Manhattan.

No doubt you do, if you make the kind

of films that he obviously makes. But not all movies are comprised of endless explosions and mayhem involving ludicrous amounts of gunplay.

And what is the law that is causing film companies such angst? Beginning next January, the newly-enacted New York law will prohibit the possession of guns with magazines holding more than ten rounds of ammunition. What! If you haven't hit your target after firing off ten rounds you need to give up and go into some other line of work.

Film industry workers in New York claim that they need real guns for verisimilitude, and that it would be impractical to try to make fakes that would fire blanks (by which they mean it would cost too much).

But if they could not rely on mindless displays of mayhem and gunplay, perhaps they would devote less time to pyrotechnical special effects and instead give some time to developing plot and characterisation. Perhaps then we would see more films centred on people in credible situations, behaving naturally, and giving us real emotion and having something to say about the state of the human condition today.

The great films of the past – including the great films of Hollywood's past – managed to give us brilliant, artistic entertainment without having to massacre every extra on the set. When entertainment becomes reduced to a succession of eruptions of urban violence, its artistic success measured by the size of its body count, we have passed from entertainment (let alone "film as art") to decadence and very evident moral decay. ☘



Sunday June 23 –
Saturday June 29

Throughout David France's feature-length documentary *How To Survive A Plague* (ABC2 Sunday 23 June 2013 at 8.30pm) a running counter keeps a record of the total number of deaths worldwide from AIDS. By the time the film ends the total is well over eight million. The greatest concentration of deaths was in the USA, but even here in Australia, most of us knew someone who died of the disease.

With a death toll like that, it seems incomprehensible that government agencies, police, politicians, even hospitals were often indifferent to the epidemic's victims. They were gay, and the disease was incurable and frightening, so therefore officialdom could too easily say, as Jesse Helms said in the US Senate, that the victims brought it on themselves by their allegedly immoral and ungodly behaviour.

George Bush Senior, when asked as President why he wasn't doing more to combat AIDS called on the gay community to "change their lifestyle". When it was learned how the AIDS virus was transmitted and that transmission could be stopped by using a condom, the Catholic Church's hierarchy in New York reiterated its embargo on condoms as grossly sinful things whose use could never be condoned.

These and similar hostile actions

by officialdom combined with the mounting death toll, prompted the gay community to take action for its own protection. At first they concentrated on trying to force the US government to give speedier approvals for various drugs believed to possibly be helpful in slowing down or even reversing AIDS symptoms.

Public protests over government inaction regularly involved harassment by the police, and politicians still thought it wiser to stay away from AIDS as an issue, so gay activists became organised in ACT-UP, using direct action in a variety of often imaginative ways to bring home their message to mainstream America.

The members of ACT-UP were motivated by the deaths of their friends and loved ones and by the constant threat of "extinction" as one activist puts it in this film.

The film is an on-the-spot record of activism in action: rallies, debates, demonstrations, protest actions, deliberate acts of defiance and law-breaking, and mass courage in the face of baton-wielding cops.

From the beginning, delay meant more people dead, and the gay community were angry at every delay and scornful of excuses advanced by the drug companies and the government agencies. So much so that they formed their own group to conduct scientific research into the disease and its treatment. The story of the positive part played in the AIDS saga by the activist groups is the main theme of the film. Although they were able to get one of the drug companies to come on board with their research, and eventually to force the government agencies to recognise the value of having actual AIDS victims represented on their panels and taking part in the evaluation process for possible treatments, it was very much the activist groups that actually brought about the clinical defeat of the virus.

The struggle was not without internal trouble, however. The two main strands of ACT-UP – the leftist "direct action in the streets" group who wanted to force the authorities to do the right thing, and the more



Catalyst – Athletes Cheat, Do You? (ABC1 Thursday 27 June 2013 at 8.00pm).

conservative (or right-opportunist?) group who sought to co-operate with the drug companies, dress in suit and tie and conduct research carefully, were very much at loggerheads with each other. The research group (under the acronym TAG) split from ACT-UP, but as other activists comment later in the film, they really needed to work together.

