



Mandatory detention

Australia's shame

Anna Pha

After more than six months in denial regarding the appalling, subhuman conditions at its "offshore processing centre" on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea, the government last week began removing families and children from the Island. Following a visit to the facilities in January this year, the UNHCR's Regional Representative Richard Towle said, "The current policy and practice of detaining children should be terminated as a matter of priority."

It has taken considerable public and international pressure for the government to even begin removing children from the Island. There are 1,852 children in closed detention facilities, denied their freedom and another 1,383 in community detention. The government, however, is still refusing to end the practice of detaining children as demanded by the UNHCR representative and required under international law.

The UNHCR, the United Nation's refugee agency, described the living conditions on Manus Island as "harsh, hot humid, damp and cramped".

"If the sole purpose of transfer from Australia to Papua New Guinea was to process people, one would expect there'd be some kind of process in place for people when they get there.

"These 221 people are being held in mandatory closed and indefinite detention, which is a very serious violation of international law."

"Serious violation of international law"

Towle pointed to a number of serious breaches of human rights and international law on Manus Island. "These 221 people are being held in mandatory closed and indefinite detention, which is a very serious violation of international law."

"The key recommendation is to put in place proper processing arrangements as soon as possible and start looking at people's claims," Towle said.

The UNHCR also called on Australian and PNG authorities to improve conditions, and ensure an early start to the refugee assessments process in order to prevent increased levels of psycho-social and physical harm amongst asylum-seekers in the detention centre.

As Richard Towle, pointed out, "Asylum-seekers are distressed and confused about their situation. They are in closed detention, without a process in sight. They feel they have been forgotten."

Former Immigration Minister Chris Bowen



Manus Island. (Photo: ABC News)

ignored the UNHRC's requests. So too did the new Minister Brendan O'Connor who is steadfastly sticking by Labor's "no advantage principle".

As recently as April, Minister O'Connor was still attempting to defend the incarceration of children: "I haven't been contemplating a change to the composition of those on the Manus Province because we made a decision, a difficult decision to ensure that we deter people getting on very unseaworthy vessels."

The "no advantage principle", as the Labor government calls it, is designed to ensure asylum seekers who make it to Australia by boat do not get assessed earlier than those languishing for years in centres in Indonesia or Malaysia.

"While some families may be released into the community on bridging visas, they will remain subject to regional processing arrangements. They will be not be processed any faster than had they waited in a refugee camp overseas," O'Connor said.

In other words, they will be left languishing for years in centres such as Manus Island, Nauru and Christmas Island with no indication of when they will be released.

It is widely recognised that children who

have fled their homeland and survived the precarious land and boat travel to Australia's shores are likely to have experienced considerable trauma. Many also have health problems.

Instead of welcoming them with open arms, treating them humanely and ensuring their wellbeing, the Australian government seeks to callously use them as pawns to deter other would-be asylum seekers.

These desperate children are incarcerated indefinitely in inappropriate facilities without the most basic of resources or staffing to meet their needs. Many are living in fear, witnessing violence and self-harm by other prisoners and uncertain about their future.

These so-called "detention centres" or "offshore processing centres" are prisons where desperate people who need our compassion and support, are arbitrarily subjected to indefinite sentences in remote locations beyond public scrutiny. Convicted criminals have more rights.

The UNHCR team also made strong recommendations regarding the unsatisfactory conditions as well the policy of mandatory detention which the government continues to ignore.

Only a morally bankrupt government

lacking any humanity could subject fellow humans, especially children – the world's most vulnerable people – to such treatment. In the former Soviet Union, children were known as the "privileged class", and were treated accordingly. Not under capitalism, where they are expendable.

It took a Liberal MP to expose Australia's shame in Parliament, Judi Moylan in valedictory speech to Parliament. "I remain stridently opposed to indefinite mandatory detention and the continued detention of children, 2,000 of whom are currently in detention under our management," she said.

"These practices have gone on in our name and will stand as a matter of great shame."

The only other voices of sanity in the Australian Parliament are the Greens and several independents.

The Opposition attacked Labor for policy failure when two more boats arrived last week. The Coalition would have the boats turned back regardless of risk to human life.

The policy failure is not the arrival of boats but the illegal, mandatory, indefinite detention of asylum seekers and their inhumane treatment.

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Guardian

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Holden heads the wage-cutting charge

Transnational corporations have sniffed an opportunity. For a long time they have been speeding up production, trimming their workforces, and quietly moving more and more of their Australian operations to low-wage centres. But the sharp downturn in global economic fortunes means that big employers like General Motors Holden can now come out and demand straight-out, depression-style cuts to its workers' wages. The details of the Holden plan to be put to the workers at the Elizabeth plant in South Australia in August are still secret, but the word is that \$200 a week will be hacked off the average pay cheque.

Holden workers have been through the wringer before. In 2008, at a previous peak in the global economic crisis, workers' hours were slashed. But the notion of cuts to the hourly rate has sent ripples throughout industry.

"If we want to build cars in this country, frankly if we want to build anything in this country, we face significant cost penalties. We are one of the highest-cost places in the world, the highest penalty we face is labour costs. We can't survive as a local manufacturer if we're not competitive," Holden managing director Mike Devereux told the media last week. Of course, workers also have to contend with high costs, i.e. the cost of living in Australia, but the corporate media focus is now on what Holden says it needs.

Other manufacturers are applauding. Toyota chief executive Max Yasuda has long been critical of what he claims is the unproductive work culture in Australia. Despite executive disdain for Australian workers, it should be pointed out that local manufacture has survived in face of the historically high exchange rate of the dollar, the almost unilateral slashing of tariffs on cheap imports and the fact that local plants were never going to be able to compete on price with mega-plants overseas producing world cars on a huge scale.

Local operations were built up by the hard work of Australians but, increasingly, vehicle production in the country has been kept going by handouts of taxpayers' money. The Australian government is far from unique in this. In fact, Australia tails the field in making this sort of "co-investment". In Australia the per capita assistance given to the auto industry was US\$17.80 in 2008/09. In the UK it was US\$27.99, in Germany it stood at US\$90.37, in the United States it was US\$264.81 and in Sweden government assistance reached a staggering \$334.18 per head.

Australian wages are not at the top of the league tables, either, but this doesn't stop GMH pushing the idea that wages are the biggest issue the company faces. The workers' unions aren't buying the argument. Labour costs are estimated at less than 20 percent of total costs so a major cut to workers' pay would result in only a very small reduction, if any, in the cost of a Holden. It will have no impact on the fact that Australians are not buying big cars in the numbers they did in the past.

The car industry and the industries that supply it are major employers. Their collapse would be devastating to local communities in terms of jobs but it is also clear that car production doesn't have a long-term future here. We need alternatives and this is where public enterprise is essential.

The car industry must be nationalised and re-tooled to produce the infrastructure we need for a sustainable future; we should produce for our own public transport and green energy needs, for example. Profit-hungry transnationals won't do this for us.

The workers at Holden are in a tough spot. The arguments will be flying that a wage cut will save jobs for themselves and their workmates for a while longer. Bills need to be paid and mortgage repayments met. This is reminiscent of the Fraser government's notorious wage freeze of the early 1980s. "One man's pay rise is another man's job," was the argument. It was an appeal to workers' sense of solidarity. In the end, the legally enforced loss of purchasing power exacerbated a recession and caused greater unemployment. The wage cutting strategy applied during the Great Depression worsened that calamity.

Car manufacturers are packing up to leave Australia. Any misguided generosity from Australian workers will simply be pocketed by the transnationals on their way out. Workers must look to their own future. We must fight for a sustainable industry plan.

PRESS FUND

Last week one commentator observed that the ALP is likely to lose the next election just because of the pig-headedness of its senior members, who are clinging with blind loyalty to their current leader. One of the casualties of an incoming Abbott government would surely be the Climate Commission, whose tremendously important report on climate change has been released recently (see page 3). Many people are awaiting events in Canberra with bated breath. However, in the meantime we suggest you make a contribution to the Press Fund, because we're involved in preventing a bad outcome in the September elections and we need your help, by way of Press Fund contributions for the next edition. Many thanks to the following for their support this week:

Jessie Kiek in memory of B Rooney \$50.

Peter Reed \$100, "Round Figure" \$10, Connie Villano \$10, H. North \$50, Ray Gillespie \$20, Don Mudie \$10, Anon. \$25.

This week's total: \$275 Progressive total: \$3,605

Commemoration: Chile, September 11, 1973

A broad coalition of community, trade union, church and human rights groups are organising activities to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the military coup in Chile on September 11 1973. The activities planned by the Other September 11 Committee were endorsed by Unions NSW.

The coordinator of the Committee Rita Mallia, President of the NSW Branch of the Construction Forestry Mining Energy Union says that in the aftermath of the coup "Australian trade unions were in the forefront of international solidarity. In fact it was a delegation of Australian trade unionists who went inside Chile immediately after the coup and exposed the atrocities and reign of terror of the military that further galvanised international solidarity. We are pleased to continue our solidarity with the people of Chile."

NSW ALP MP's Lynda Voltz and Laurie Ferguson and NSW Greens MP John Kaye have endorsed the commemoration activities. Laurie Ferguson who represents the electorate of Werriwa in western Sydney where many Chileans live says "We should never forget the terror of

the period of dictatorship or the courage of those who fought for the restoration of democratic rights."

A public meeting, vigil and film screening has been planned for September 11. Maya Fernandez Allende, the granddaughter of socialist President Salvador Allende overthrown in the 1973 military coup, has been invited to participate in the planned commemoration activities. There is also a commemoration planned for 11am at Fairfield Park at the monument to Salvador Allende.

Finally Memoria Viva is planning an exhibition documenting the abuses of human rights in the secret Villa Grimaldi Torture Centre during the dictatorship and a Justice for Victor Jara Concert in Casa Latinoamericana on September 13 and 14.

For more information about the activities of the Other September 11 Committee contact Elizabeth Rivera: elirivera29@hotmail.com

For more information about the exhibition and concert at: Casa Latinoamericana contact Marta Olea memoriavivasydne@yahoo.com.au

Comrade Riad Issa freed from prison

Comrade Riad Said Abdulaziz Issa was released from occupation prisons after 20 years behind bars on Sunday, June 9, returning to Shaboura refugee camp in Rafah, Gaza, Palestine. A rally and march in Rafah welcomed him, including a number of cadres and members of the Front, his family and friends, and family members of other prisoners, who carried Palestinian flags and PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) banners.

Participants chanted for the freedom of all prisoners, and for soldiers to be captured in order to liberate prisoners. Comrade Issa was arrested on June 10, 1993, accused of belonging to the Front

and its military organisations and being part of military operations during the first Intifada.

His mother and father died while he was a prisoner in Israeli jails, both of whom were prohibited from visiting their son by the occupation authorities. Issa participated in various protests and strikes inside the occupation prisons, and was subject to isolation on multiple occasions.

Comrade Ahmad Sa'adat, General Secretary of the PFLP, Comrade Abdel-Rahim Mallouh, the Deputy General Secretary, and the Front congratulated Issa and his family and comrades upon his freedom after 20 years in occupation

prisons. The PFLP in Rafah has opened a congratulatory tent for people to greet Comrade Issa in front of his home.

Issa spoke to the Voice of the People radio station, saying that the conditions of prisoners inside the occupation prisons is very difficult and they are subjected on a regular basis to arbitrary repressive actions by the prison administration. Issa urged all of our people and the Palestinian leadership to prioritize the issue of Palestinian prisoners inside Israeli jails. Issa was one of the veteran, pre-Oslo prisoners in Israeli jails and served his full sentence of 20 years.

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International situation

The number of displaced persons continues to rise at an alarming rate. According to figures recently published by the UNHCR, during 2012, there were 7.6 million newly displaced refugees. Currently 35.8 million refugees are under UNHCR protection.

These are human beings – men, women and children – forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, and human rights violations and seeking safe sanctuary.

The major recipients of refugees are Pakistan (1.6 m), Germany (589,700), Kenya (564,900) and Syria (476,500).

"... the number of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia remains relatively small by global standards," Towle noted.

So far this year, 12,194 asylum seekers have reached Australia on 180 boats. This is a drop in the ocean. At the end of 2012, the number of refugees hosted by Australia was estimated to be around 30,000 and the number of asylum seekers 20,010.

Compare these figures with an

estimated 15.4 million refugees globally, and just under one million asylum seekers in 2012. Australia ranks 49th for the number of refugees, while poor Pakistan with all of its problems took in 1.6 million.

Australia has a problem. It is not too many asylum seekers or refugees. It is that we are not pulling our weight. We are not shouldering our international responsibilities. Australia's barbaric treatment of asylum seekers adds to our shame.

International responsibility

There are a number of ways in which Australia can make a positive contribution.

First is to treat asylum seekers in a humane and caring manner, in line with our obligations under international law and support family reunions in Australia. Mandatory detention should be abolished. Children and their families should be living in the community, leading as normal lives as possible and receiving appropriate health and other care.

Asylum seekers are not "illegals" or a threat to Australia's security.

Almost all of them are genuine refugees who have a great deal to contribute to Australia.

The second is to substantially increase our intake, which would also serve to reduce the number of people risking their lives on perilous boat trips. We have an additional responsibility because of Australia's role in the US's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and its support for Western interference in Syria and elsewhere.

The third area is to address the cause of such large numbers of refugees. Of course Australia cannot do this single-handedly but it can play a role at the United Nations Security Council and elsewhere in preventing wars and other conflicts. More than half the refugees last year came from Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Syria and Sudan.

As a start the government should oppose the arming and training of the so-called "Free Syrian Army", oppose the blockade of Iran and support the struggle of the Palestinian people, including the call for implementation of previous UN resolutions. Australia has a responsibility to assist the people of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Climate report urges phasing out coal

Peter Mac

The coal mining industry has greeted the latest report of the Climate Commission with howls of protest. Entitled *The Critical Decade, Climate Science, Risks and Responses*, the report says that in order to avoid a rise of 2 degrees in average world temperatures by the end of the century the burning of fossil fuels must peak before 2020, and must then begin to decline sharply.

Mitch Hooke, chief executive of the Minerals Council of Australia, accused the Commission of environmental campaigning and demanded to know why a taxpayer funded organisation that was supposed to operate with strict scientific rigor would draw the same conclusions as environmental organisations dedicated to ending coal mining.

The answer is that the report is based on a number of studies from leading scientific organisations around the world, including NASA and Australia's CSIRO, and that all these organisations followed strict scientific criteria in reaching their conclusions.

In replying to the mining industry's criticism, Climate Commissioners and co-authors Professor Will Steffan and Professor Lesley Hughes pointed out that the Commission had not been influenced by other organisations and that it was up to governments to act on the report's findings.

The fact that the report comes to the same conclusions as environment groups simply proves that those groups were right; it does not invalidate the Commission's conclusions.

There is a certain irony in the mining industry's criticisms, because the report indicates that mining will be one of many activities that will be badly affected by climate change, especially in the north-west, which is expected to experience a sharp increase in extreme weather events in coming decades.

The report's findings

The report verifies conclusions reached by many scientific organisations, i.e. that global average temperatures are rising, and that although there has only been a one Celsius degree rise over the last 50 years the

climate is already changing. The polar ice is melting, the sea levels are rising, the sea is increasing in acidity. The world's flora and fauna are trying to adapt, but for many species the long-term outlook is grim.

The effects are already evident in Australia. The number of record hot days has more than doubled in the last 50 years, with increasing heat waves and bushfires. The 200mm average global rise in sea levels since the late 1880s has impacted many coastal communities, and if current conditions persist another rise of 200mm is likely by 2050.

The Great Barrier Reef has experienced nine bleaching events in the last 31 years. The Reef and its associated economy are under serious risk.

The report accepts that the rise in world temperatures results from the increase in the level of atmospheric greenhouse gases, and that deforestation and human activity involving the combustion of fossil fuels and the consequent emission of carbon dioxide is primarily responsible. Orbital variations and solar activity cannot explain the global warming trend.

The report declares unequivocally: "Without strong and rapid action there is a significant risk that climate change will undermine our society's prosperity, health, stability and way of life.

"To minimise this risk we must decarbonise our economy and move to clean energy sources by 2050. That means carbon emissions must peak within the next few years and then strongly decline. The longer we wait to start reducing carbon emissions, the more difficult and costly those emissions become."

A difficult but crucial goal

This is the first time an Australian government report has explicitly recommended the phasing out of fossil fuel production and use. It concludes unequivocally that the use of fossil fuels must begin to decline within the next few years, and that the sooner and more rapidly that occurs the better.

In glaring contrast, industries associated with fossil fuel want an increase in their use, and they will fight to prevent or delay any



government program to reduce reliance on those fuels.

Coal industry representatives have argued that winding down the coal production in Australia will be futile because its use in Australia is very small compared to other countries, and because overseas purchasers will simply buy their coal from other sources.

But that's not correct. Despite its relatively small population size Australia is now the 15th largest emitter of carbon dioxide in the world out of 295 nations, and is the worst performer on a per capita basis, so a progressive reduction in our carbon emissions would have a significant impact in mitigating climate change.

Such a reduction would set an example for other nations to follow and would also cause global shortages, prompting overseas purchasers to turn to renewable energy sources.

Moreover, scientists estimate that in order to provide a reasonable chance of keeping average global temperatures no higher than 2 degrees over the 1990 benchmark levels between now and 2050, the burning of carbon will have to be limited to about 600 billion tonnes. Australia's fossil fuel reserves represent about one twelfth of the world's stock, so Australia carries a major responsibility to take the lead in reducing production and use of fossil fuels.

Australia is now the world's biggest exporter of coking coal, and the port of Newcastle, which is about to be sold off to private interests by the

O'Farrell government, has the largest coal-loading facilities of any nation.

The Commission has taken a new approach to presenting its conclusions and now nominates long term "budget" targets for maximum permissible emission levels, with a view to avoiding "tipping point" climate changes.

The major Australian political parties have argued about the "best" way to tackle climate change, but because of the urgency of the situation all the approaches that are likely to have some effect should be put into effect.

Emissions trading schemes are foundering, because of the vagaries of market fluctuations, and because of the difficulty of imposing sanctions on nations that default on their obligations under these schemes.

The carbon tax has been a colossal disappointment in Australia, largely because the major polluters have been exempted from the carbon tax. However, carbon taxing has great potential, especially where

heavy taxation on high-emitting firms funds tax exemptions for firms converting to renewable energy use and firms involved in renewable energy production.

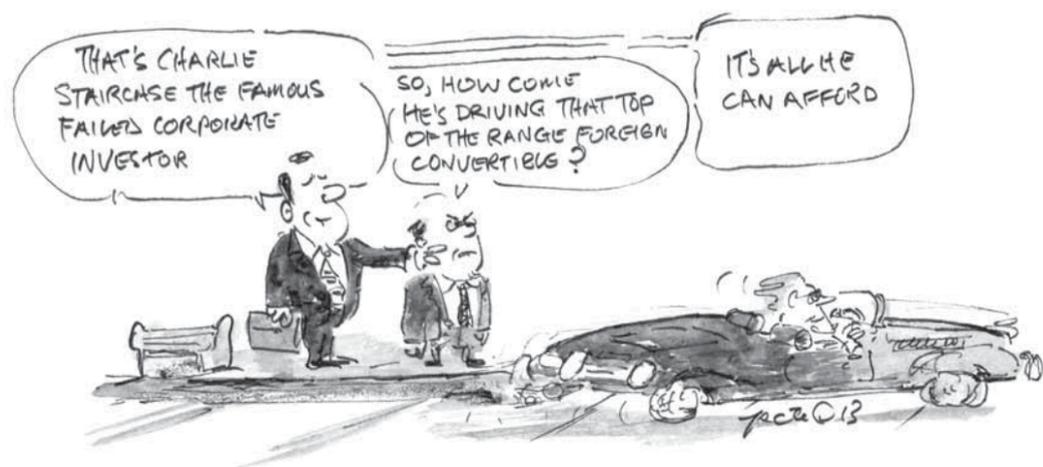
The Climate Commission's report does not deal with these matters, but it does examine methods of limiting carbon emissions. It acknowledges the worth of bio-fuels and "carbon sink" schemes involving new ecosystems. However, it also describes their limitations, and explains why minimising the burning of fossil fuels is essential to tackle the problem.

The Critical Decade is lengthy, but is clearly expressed and graphically illustrated. It's a very important document that should be widely read.