It is a profoundly sad film in many ways: one watches all these people proudly and determinedly protesting and demonstrating and you know that a lot of them will never live to see the end of the fight. One of the most poignant protests is during Bill Clinton's election campaign for US President, when people march on the White House carrying urns with the ashes of their relatives and loved ones who have died of AIDS, and then they rush up to the fence around the White House and empty the contents of the urns through the fence onto the White House lawn.

The film won several awards

and was rated "Best documentary of the year – extraordinarily moving, singular and powerful" by *Esquire*.

Nothing On Earth, screening in the *Sunday Arts Up Late* skein (ABC1 Sunday 23 June 2013 at 10.30pm) is a very disappointing documentary about landscape photographer Murray Fredericks who has formed the unfortunate opinion that there is nothing original in landscape left to photograph. Apparently he has no original view of the world to advance in his photography but labours under the impression that it has all been done before.

So he is looking for some technological gimmick that will enable him to be "original". Consequently, he is obsessed with getting into lonely places in order to photograph nothingness. He haunts deserts and icefields, looking for "nothing" that he can photograph. And recording the most self-obsessed pompous and ultimately boring commentaries on his video-camcorder.

I eventually gave up on it, as just not worth the effort.

Catalyst this week is titled *Athletes Cheat, Do You?* (ABC1 Thursday 27 June 2013 at 8.00pm) and briefly covers performance enhancing drugs and so-called Life Enhancing Drugs (such as drugs to improve your language learning ability).

The performance drugs are well-known as are their potential ill effects. The people interviewed who are involved in sport seem to be more inclined to view drugs as not a problem, so long as very one takes them which they seem to think will create the much desired "level playing field". One of the doctors interviewed strongly rubbishes that approach, on health grounds.

The same doctor warns that body-builders who take anabolic steroids are fooling themselves. They may look like Arnold Schwarzenegger, but their bulging muscles are filled with liquid not with muscle fibre. ☹

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Vic Williams was one of the best working class and communist poets of Australian literature. His writing came from a lifetime of struggle and experiences, in particular in industry and on the Fremantle waterfront.

Katharine Susannah Prichard wrote: "He fuses a passionate and sensuous vision of the earth he knows and loves with thought, direct and forceful, about everyday life and work of men and women. There is, I think, a high rare quality in Victor Williams' poetry."

Three Golden Giants and other poems contains some of his most popular poems. The lines: I do not live with a divided heart. One love, one aim, once class my loyalty ... from "The Undivided Heart" are illustrative of the direct and forceful approach. In all there are 21 poems in the booklet, including "Delegate"; "Speak for Us, Pablo Neruda"; "Along the Waterfront"; and "My Baby Cries".

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Western Emperors have no clothes

Finian Cunningham

The military victory for Syria's government forces in the strategic central town of Qusayr last week was a watershed event for several reasons. But of the crucial turning points heralded by this event, one is inimitably clear – the Western powers, the would-be emperors of Syria, stand naked in their failed criminal conspiracy to destroy that country.

These would-be emperors – Washington and the region's former has-been colonial powers, Britain and France, have been shown demonstratively to have not a shred of credibility. The emperors have no clothes and they are running for cover.

The Syrian army now has the upper-hand and the momentum towards outright victory in a conflict that has ransacked large swaths of the Levantine nation, resulting in up to 80,000, mainly civilian, deaths, and causing 4-5 million internal and external refugees.

Western-backed insurgents are being destroyed or routed from villages and towns across Syria as the Syrian army moves swiftly on to its next objective of freeing the country's second major city, Aleppo, in the north. That clash may prove a more bloody and protracted fight than the three-week campaign to retake Qusayr. But, given their withering loss of fighters and the severance from key supply routes through Qusayr, the eventual defeat of insurgents in Aleppo looks all but assured.

The recapture of Aleppo, and shutting off the NATO weapons supply line from Turkey in the north, would then prove to be the last stand for the foreign-backed mercenaries. These mercenaries have been terrorising Syria since March 2011 at the behest of NATO powers and their regional allies, including Israel, Jordan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The Western agenda of regime change to oust President Bashar al-Assad is therefore, in a word, a dead letter.

But perhaps a more telling repercussion from the victory in Qusayr is

the stripping bare of the ugly face of Western imperialism in Syria and the wider region.