As the authors have explained:

"This decade is critical. Unless effective action is taken, the global climate may be so irreversibly altered we will struggle to maintain our way of life. The choices we make this decade will shape the long-term climate future for our children and grandchildren." ☘

Pete's Corner



XITI Productions in cooperation with
Migrante Western Australia
Presents
A Joel Lamangan Film
MIGRANTE
(The Filipino Diaspora)

Starring:
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Bedford – FACPI Clubhouse
July 6
Screenings 4-6pm & 7-9pm

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Screening 3-5pm

Adult: \$15
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MIGRANTE

Enquiries and Bookings: Vicki 0400 236 884 Mel 0414 247 154 Rashid 0452 518 189
Light meals, snacks, drinks and cuppa will be on sale at reasonable costs
This project is supported by the Filipino Community Council of Western Australia (FCCWA)

Aboriginal Affairs under fire – funding cuts guaranteed

Gerry Georgatos

Western Australia's Premier Colin Barnett has signalled what may become a national trend; the finding of budget saves by cutting spending to initiatives assisting Aboriginal peoples. The Closing the Gap targets are being touted by some as having been reached, while others claim otherwise, and may begin to spiral out of control once again in the decade ahead with less funding to be made available by governments.

Barnett is refusing to sign the Closing the Gap Indigenous health agreement until after his government's August budget. Premier Barnett will only commit to Aboriginal health, and obviously to other areas affecting Aboriginal peoples, after the State budget and obviously he will commit only what his budget will arguably allow him.

The National Partnership Agreement (NPA) on Indigenous health targets was signed by all states, territories and the federal government in 2008. \$1.57 billion was arguably invested over four years on Aboriginal health – to treat chronic disease in particular but also to better develop Aboriginal health systems.

But trachoma, diabetes, renal failure and hearing loss are at horrific levels among Aboriginal peoples, especially among the poorest 200,000 Aboriginal peoples, of whom more than 100,000 thousand live in what have been described as third-world conditions by many, including UN High Commissioner Navi Pillay, Amnesty International Secretary-General Shalil Shetty and world-renowned documentary film maker John Pilger.

The NPA agreement is up on June 30, and a new one needs to be signed but there is no way that WA, Australia's richest State, will sign it before then.

Despite the WA government stating that it will interim fund the initiative for another three months past June 30, it will not commit to the spending on Aboriginal health initiatives that is being asked of WA at this time, not till after the budget.

Federal Aboriginal Health Minister Warren Snowdon wrote to Premier Barnett to try and secure his signature on the NPA agreement.

"Under the NPA, all Australian governments have implemented, or are currently implementing, an extensive range of activities to improve Indigenous health outcomes and contribute to closing the gap in life expectancy," wrote Mr Snowdon to Premier Barnett.

Insiders have told *The Stringer* that Premier Barnett intends "less will be spent on Aboriginal health but it will be spent more effectively."

Coalition leader Tony Abbott earlier in the year told the *National Indigenous Times* that if he became Prime Minister he would take direct control of Aboriginal Affairs, adding it as portfolio – Prime Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, and that he will work alongside Northern Territorian Nigel Scullion in addressing Aboriginal Affairs – the closing of the gap, health, education and housing.

The *Stringer* has been told by sources close to Mr Abbott that he too, like his fellow Liberal, Premier Barnett, will take control of how much is to be spent on Aboriginal initiatives. He is bent on making financial savings. *The Stringer* has been told that Mr Abbott, if and when Prime Minister, will engage a powerful troika to "better executive spending" and from the "bottom end up". Mr Abbott wants to do away with spending on the "heavy bureaucracy" and the numerous consultants of Aboriginal Affairs.

"He wants to spend funds directly on addressing alcoholism, on getting

kids into schools, on providing services, on getting people into jobs."

"Some can call this assimilation but in the end it's about changing lives that everyone and everything else tried has failed to do."

The powerful troika that is being touted behind the scenes but yet to be announced is Warren Mundine, Professor Marcia Langton and Noel Pearson.

These three are well credentialed but also highly controversial figures who have polarised Aboriginal peoples. Mr Pearson is probably the most controversial of the three with hundreds of millions of government funding that his Cape York Institute has received yet to show any real advances for the people of the York peninsula. Aurukun is an embarrassment for Mr Pearson.

The Stringer posed the question of the troika to Mr Abbott's office. For the first time they have decided to not respond to the *National Indigenous Times*. In other words they will neither confirm or deny the troika – but our sources are on the money.

It is a huge gamble to take, at the expense of impoverished Aboriginal peoples, to reduce expenditure on Aboriginal health, education and housing when clearly many targets are still not being met.

The federal government in its May Budget committed more spending on Aboriginal programs but this does not mean this spending will be met past September 14.

In WA it looks like Aboriginal spending will take a huge hit, one that the mining rich state's Aboriginal peoples cannot afford. WA, alongside the NT, has Aboriginal homelessness, youth suicide and health issues such as trachoma and otitis media at horrific levels and with some at world record levels. Aboriginal incarceration rates in Western Australia are a national tragedy with one in 14



Aboriginal adult males in prison, the worst incarceration rate in the world.

Premier Barnett is bracing WA for austerity measures, not dissimilar to Queensland where Premier Campbell Newman will do away with 66,000 public service positions over the next five years.

Already Premier Barnett has confirmed that 1,000 public service jobs will go. Therefore more direct control from ministerial offices will be needed in many areas, for instance Aboriginal Affairs, which will see Premier Barnett and the state's Aboriginal Affairs Minister Peter Collier more involved – and in making and acquitting the decisions of where and how any funding to Aboriginal programs should be spent.

The Stringer will cover a number of issues in the weeks ahead – the troika of Mundine, Langton and Pearson, and their own track records, and the burden they will be carrying for Aboriginal peoples. *The Stringer* is also aware of looming changes to the Native Title Act and processes which will expedite determinations and future acts and compensation payouts before "people die waiting" but which will be peddled with the express intention to speed up Indigenous Land Access Agreements and tenement tenure for extractive industry miners and developers.

It will not be about the Native Title Holders and their rights; it will be about encouraging mining projects. *The Stringer* ✪

Scott Ludlam Federal re-election campaign launch

Richard Titelius

As the filth and the (false) fury that is the election campaign of the Liberal and Labor Parties – from Julia Gillard Kentucky Fried Quail to the sexual preferences of the Prime Minister's partner – made headlines across the nation for all the wrong reasons, West Australian Greens Senator Scott Ludlam kicked off his re-election campaign by highlighting many important issues that he would be pursuing in his next term of office if he is re-elected.

Scott Ludlam's launch was held outdoors at Rigby's Bar in the Perth CBD, a popular drinking spot named after a long time political cartoonist at the *West Australian* newspaper and was attended by 350 people including many of the party faithful but also some who had come for the first time.

The MC for the evening was fellow WA Greens Senator Rachel Siewart, who is not facing re-election. She introduced the principal

speaker for the night, former Greens leader and now ongoing activist and occasional DJ, Bob Brown. He started the evening by highlighting Scott Ludlam's commitment to having Australia's spy agency's subjected to oversight when conducting surveillance of people, by seeking to introduce legislation. This would require the government to show cause before a judicial officer in the form of a warrant before conducting eavesdropping of the kind.

Bob Brown also defended the good work of the *Sea Shepherd* and its intrepid leader captain Paul Watson who has an international warrant for his arrest by Japan for Green Peace's role in defying Japan's so called scientific whaling program and, in so doing, upholding international law in regard to the Antarctic Whaling Sanctuary.

Scott Ludlam commenced his speech with what he believed was the number one issue which will effect all Australians and that is climate change. To help with our appreciation it was important to

listen to the stories of Aboriginal Elders whose ancestors have passed on stories about Australia when it was subject to the last ice age.

"WorkChoices had still not been completely unpicked," Ludlam reminded the audience. "We need new tools to build new forms of democracy, ones that are free from moneyed interests and only pursuing profits."

Ludlam concluded by saying that what was needed was a turning point so that we can deal with the urgent and pressing issues of the day, including the calculated asset-stripping of our economy with so much of our manufacturing going overseas.

The Communist Party of Australia supports the campaign for the re-election of Senator Scott Ludlam as the Greens have been able to break the two party stranglehold and are pursuing progressive policies which will help bring about a more sustainable economy and a more transparent, accountable and fair society. ✪

Unless we open our minds and hearts to the common humanity of those who seek a new life in Australia, we place our own humanity in danger.

As an Australian, as an immigrant, as a senator and as a human being – I endorse the work of Welcome to Australia to encourage and advance the nation's best instincts, ideals & aspirations.

- Senator Scott Ludlam
GREENS SENATOR FOR WA
WELCOME TO AUSTRALIA AMBASSADOR

PRISM – heed the privacy warnings

Bob Briton

The scandal surrounding the US National Security Agency's industrial-scale collection of Internet data had the spy agencies and Internet monopolies tripping over themselves to engage in damage control. An NSA employee, 29-year-old Edward Snowden, had fled to Hong Kong for his own safety after revealing the extent of the NSA's PRISM program to the UK Guardian and The Washington Post. Data given voluntarily by users of services like Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Apple, AOL, Yahoo and others has been made freely available to the NSA for several years. Clearly, masses of Internet users across the globe, including those in Australia, are being caught up in the workings of Section 702 of the US Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA).

The White House was choosing its words carefully. The program does not intentionally "target" individual US citizens. If everybody's telephone and Internet data is being collected and stored for later reference on vast data farms like the one at Bluffdale in Utah then, very strictly speaking, individuals aren't being targeted by programs like PRISM. Presumably, the rights and protests of citizens in other countries are of no concern to the US administration.

"Facebook is not and has never been part of any program to give the US or any other government direct access to our servers,"

Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg said. "We only ever comply with orders for requests about specific accounts or identifiers," Microsoft chimed in. "If the government has a broader voluntary national security program to gather customer data, we don't participate in it."

"We have never heard of PRISM," said Steve Dowling from Apple. "We do not provide any government agency with direct access to our servers, and any government agency requesting customer data must get a court order."

Several companies were reported to be seeking exemption from restrictions imposed by FISA so as to give clearer details of the huge numbers of police and spy agency requests they receive and with which they are bound to comply. The "outrage" and "concern" for the privacy of users is unconvincing. The only company with a record of genuine resistance to the embrace of the NSA appears to be Twitter. It fought requests from US government authorities for information on users associated with WikiLeaks and the Occupy movement though ultimately it, too, is vulnerable to the vast body of post 9/11 legislation.

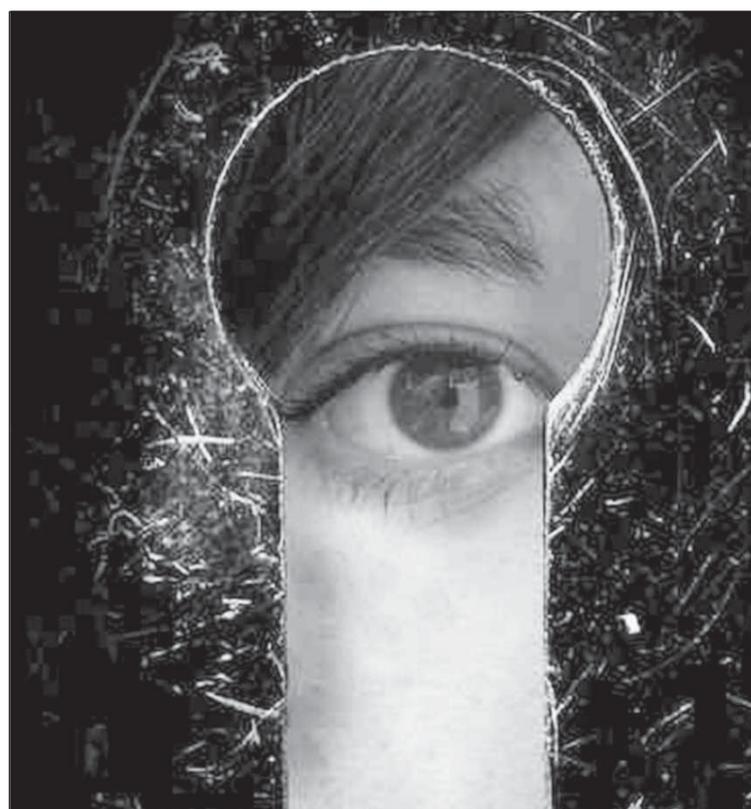
What about Australia?

So what about Australia, how exposed to this massive invasion of privacy are people living here? Very, is the short answer. The path travelled by Internet data is relatively random but, given the dominance of companies like the ones mentioned above and the ownership of satellites,

there is a strong chance it will pass through the US. Australia is party to the "five eyes" agreement with the US, Britain, Canada and New Zealand to share signals intelligence. Reports on PRISM confirm that the UK's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) has gathered information on British citizens via the NSA program. Why would Australia be any different?

A spokeswoman for Australian Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus was very tight-lipped. It was the "... long-standing practice of successive governments not to comment on national security and intelligence capabilities." We do know, via a statement to a Senate estimates hearing by Australian Federal Police Deputy Commissioner Michael Phelan, that the AFP made 43,362 requests for "metadata" from phone and Internet records last financial year. "Metadata" indicates who contacted whom from what location, at what time and for how long. It appears authorities are just as interested in patterns of contact as they are in the content of communications.

No doubt many of these requests are about missing persons, drug dealing, fraud and other legitimate police matters, but the potential for Australian authorities to share the "wealth" of data collected on Australian political activists by the NSA should sound warning bells. "If you have nothing to hide, there is no reason to worry," is the usual official response to such concerns. But the secret collection of data on activists is disturbing and will pose greater



dangers in future as capitalism drifts deeper into crisis and governments respond to social unrest with even more repression of dissent.

Progressive Australians should review their Internet habits. Sensitive matters relating to the struggle against the increasingly anti-worker, pro-war and environmentally destructive course the country is set on should not

be gifted to the NSA and, eventually, to Australia's spy agencies via email and social media. Some used to consider it paranoid to believe Internet monopolies had an open door policy towards US spy networks. We now know too much about its operation to carry on as before. Thank you Edward Snowden. ✪

NTEU to spend \$1 million on election campaign to defend higher education

In an historic move, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) voted last week to spend \$1 million on an election campaign to defend higher education in the September federal election.

"This is a watershed decision for our union. We are deeply concerned about the impact of a Coalition government on higher education, and the latest \$2.3 billion cuts by the Gillard government to universities and student support left us no alternative. We feel compelled to act in defence of universities and Australia's future as a smart country," Jeannie Rea, national NTEU president, said today.

NTEU will run its own campaign in support of maintaining the Greens' balance of power in the Senate and the election of selected lower house candidates who commit to the union's election priorities.

"To be clear, NTEU will be campaigning on issues important to higher education and our members. We will not be making any donations to the Greens, or any individual candidate.

"We don't want to see the

Labor government voted out and a Coalition government voted in but the ALP needs to hear loud and clear that the \$4 billion cuts to higher education since 2011 are plain dumb and undermining this country's capacity to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

"We are under no illusion that, should the Coalition win control of the Senate, higher education will be amongst the first to feel the brunt of Tony Abbott's axe. The decision by the Greens to elevate university cuts as a top election priority provides the NTEU with an unprecedented opportunity to make higher education funding a real issue in the federal election campaign."

The decision to intervene in the election campaign was made today by a special meeting of the NTEU's National Council. Over 120 delegates have been meeting in Canberra since Sunday (16 June).

Rea said it was the first time in its 20-year history that the NTEU had called together a special meeting of its national council.

"We're seeking their commitment to a 10 percent increase in real funding per student, as recommended by the Bradley Review,

better student income support (and less debt), and the use of the balance of power to block any further university cuts and any future Coalition industrial relations measures aimed at undermining trade union and collective bargaining rights," she said.

The union says the latest cuts undermine some of Labor's positive initiatives in higher education and mean even more casual staff, bigger workloads and more pressure on the ability of universities to give students the quality education they deserve. "Universities are at breaking point. The response from our members on these latest cuts has been unprecedented."

NTEU is not and has never been affiliated to any political party. It has 28,000 members in universities, TAFEs and research institutes.

Key aims of the campaign are:

- reversal of the latest \$2.3bn cuts.
- a 10% increase in real funding per student.
- no further university cuts.
- no industrial relations measures aimed at undermining trade union and collective bargaining rights. ✪



The discount chain Target is culling 260 positions as part of a major restructure. The job losses are in the Target's store support centre in Geelong and regional support locations. The Target job cuts follow Ford's decision to stop making cars in Australia from October 2016, with the loss of about 1,200 jobs in Geelong and Melbourne. Two other major industrial plants in the city – Shell oil refinery and Alcoa aluminium smelter face an uncertain future. Shell has put its refinery up for sale, Alcoa will keep its smelter open until 2014 under a support package announced last year.

Workers on 457 visas are open to all sorts of abuse. There have been numerous cases of workers not receiving their proper wages, subjected to unsafe working conditions and poor accommodation. Some have fought for their rights, which is how it should be – solidarity is not an empty word but a call for action. However, the extreme exploitation of 457 visa workers continues. It was recently made public that one such worker had to pay his boss half his wages back in cash. He also had to pay work-placement agents weekly which did not leave him much money to send home to support his family. The whole experience made him depressed and suicidal as he felt ashamed of his perceived failure as a bread-winner. Unscrupulous employers pursue all manner of loopholes to cut wages and conditions – not only for migrant workers but for local workers as well. Setting one group of workers against another has been going on for ages. It would be wise not to fall for these tricks and unite for proper working conditions for all.

A parliamentary committee has raised concerns about the effect on children of the prominent display of betting companies' logos and gambling advertisements on football jumpers. A ban on gambling advertising would pose a serious threat to the growth of corporate bookies which have spent large sums to secure a piece of \$19 billion gambling market. Evidence from research into the influence of advertising on young people found a high level of recall – young people could name two or three gambling company brands, a much better result than their parents or adults generally. Betting promotion on uniforms is contrary to the stated aims of sports clubs as family-oriented. No family would want to see a child growing into a gambler.

Film Review by Anna Pha

We Steal Secrets: The Story of WikiLeaks

***We Steal Secrets: The Story of WikiLeaks* is promoted as a documentary about WikiLeaks, the whistleblowing group which released hundreds of thousands of classified US diplomatic cables two years ago. Since its formation in 2007 WikiLeaks has hit the headlines on numerous occasions with its leaks exposing the truth behind wars, killings, torture, detention, corporate activities, corruption, abuse, suppression of free speech, cults and other cover-ups. WikiLeaks and one of its founders, Julian Assange, are now being subjected to the largest criminal probe ever.**

The content of the cables and the serious breakdown in security involved proved extremely embarrassing to the US military, the National Security Agency (NSA) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

With their long list of previous exposés and the fallout and actions that resulted from them, the promise of a documentary telling the story of WikiLeaks was exciting. Unfortunately, *We Steal Secrets* does not tell the story of WikiLeaks.

The title of the film is a good indicator of the inaccuracies and innuendo that permeate the film. WikiLeaks does not steal secrets. Nowhere in the film is this even suggested. It is US General Michael Hayden, former director of the NSA and the CIA, who confesses.

In one of numerous interview segments with the former CIA head, he says, "Now look, I'm going to be very candid, alright? We steal secrets. We steal other nations' secrets. One cannot do that aboveboard and be very successful for a very long period of time." The activity of those who lie and steal secrets is not investigated.

The film is written, directed and narrated by award winning US documentary and film maker Alex Gibney (*Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room; Client 9, The Rise and Fall of Eliot Spitzer; Taxi to the Dark Side*). Gibney gives it mainstream credibility and, along with its title, it may attract large audiences.

The film relies heavily on the ignorance of its audience who are in no position, without some research, to query what they are being told. It has the feel of a Hollywood contribution to the US military's information war.

It starts with the appearance of a worm (self-replicating program in computers) which spreads through NASA's computers just prior to the launching of the nuclear powered spacecraft *Galileo* on its way to Jupiter. It then, by innuendo, via a Midnight Oil song from Australia, links the worm to Julian Assange.

Gibney selectively extracts segments from old media footage of Assange to make his points. He also relies heavily on Hayden and several media commentators including Mark Davis who early in the film says, "I see this story entirely as one man against the world."

WikiLeaks' goals

There are interviews with some of those involved in or on the fringes of WikiLeaks. Nick Davis provides an apt description of the group:

"WikiLeaks is a not-for-profit media organisation. Our goal is to bring important news and information to the public. We provide an innovative, secure and anonymous way for sources to leak information to our journalists (our electronic drop box). One of our most

important activities is to publish original source material alongside our news stories so readers and historians alike can see evidence of the truth. We are a young organisation that has grown very quickly, relying on a network of dedicated volunteers around the globe.... We also develop and adapt technologies to support these activities."