The routing of the mercenaries who had laid siege to Qusayr for the past year showed more clearly than even the largely foreign component of the so-called Free Syrian Army and the minimal support among the Syrian population for this outfit of Al-Qaeda-linked extremists. The FSA should henceforth be known as the Foreign Supplied Army. Without foreign supplies, there is no FSA, and there never would have been one in the first place.

Why were the 30,000 inhabitants of Qusayr obliged to hide in their homes for the past year while gangs of Libyan, Egyptian, Tunisian, Saudi, Chechen, Yemeni, French and British self-styled jihadists and, yes, local Syrian criminal opportunists, roamed the streets, looting and brutalising?

When these Western-backed killers and bandits were eventually run out of Qusayr, why did the inhabitants greet the Syrian army and their Lebanese Hezbollah comrades with relief and gratitude? Why have street celebrations been held in Qusayr feting the restoration of civilian life?

Why did thousands of Qusayr's residents flee the town over the past year? Of course, it was to escape from the Western-backed so-called "rebels" who imposed their draconian, twisted fundamentalist tyranny that they have adopted from their Saudi and Qatari paymasters. This is the same kind of tyranny that is being imposed on the suffering communities of Aleppo still under the control of the mercenaries.

This week, reports emerged of a 14-year-old boy in Aleppo who was executed in a public square by foreign gunmen because he allegedly blasphemed over a cup of coffee. He was sentenced to death by a kangaroo court before being shot twice in the head in front of his mother and father.

Why is it that now those inhabitants who had fled Qusayr – Muslim, Sunni, Shia, Alawite, Christian alike – are returning to the resumed safety of their town to pick-up their hitherto peacefully co-existing lives?

None of these questions are being



Why have street celebrations been held in Qusayr feting the restoration of civilian life?

asked in the mainstream Western media, or of Western politicians, since the fall of Qusayr. Incredibly, the Western media coverage on Syria seems stricken by a sudden muteness over the past week, as if crippled by a huge spanner tossed into its wheels. Conveniently, the news agenda seems to have inexplicably moved on to other matters.

At this juncture, what Western governments and their media propaganda system want most to avoid is for the Western public to see the naked, glaring truth: that these governments and media have been lying for the past two years about what is going on in Syria. This country is not undergoing a pro-democracy uprising, supported by Syrian people and benevolent Western powers. Rather, Syria has been subjected to a criminal covert war of aggression by Western powers for selfish strategic interests in the oil and gas-rich Middle East. This kind of conspiracy is what war criminals at Nuremberg were hanged for.

Qusayr has made Western

government crimes in the Middle East abundantly clear. And that is why the story is being discarded down the Western media memory hole.

So let's drag it out of the memory hole. To achieve their illicit objectives, Western governments have secretly funnelled weapons, money, Special Forces and networks of foreign cutthroat killers into a sovereign country to terrorise its people into submitting to their agenda for regime change. The blood of 80,000 Syrian people is on the hands of Western presidents, prime ministers and their foreign diplomats: Barack Obama, David Cameron, Francois Hollande, John Kerry, William Hague and Laurent Fabius. They all stand accused and should be tried before a war crimes tribunal.

When Syrian army forces retook the bombed-out, sabotaged town of Qusayr, the façade of Western pretence and propaganda was demolished forever.

Now, as with the dregs of the retreating insurgents, Western

governments are running scared from the damning exposure. Last week the White House held a series of emergency meetings on Syria. US Secretary of State John Kerry had to cancel a tour of the Middle East in order to attend those meetings. On the cards for discussion was the US moving towards sending weapons and other lethal aid openly to its Foreign Supplied Army in Syria – a desperate move that probably won't happen because the Western criminal agenda has already been defeated. The Obama administration – assailed by other scandals and imploding legitimacy among the American people and the wider world – is in no position to step up criminality in the Middle East.

The Associated Press reports, "[Syrian] opposition leaders [that is, Western stooges] have warned Washington that their rebellion could face devastating, irreversible losses without greater support."

That one sentence says it all. The emperors have no clothes. *Information Clearing House* ✪

Syria is not undergoing a pro-democracy uprising, supported by Syrian people and benevolent Western powers. Rather, Syria has been subjected to a criminal covert war of aggression by Western powers for selfish strategic interests in the oil and gas-rich Middle East.



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