Stock footage of Assange also provides an indication of their objectives: "So this is what you'll see if you go to the front page of the website. This is WikiLeaks, we help to get the truth out. We want to enable information to go out to the public that has the greatest chance of achieving positive political reform in the world. To get things to the public you need to protect sources who want to disclose and you also need to protect your ability to publish in the face of attack."

The film provides an interesting insight into how the technological side of their work developed which is extremely important. There are also great dramatic, graphic representations of the internet.

Robert Manne notes: "His thinking is: how can we destroy corruption? It's the whistleblower. Julian Assange is neither a right-wing libertarian nor a standard leftist. I think he is a humanitarian anarchist. A kind of John Lennon-like revolutionary, dreaming of a better world."

Having given a picture of WikiLeaks' aims and approach, Gibney glosses over its achievements, with only a couple of examples. The result is a gross understatement of its history, its successes and battles dating back to 2007.

The film notes, but does not make a big deal out of the fact that the media outlets that played a critical role in releasing information from the diplomatic cables – the British *Guardian Weekly*, *The New York Times*, *Der Spiegel* and the Fairfax media in Australia – are not being accused of any crimes or their editors threatened with life imprisonment. Only Assange and the whistleblowers are.

Distortions

Much of the film focuses on Assange and the US army private first class Bradley Manning who is accused of leaking the cables. Throughout the film, Gibney propagates the idea Assange had been "fishing" for the leaks or that Manning had been "persuaded" to leak by Assange. But there is no evidence of that.

In effect, the film reinforces the attempts by the US military to try to point to Assange as doing more than just receiving information – that his complicity makes him a spy. Again there is not a shred of evidence. WikiLeaks works on the basis of anonymity and Assange confirms that they do not know the source of leaks.

Alexa O'Brien, who has produced the only available transcripts of Manning's secret prosecution and has carried out extensive research into Manning's case, was highly critical of Gibney:

"His tabloid motion graphic is a regurgitation of stock footage, unsubstantiated innuendo, and unexamined allegation. The ominous and unprecedented prosecution of Manning unfolding in a soundproofed room in the confined wasteland of Fort Meade is a trite remark in the dark space surrounding Gibney's frame." (www.alexaoobrien.com)

Manning's trial is being conducted in

secrecy by the Military District of Washington in the US Army's First Judicial Circuit.

"If *We Steal Secrets* or the subsequent Q & A with director, Alex Gibney, revealed anything, it's that the filmmaker is quite uninformed about the trial of Bradley Manning. He can barely speak on the topic or on that of the largest criminal probe of a publisher [WikiLeaks] and its source in history," O'Brien added.

"What is unsaid in Gibney's film is how democratic governance ceases to function when bureaucrats arbitrarily over-classify terabytes of information hiding government waste, fraud, abuse, and crimes."

There has been no evidence that the material selected for release by WikiLeaks has posed a security threat to the US. Many of the revelations, however, have proved extremely embarrassing with their exposure of the lies and conduct of US authorities with their criminal cover-ups and use of diplomats to spy on foreign governments and commercial entities. But *We Steal Secrets* does not look into what it exposed, let alone who really should be on trial for serious war and other crimes.

Manning's political motives

Much of the film focuses on Manning and supposedly why he revealed the secrets including the now infamous "Collateral Murder" video. The video showed the cold blooded murder of civilians including two Reuters journalists in Baghdad by the crew of an Apache helicopter (including their comments) and their lust for blood and scant regard for human life.

"If you had free reign over classified networks ... and you saw incredible things, awful things ... things that belonged in the public domain, and not on some server stored in a dark room in Washington DC ... what would you do?" He goes on to write, quote, "I want people to see the truth ... regardless of who they are ... because without information, you cannot make informed decisions as a public," Manning explained.

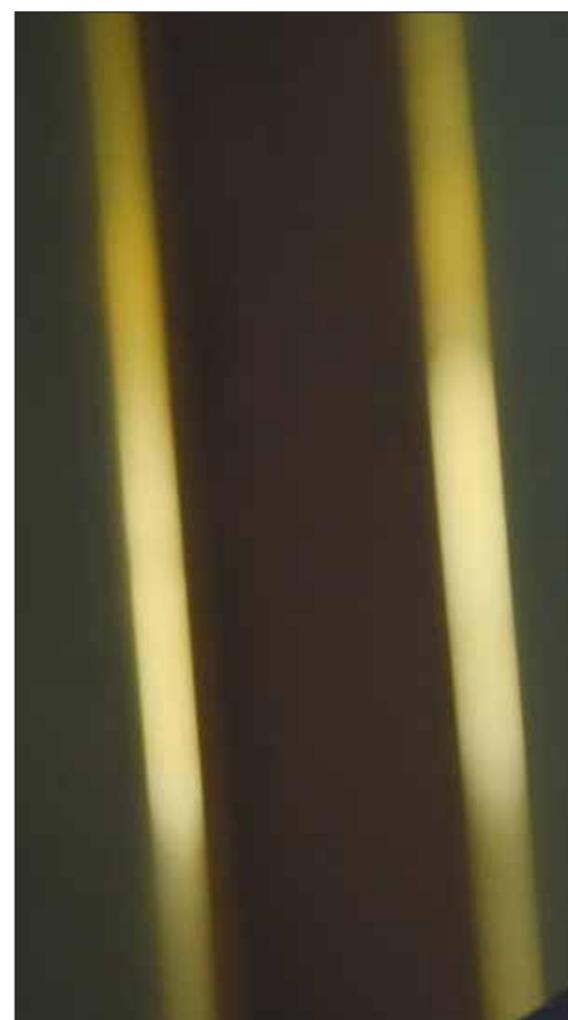
But Manning's political motives are quickly glossed over with the main focus on the personal, comments by others that he is gay and so could not fit in as a regular soldier. He had a high level of computer skills so the army used him as an intelligence analyst.

Treachery

There is also an interview with computer hacker Adrian Lamo, who turns informant on Manning who had confided his concerns to him. The film omits what followed, that Lamo not only was an informer, but immediately pushed the story out through *WIRED* magazine, issued nine press releases, gave dozens of interviews, and campaigned for Assange's extradition.

Still playing down the political side of Manning's actions, the film continues to pursue the whistleblower's alleged psychological shortcoming and other possible motives. This serves as a diversion from the important content of the leaks and the criminal persecution of Manning. Manning showed incredible courage. His actions were courageous and in the service of humanity. Gibney rewards him with nothing short of character assassination.

O'Brien is correct in referring to his film as tabloid regurgitation of unsubstantiated innuendo, and unexamined allegation.



The film's writer, director and narrator – Alex Gibney.

In his plea statement to the court, Manning said that he experienced conscientious alarm after he viewed the Apache helicopter gunship video ("Collateral Murder").

Principled stand

"I hoped that the public would be as alarmed as me about the conduct of the aerial weapons team crew members. I wanted the American public to know that not everyone in Iraq and Afghanistan are targets that needed to be neutralised, but rather people who were struggling to live in the pressure cooker environment of what we call asymmetric warfare," he told the court in another courageous act.

But instead of using Manning's own explanation, such as just quoted, Gibney poses questions: "Just what had happened with Bradley Manning? Was this just a data dump? Or was this the act of a man who had peaked behind the curtain of a superpower and decided that what it was doing was wrong?"

This is followed by more personal diversionary discussion over whether Manning had a female personality or wanted to become a woman. Details of a physical incident which occurred after the leaks are implied to have been behind the leaks.

It is a missed opportunity to reveal the lies behind the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and US operations around the globe.

Hypocrisy

After airing accusations about Assange being a terrorist, extortionist, crackpot, enemy combatant, etc, from US officials and news outlets, Gibney notes:

"There were rumours of a sealed indictment against Assange. Secret subpoenas were served targeting WikiLeaks supporters. Under political pressure, VISA and MasterCard stopped processing donations to the website."

Amy Goodman from Democracy Now, interviewed Gibney when the film was first publicly shown at the Sundance Film Festival in Utah. She asked him why he made the film.

"Well, I think, to me, when I was originally brought into this – and actually, I got a call from Universal to take it on, and I took it on because

O'Brien is correct in referring to Gibney's film as tabloid regurgitation of unsubstantiated innuendo, and unexamined allegation.

WikiLeaks



I thought it was the ultimate David and Goliath story, one man against the world – a guy, the Silver Surfer of the Internet, Julian Assange, with a computer, wandering the world and taking on the biggest superpower. So it seemed a classic David and Goliath story for me, at the beginning,” Gibney said.

“So what changed?” Goodman asked.

“I think there’s – you know, the film charts a change in Julian Assange. I think in – at the moment of his greatest fame, I think his rigorous adherence to the truth, maybe, went – changed, let me put it that way,” Gibney said.

When asked to explain: “Well, I mean that the biggest problem I had with Julian Assange came up over the Swedish episode. That is to say, an episode in which questions were raised about his behaviour with two women in Sweden. And a lot of people, including me, thought at the time that this was some sort of obvious sort of honey trap, some sort of CIA plot to prevent him from leaking any further documents. And it turns out it’s not that. It’s – in my view, it’s a story about one man and two women, but – and it’s been morphed, I think, by Julian Assange into something bigger than that. And now I think he believes something that I don’t think is true.”

Goodman asks, “Which is?”

“Which is that the United States is trying to use or manipulate the Swedish judicial process in order to get him to Sweden, in order to send him to the United States for trial.”

“And why do you not think that is true?” asks Goodman.

“Because there’s no evidence that it’s true. I mean, we know that there’s a grand jury proceeding – or, there’s a grand jury investigation of Julian Assange, but there’s absolutely no evidence that the United States is manipulating the Swedish legal process in any way, shape or form,” replies Gibney.

So, after all the preceding innuendo and rumour, Gibney throws political reality out the window and requires evidence from one of the most secret organisations in the US before he will acknowledge the dangers facing Assange if he goes to Sweden or leaves the Ecuadoran embassy in London!

This refusal to acknowledge the glaring

political reality that the US has plans to extradite Assange from Sweden seems nothing more than an abject attempt to justify the character assassination of Assange that dominates the last part of the film. In particular, there is a lengthy interview with one of the women.

In an interview with Amy Goodman on May 29, 2013, Assange, speaking from the Ecuadoran Embassy said, “The claim in the title is simply false. It has spread everywhere, of course, because it’s in all the promotional literature ... That’s a \$2.5 million hit job on my reputation, the reputation of the organisation. What’s the equivalent title? *I Make Fictitious, Fraudulent Films: The Story of Alex Gibney*.”

“In response,” Assange tells Goodman, “we have published the full transcript, ... ahead of the film’s release, with line-by-line detail showing exactly how Alex Gibney edited statements, stitched them together, etc, and ... didn’t engage, it seems, in any fact checking of the statements [of] the people he was interviewing. You know, for an example, I make some statement that begins with, ‘Well, what they say is,’ and then I quote it. Alex Gibney cuts off the ‘What they say,’ so in order to put someone else’s words into my mouth. And that’s present throughout the film.”

Edward Snowden, another courageous whistleblower, has been charged with espionage and stealing government property, following the release of details of the US’s extensive global surveillance operations, including over its own citizens. His case may arouse interest in *We Steal Secrets* which opens in cinemas around Australia on July 4.

It is strongly recommended that anyone seeing the film, check the websites below:

wikileaks.org
(Homepage for updates and click on “archives” and “about” for information on its activities and principles of operation)

democracynow.org
(Amy Goodman interviews)

justice4assange.com/IMG/html/gibney-transcript.html
(Film transcript and WikiLeaks comments) ✳

Classic Protest Songs



In the early 1940s, singers such as Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Josh White and Lead Belly took up political struggles through their music. Folkway Records (USA) and its founder Moses Asch provided the vehicle for many these great folksingers to speak out. They were part of a folksong revival that reached its peak in the 1950s in the US and continued to be popular well into the next decade.

In 1987, the Folkways label was donated to the non-profit Smithsonian Institution. Its museum holds the collection and has taken over other smaller labels (including Paredon & Collector), with a commitment to reissue material from its archives with expanded liner notes.

More than 3,000 titles are now available through Smithsonian Folkways via on-demand compact disc and on-line digital download and many are available on CDs.

Classic Protest Songs from Smithsonian Folkways is one such CD with a collection of 22 protest songs, a small sample of some of the great artists of that period. There are many more of their works which can be followed up by visiting the museum’s website, www.folkways.si.edu.

The songs have been sung in anti-war, civil rights, labour, Indigenous, and other struggles as a means of airing grievances and making demands.

Huddie Ledbetter, better known as Lead Belly, performed blues, spirituals, pop songs, and many other styles. He was discovered in prison by researcher John Avery Lomax, and became part of a grouping in New York, which included Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Aunt Molly Jackson, Sonny Terry and Moses Asch. The CD includes his *Bourgeois Blues*, a song inspired by an incident when he was denied a room in a Washington Hotel because of his colour.

Woody Guthrie composed more than 2,000 songs, including the classics, *This Land is Your Land* and *So Long, It’s Been Good to Know You*. Here he sings *Jesus Christ*, a commentary on what would happen if Jesus Christ returned to 1940s America using the melody of the classic folksong *Jessie James*.

Janis Ian composed *Baby I’ve Been Thinking* at the age of 15. On the theme of inter-racial romance, it was too hot to handle. Twenty-two record companies rejected it before Verve/Folkways released it. It only took off after Leonard Bernstein featured it on his show. She received death threats and razor blades in the post. In the South, it was released under the pseudonym Blind Girl Grunt.

Claudia Jane Berger, from The Bergerfolk sings *Masters of War*, a powerful anti-war

song written by Bob Dylan. “Like Judas of old, you lie and deceive. / A world war could be won / You want me to believe / ... ”

Brother John Sellers, a blues and gospel singer performs Lewis Allan’s *Strange Fruit*, but the lyrics differ from those sung by Billie Holliday. The “strange fruit” are the swinging bodies of the lynched blacks. The song decried racism in the South. It sent a strong message which record companies were reluctant to handle in the early 1960s.

John Cohen, Mike Seeger and banjo player Tom Paley came together in mid-1958 to form the New Lost City Ramblers. *How Can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live* dates from the Great Depression and was first recorded by Blind Alfred Reed in 1929. Ry Cooder and Bruce Springsteen also recorded it.

Corrido De César Chávez is a tribute to the leader of the United Farm Workers who organised to fight the mistreatment of migrant workers in the US. In 1966, during the Delano Grape Strike (1965-70) the UFW staged a 300-mile (482km) march. This tribute to César Chávez was composed during the march and is performed by Los Perros del Pueblo Nuevo (The New People’s Dogs).

Gone, Gone, Gone by the group Red Shadow is a lively piece written in 1973 that exposes the ruling class and its policies. The chorus line, “But they’ll be gone, gone, gone when the workers take their power away,” leaves no doubts which side they are on.

No protest song collection would be complete without Pete Seeger. Like Woody Guthrie he believes strongly in the use of music for the betterment of humankind. He was blacklisted during the McCarthy era but was not silenced. *Waste Deep in The Big Muddy* was a highly controversial anti-war song at the time. The last line of the song came after Pete had seen a newspaper photograph of troops in the Mekong Delta during the Vietnam War.

Other songs include *Spirits of the Revolution* (Larry Estridge), *Evicted Tenant* (Sis Cunningham), *We Shall Overcome* (Guy Carawan), *Agent Orange* (Peggy Seeger), *Talking Pay TV* (Phil Ochs) and *As Long as the Grass Shall Grow* (Peter La Farge).

The 70-minute CD comes with a 32-page booklet with notes on the background of each artist and information on the songs along with a few photos. For some, it will be a wonderful trip down memory lane, and for others a new musical experience that was part of the protest movements of the mid-20th century. Copies of the CD are available from the CPA for \$20 including packing and postage. ✳

Mali agreement signed but root problems remain

Emile Schepers

On Tuesday June 18, the interim government of Mali and the Tuareg separatists of the National Movement of Azawad (MNLA) signed a tentative peace deal to put an end to a year and a half of intense fighting. However, not everyone is sanguine about the deal and its ability to solve the root problems behind the conflict.

The MNLA has been fighting for the separation of Tuareg majority areas from Mali and neighbouring states and the creation of an independent Tuareg state. The Tuaregs are an ethnic group that speaks a language of the Berber family and that has social customs different from those of its neighbours. There have been many Tuareg revolts, but the current one started in January of 2012. The MNLA made a marriage of convenience with militant Sunni Islamist groups, including Ansar Dine, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and MUJAO (the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa).

This, plus an influx into Mali of Tuareg fighters and armaments from Libya caused by the overthrow of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, gave the rebels the strike force which enabled them to take over the whole Northeastern triangle of Mali including the important towns of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal. The rebel advance and the failure of the government then in power to stop it was the pretext for a coup d'état by junior officers of the Malian army in March of 2012. The new military junta, headed by Captain

Amadou Sanogo, found that the coup did not stop the rebel advance, and that regional powers were reluctant to send help to a government not established legally.

Time was lost as Sanogo tussled politically with other factions in Malian politics. Meanwhile, the Islamist organisations pushed aside the MNLA forces and established their control over the Northeast.

At the beginning of 2013, the rebels made a sudden push through Mali's narrow waistline, and there was real fear that they might capture the capital, Bamako. At that point the interim president, Diancounda Traore, appealed to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union and French President Francois Hollande to send military help. Combined Malian, French and other African troops drove back the rebels and recaptured Timbuktu, Gao and other towns, but they have not captured Kidal, which, unlike the other places, is mostly Tuareg.

Earlier this year, reports surfaced that the French were thinking in terms of dividing the rebels by making attractive offers of autonomy to the Tuaregs. This led to some consternation in Bamako. Mali is not alone in Africa in being very wary of separatist tendencies, especially when they are being promoted by the former colonial power.

Malians speak more than 60 different languages. Africa is seen as already balkanised enough and to open the door to ethnic separatist movements is perceived as very



January this year, MNLA (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad) commander Akli-Ikman Ag Souleyman, leads around 400 fighters in Gao region, Tessit, Mali.

dangerous. However, the Malian army was not in adequate shape to overcome the rebel forces on its own, without outside and especially French military help.

While there were especially bitter local complaints about the Islamist rebels, there were also complaints about the MNLA. Besides abusive behaviour by Tuareg fighters, many Black Malians, especially but not only of the Bella ethnic group, fear that Tuareg aristocrats aim to re-subject them to the slavery that prevailed before the colonial period and persisted in one form or another through colonialism and into the period of independence.

There were many reports in the international media of Bella people being "claimed" by Tuareg "owners" during the rebel occupation. In response to these experiences, even innocent Tuaregs and Arabs have been subjected to repression by the returning Malian troops, or have been attacked and driven out by local villagers.

Nevertheless, President Traore's

government agreed to sit down with the MNLA and hammer out a peace accord, with various countries, including Algeria and Switzerland (considered a Tuareg ally), playing mediating roles. The June 18 agreement was signed in Oagadougou, the capital of neighbouring Burkina Faso, whose government has spearheaded ECOWAS efforts to resolve the crisis.

The agreement includes acceptance by MNLA that Mali will not be broken up. A mechanism was devised whereby Tuareg rebel troops will withdraw from Kidal to bases outside, and Malian troops and civil administrators will return, with French and allied African help. The ceasefire will be supervised by a joint commission composed of representatives from the Malian government, the rebels, the United Nations, the ECOWAS forces, the African Union and (naturally) France. The rebels had asked for an amnesty for all crimes committed by them during their occupation of the Northeast, but this will be a matter, rather, for a joint commission. This interim setup will permit the people

of Kidal to participate in Malian presidential elections scheduled for July 28. The new government elected at that time will then pursue a more permanent peace treaty.

But there is much suspicion of this agreement in the rest of Mali. Many fear that it is basically a bit of French chicanery designed to keep Tuareg separatism alive and ultimately allied to French interests. International donors have made reconstruction aid dependent on the deal going through. The main group of the left in Mali, the SADI (African Solidarity for Democracy and Independence) Party, denounced the agreement as a violation of Mali's national sovereignty.

Women's organisations also expressed fear that the agreement would allow the rebels to get away with their abuse of women.

And this agreement does nothing to remedy the basic problems of Mali and its neighbours, which are their extreme poverty and their disadvantageous position in the corporate dominated world economy.

People's World ☼

Britain pays \$31 million to Mau Mau victims

LONDON: British Foreign Secretary William Hague stopped short of issuing an apology last week to the elderly Kenyans tortured by British colonial forces during the Mau Mau uprising.

The Mau Mau movement emerged in central Kenya during the 1950s to get back seized land and push for an end to colonial rule. Supporters were detained in camps and thousands were tortured, maimed or executed.

Hague told the House of Commons on June 6 that the government had reached a full and final settlement with solicitors of 5,228 claimants totalling US\$31 million.

The government would also support the construction of a memorial in Kenya's capital Nairobi to the victims of torture and ill-treatment during the colonial era.

But he said the British government continued to deny liability for what happened during the uprising.

Shadow foreign secretary Douglas Alexander said Labour supported the government. However, left Labour MP Jeremy

Corbyn said it was strange of the government to offer compensation but to deny any formal responsibility.

"I'm a bit surprised," he said, adding: "This is a very strange result, to offer compensation and a settlement for Leigh Day and at the same time deny liability."

Corbyn pointed out that many MPs in the 1950s raised the issue in Parliament at the time, praising the Kenyans for their "tenacity" in seeking justice.

"When we deny rights and justice, when we deny democracy, when we practice concentration camps, it reduces our ability to criticise anybody else for that fundamental denial of human rights, and I think this is a lesson that needs to be learnt not just in Kenya but in other colonial wars as well where equal brutality was used by British forces," he said.

Hague said there was no inconsistency in recognising the suffering endured by many of the victims while continuing to deny liability. *Morning Star* ☼

Royal Mail management joins sell-off fight

Adrian Roberts

BRITAIN: Royal Mail bosses threw their weight behind postal workers last week in the fight to save the service from privatisation. Senior managers, who are part of the Unite union, said they fully supported the Communications Workers Union (CWU) whose members have voted overwhelmingly against coalition government plans to hand Royal Mail over to the private sector.

Unite assistant general secretary Tony Burke said: "Our members working in the Royal Mail are in management and senior management positions. They are becoming increasingly concerned about the proposed privatisation and its implications for the public, for pensioners, the disabled and small companies - as well as future

employment and their pension provisions.

"Their concerns reflect the overwhelming vote against privatisation carried this week by CWU members."

A CWU spokeswoman said it was "great" to have the full support of Unite on "this vital campaign."

"Privatising Royal Mail would have a major impact on managers as well as CWU members in the company, not to mention on customers too," she said.

"We remain firmly convinced that privatisation would only serve limited vested interests and faceless investors simply after a quick profit. We, along with our members who work in Royal Mail, will provide MPs with information and arguments on why we think privatisation is such a bad idea at the lobby on July 2. Until then, the fight to

Save Our Royal Mail continues to build momentum."

As part of its campaign of opposition to privatisation, the CWU has announced the July lobby of Parliament and, at a meeting between Mr Burke and CWU leader Billy Hayes, it was agreed that both unions would work jointly to save the Royal Mail from being sold off.

Mr Burke added that all Unite members are being encouraged to attend the lobby to show the coalition the strength of opposition to privatisation.

Royal Mail has claimed that privatisation would enable the company to "combine the best of the public and private sectors and secure as many good-quality jobs as possible."

Morning Star ☼

Gold plunges, panic deepens

Andre Damon

Global stocks plunged last week in the biggest one-day sell-off so far this year, after Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke said the US central bank might consider paring back its cash infusions into the financial markets within the next six months.

The panic in stock and bond markets sparked by the remarks of Bernanke, who suggested the Fed might start winding down its US\$85 billion per month in asset purchases, was compounded by the release of data showing that Chinese manufacturing activity hit its lowest level in nine months.

These developments point to two fundamental facts about the current economic situation: the continuing slump in the real economy and the extreme dependence of global financial markets on virtually free credit from the Federal Reserve and other central banks.

In the United States, the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 353 points, or 2.34 percent, in its biggest drop since November 2011. This followed a 206 point drop. The Standard & Poor's 500 index fell by 2.5 percent, and the Nasdaq Composite Index fell by 2.3 percent. All ten sectors of the S&P 500 fell by more than two percent.

The drop in US financial markets followed a panicky sell-off in Europe and Asia earlier in the day. The United Kingdom's FTSE 100 index lost 2.98 percent and the German Dax lost 3.28 percent. In Asia, Hong Kong's Hang Seng index dropped by 2.88 percent and Japan's Nikkei fell by 1.1 percent.

Asian markets declined further at their opening, with the Nikkei down by 2 percent, the Hang Seng down by 1.75 percent, and the Australian All Ordinaries index down by 0.70 percent in early trading.

All major commodities were hit by last week's sell-off, with gold futures dropping below US\$1,300 per ounce, the lowest level in two-and-a-half years. Silver dropped by 9.7 percent during the day before recovering slightly, hitting its lowest level since 2010. Prior to the sell-off, gold prices were already down by 18



percent, in what may become the first yearly decline in the value of gold since 2000.

Every asset class, including bonds of every duration and quality, fell sharply. Yields on ten-year US Treasury notes went as high as 2.47 percent during the day, up from 1.61 percent in May, before retreating as the stock sell-off intensified.

Emerging market currencies continued to plunge against the dollar. The Indian rupee fell 2 percent to a new low, and the Turkish lira fell 1.8 percent. The US dollar rose more than one percent against the Korean, Russian, Polish and South American currencies.

A preliminary reading of HSBC's Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) for China, a measure of manufacturing activity, fell to 48.3 this month, down from 49.2 in May. This was the lowest reading in nine months. The Chinese economy slowed to a growth rate of 7.7 percent in the first quarter and is expected to continue slowing in the second.

The Markit Flash euro zone PMI, also released last week, while slightly improved, nevertheless indicates

that the European economy remains stagnant.

The economic slowdown and bond sell-off have sparked a credit crunch in China, where overnight inter-bank lending rates hit 13.1 percent, the highest on record and up from the previous day by 5.98 percentage points.

Data in the United States was little better. The day after Fed Chairman Bernanke reported an improved outlook for the US economy and the jobs market, the Labour Department said initial applications for unemployment benefits rose unexpectedly last week by 18,000, to 354,000.

The plunging bond market hit junk bonds especially hard, raising the prospect of troubled companies becoming insolvent. The iShares iBoxx High Yld Corp Bond, the largest junk bond fund, fell 1.5 percent.

"All these people who lined up to buy high-yield bonds, only looking to get that extra yield and not paying much attention to the credit quality of these companies, are now just trying to get out," Adrian Miller of GMP Securities told the *Financial Times*.

Bond prices have been plunging

since May 22, when Bernanke indicated in congressional testimony that the Fed might slow asset purchases "in the next few meetings" if economic conditions continued to improve.

In revised economic projections, the Fed's policy-making Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) lowered its 2013 unemployment rate forecast from 7.4 percent to 7.25 percent and concluded that economic growth would be 2.45 percent in 2013 and 3.25 percent in 2014, significantly higher than current market expectations.

While the Fed's official projections were upbeat, significant sections of the US ruling class are increasingly concerned about signs of a global slump, particularly in Asia and Europe, and the spectre of deflation in the US economy. Wall Street, on the other hand, looks with dread on any significant improvement on economic growth and employment prospects, for fear the Fed will turn off the spigot of limitless and ultra-cheap cash, which is subsidising super profits and rising executive pay packages.

Behind the Federal Reserve's hints that it may wind down its

asset-purchasing program lie worries that the vast amounts of cash that have been pumped into the financial system have created a speculative bubble of vast proportions, threatening a financial collapse that could dwarf that of 2008.

The fall in global markets on last Wednesday and Thursday is an expression of the fear and panic that predominate on financial markets amid mounting concerns that the asset bubble is beginning to burst.

The market panic demonstrates that none of the underlying issues that led to the 2008 financial meltdown have been addressed, let alone resolved. Far from engineering any real economic recovery, governments and central banks have merely papered over the contradictions in the global economy while further enriching the financial elite, on the one hand, and brutally attacking the working class, on the other.

The response of the ruling class to the latest eruption of the financial crisis will be to intensify the assault on social programs and workers' jobs, wages and pensions.

globalresearch.ca ✪

Shocking cuts will gut Chicago schools

John Bechtell

CHICAGO: Fresh from closing 50 schools and laying off 850 teachers and staff, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) informed principals June 14 they face a new round of devastating cuts forcing layoffs of hundreds more educators and personnel.

Many elementary schools will suffer cuts in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, and numerous high school budgets have been slashed between US\$1-\$3 million.

The cuts, described as "horrific," amount to 10-25 percent per school, said Wendy Katten, a spokesperson with the parent group Raise Your Hand.

CPS had promised the historic school closures would result in providing the merged and remaining schools with adequate resources. But the announcement sent school communities into shock and turmoil, scrambling to make choices over what to cut and pitting school personnel against each other to see who would go.

On June 6, CPS announced

new rules that give increased "flexibility" to principals and ultimately the Local School Councils to allocate funds, but places the onus on them to make the cuts.

The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), parents and students blasted the cuts and have demanded alternative funding revenues be tapped.

Kenneth Fitzner, principal at Audubon Elementary School, told DNAInfo.org "When I saw these numbers, my jaw dropped. These are below state foundations." Fitzner said the cuts would result in class sizes of 35-47 students. If one of two seventh grade teachers were eliminated, the resulting homeroom would have 61 students. CPS now defines a class size of 35 students as normal "utilisation."

The cuts are so deep some schools are considering steps that would essentially eliminate libraries, at a time when there are already 160 schools without libraries.

In addition, the cuts could gut guidance counselling departments,

physical education and art and music programs and physical improvements like air conditioning.

Program funding for the longer school day, a move trumpeted by Mayor Rahm Emanuel as a huge educational advancement, was eliminated. Children entitled to special education services may feel the worst impact. As the CTU noted, "At Blair Elementary, seven special education teachers, one general education teacher and close to eight paraprofessional positions will be slashed by a nearly 75 percent cut to their budget.

"At Northside Learning Centre, a school that serves students with cognitive disabilities, eight special education instructors and 14 teacher aides will be lost."

The cuts are based on a new funding formula. CPS spokeswoman Becky Carroll said the per pupil rates for next year will be US\$4,429 per student in kindergarten through third grade, US\$4,140 per student in 4th through 8th grade, and US\$5,029 per student in high school.

This year, charter schools had per pupil rates of US\$6,070 per elementary student and \$7,587 per high school student. In contrast, New Trier, one of the wealthiest school districts in Illinois allocates US\$20,807 per student.

Emanuel warned cuts were necessary because CPS is facing a US\$1 billion budget deficit, most of which he blamed on teacher pensions.

CPS and CTU had negotiated a "pension holiday" and new schedule for payments into the system. But the deal was scuttled when the state legislature couldn't agree on an overall plan to resolve the public worker pension crisis.

However, CTU president Karen Lewis told the City Club that Emanuel won't join forces to end TIF payments, close corporate tax loopholes, end costly "toxic swap" deals with Wall Street banks and fight for a progressive state income tax.

Lewis said K-12 educational cutbacks in recent years are approximately equal to the amount of state

taxes left unpaid by the largest 155 corporations.

Lewis also blasted TIF funding, property tax money meant for schools and parks but legally channelled to wealthy interests. TIF funds amount to US\$500 million per year, most of which ends up aiding downtown developers.

"Since 2000, nearly US\$100 million of TIF funds have been given to corporations to move their corporate offices to the (downtown) Loop or keep them in the city," she said.

"A combined Chicago city-income and commuter-progressive tax between just 0.5 percent and 1.5 percent can generate close to a US\$1 billion for the city, with half going to CPS. Imagine if CPS had US\$600 million more in revenue in addition to nearly US\$300 million a year from TIFs and Swaps?"

In addition, CTU is calling for passage of a Financial Transaction Tax that could raise an estimated US\$10-13 billion per year.

People's World ✪

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

e-health and job cuts

Australian workers and their families are being treated like disposable items. Week after week we are hearing about another closure of either a manufacturing plant or a business. Outsourcing became a favourite tool and we are now in a situation when Australian jobs are being sent overseas while migrant workers are being brought here.

It is not that it is struggling companies that are looking overseas for cheap labour. Far from it. ANZ bank for instance has 590 call centre workers in its sights, according to a leaked internal document. Last year 1,000 jobs were lost there, 70 jobs went in May this year. Now ANZ is planning to drop the percentage of staff in Melbourne from 87 percent to 42 percent.

Over a 3-5 year period Australia will have 40 percent, Philippines 30

percent and New Zealand another 30 percent of call centre employees. All this comes with very healthy profits for the ANZ. There is another aspect of the shift to "greener pastures" which is being neglected. We hear a lot about cyber security and the bad people who try to take advantage of our data and information. How does it help us to have outsourced centres with unknown cyber security provisions?

Many customers are being encouraged to do everything on the internet. I was visiting a Medicare office today to lodge a Medicare claim. I like to do it in person for two reasons – if I have a question I would like a trained person to explain it to me and secondly I feel that I contribute to keeping somebody's job.

I noticed that there are fewer and fewer staff and people have to wait longer. Today, however, there was a young lady doing the rounds and signing up people for e-health – a service which will make staff members redundant and I am not sure how it will actually benefit patients.

A friend of mine is working in a Centerlink office. They have about 1,000 people going through this office. Their bosses insist on the clients using computers – with many people from non-English speaking background to fill out forms without assistance is next to impossible. It

certainly does not help customers who feel frustrated; it does not help staff either – they know their jobs are on the line and they have to do more with fewer staff all the time. It is a race to the lowest common denominator and we should all be both aware of this process and resist it.

Mati English
Sydney

Habitats in danger

We need to act to protect many of our stressed wilderness habitats and save endangered wildlife. When will we learn that to save endangered species it is vital to protect our remaining forests and other wilderness habitats. The remarkable Tarkine region of Tasmania, a mostly pristine tract of temperate rainforest, coastline, sand dunes and river systems is under threat from big businesses that want to establish open cut mines in the area.

The wild region contains over 60 species of threatened, rare or endangered animals including the Tasmanian Devil, the Wedged-tailed Eagle and the world's largest freshwater crustacean.

Habitat loss is the main danger to many endangered species. The protected Tasmanian Devil is struggling

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to survive a fatal facial cancer, the Devil Facial Tumour Disease, which has decimated the population, with about 12,000 Devils remaining in the wild today. One of the few disease free areas of Tasmania left is the remote Tarkine region. Allowing mining and other development would be another major threat to the continued existence of the endangered Tasmania Devil.

These proposed operations, roads

and other infrastructure would drastically damage its biodiversity and the habitats the native wildlife needs to survive and ultimately the whole ecosystem would be devastated. We must act to save this special place from being destroyed. The only way to conserve plants and animals from extinction is to preserve these unique, essential, wild habitats.

Steven Katsineris,
Vic

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Drones and a Wasteland



Did you see the article on drones (as in military aircraft, not bees) in *The Sydney Morning Herald* on May 31? It was written by Waleed Aly from Monash University and focused on US President Barack Obama's recently declared "doubts" about the morality of drone attacks.

Not that Obama's doubts were very strong ones, mind you. He merely put forward the idea that they were not "wise or moral in every instance". US drone attacks have killed upwards of a 1,000 people so far including four Americans, so how many unwise and immoral instances are needed before a US President will develop "doubts" do you reckon? Well apparently 1,000. A more important factor than immorality may be the growing numbers of US citizens who are expressing their unease at this glaringly obvious program of assassination being carried out in their name whilst shrouded in the trappings of secrecy.

It might be comforting to think that Obama's present concern is the result of his recognising the criminality of murdering people around the world without bothering about trials or evidence or observance of people's "inalienable rights". But I suspect that his concern is more because the USA no longer has a monopoly on drone aircraft. Other countries can now make them, and at a fraction of the cost of the US versions.

According to Aly, a US drone costs between US\$5 million to US\$10 million. Apparently China can build them for less than US\$1 million. (That shouldn't surprise us: US military hardware is always ridiculously

overpriced. The government pays for it, and it's for the sacred cow of "defence" so arms companies can virtually write their own tickets. Or their own contracts at any rate.)

But China is not only building up a fleet of drones of its own, it is offering them at bargain prices to developing countries, the sort of countries the US likes to bully. (Those perfidious Orientals! You can't trust them an inch, can you?) I suspect Obama's newly discovered dislike of drones has much to do with his dislike of the idea of the US being on the receiving end of other people's drone attacks. After all, it is no longer a super weapon if poor countries have it.

A correspondent has pointed out an interesting connection: not only was the date of the bombing of the Boston marathon – April 15 – the anniversary Ronald Reagan's bombing of Tripoli in Libya in 1989, but the young fanatics who carried out the bombing had attended a mosque that was built with funds from the International Islamic Call Society which was headquartered in Tripoli before NATO went in and wrecked the country.

The Society was headed by Gaddafi's son Saif al-Islam who is languishing in a pro-US prison somewhere in Libya. That is, if he is still alive. My correspondent asks why the US didn't make more of these connections between the Boston bombers and the Islamists? Could it be that the US didn't want people to wonder if the

attack on the marathon might be a response to the US attacks on Libya?

I see that that notorious liar Barry "Promise Them Anything" O'Farrell is being pressured by Liberal party bigwigs to allow political donations from property developers and tobacco companies, not to mention entrepreneurs in alcohol and gambling. Barry got himself elected by campaigning against the crookedness of the previous Labor government, many of whom were in bed with moneyed denizens of the big end of town.

But such is the way of democracy under capitalism that the cost of elections is now measured in the multimillions of dollars so the Libs are keen to tap into the same tainted money sources that Labor used to use. It's comforting to know we have the best democracy money can buy, isn't it?

Talking of democracy and money, I came across a relevant article by Newton Minow in the US journal *The Atlantic* that was published in 2011. Minow was the former chairman of the US Public Broadcasting Service who was appointed to Chair the Federal Communications Commission by President John F Kennedy in 1961. Minow famously described US commercial television at the time as "a vast wasteland".

Writing 50 years later, he found the situation largely unchanged in essentials: "For 50 years we have bombarded our children

with commercials disguised as programs and with endless displays of violence and sexual exploitation. The United States is nearly alone in the democratic world in not providing our candidates with public service television time. Instead we make them buy it – and so money consumes and corrupts our political discourse.

"It is simply unconscionable that candidates for public office have to buy access to the airwaves – something the public itself owns – to talk to the public, unlike in most other major democratic countries.

"Put simply, candidates for public office have to raise huge amounts of money to buy access to the public airwaves so they can talk to us. And because airtime is so expensive, they talk to us in slogans and slurs and only obliquely – if at all – about substance.

"If broadcasters are to continue as the lone beneficiaries of their valuable spectrum assignments, it is not too much to require that, as a public service, they provide time to candidates for public office. That time is not for the candidates. It is for the voters."

Naturally, US commercial broadcasters were like Australia's, more interested in a broadcast licence as (in Kerry Packer's words) "a licence to print money", than in any commitment to (in Minow's words) "promoting the county's arts and culture". Most of them (not all, but most) were no doubt glad to see the back of him. They could dispense with pretensions to culture and get back to the real business of commercial television: making money as an adjunct of the advertising industry.

Truly a wasteland. ☘



Sunday June 30 –
Saturday July 6

Catfish screening on *Sunday Best* this week (ABC2 Sunday June 30 at 8.30pm) is technically little better than a home movie. In fact, the sound recording is often so poor that one misses actual dialogue. The film was made by New York still photographer Nev Schulman, his filmmaker brother Ariel and his friend Henry.

They were prompted to make it when they received a painting of one of Nev's photos from an eight-year-old girl in Michigan named Abby. Exchanges on Facebook were followed by regular phone conversations with Abby, her mother Angela and her half-sister Megan. Nev finds himself falling for Megan.

However, when Megan sends Nev a recording of herself singing a song she wrote, the boys actually track the performance down to another singer and they begin to realise that the Facebook profiles of Megan, Angela and Abby may all be false. The painting however, is real.

Eventually, while attending a dance festival in the Midwest, they detour by car to visit Abby and her family in the small-town where they supposedly live. The film is a testament to the digital age: the boys' detective work is all done via such media as Google Earth (where they find the building where Megan

supposedly has her gallery), Facebook figures prominently, and pinning down the truth is by no means easy.

The situation surmounts the "home movie" limitations of the way the film is made, so that you keep watching, helped by the boys' good natured acceptance of the real situation: no rancour, just resignation.

The husband whose comment at the end of the film gives it its title, is a virtual clone for the backward-sounding title character in the film *Forest Gump*, which is disconcerting to say the least.

Remember the way history used to be taught: as a succession of actions perpetrated by the King of this and the Emperor of that. Today, thanks to the efforts of more progressive historians we tend to give more credit (though not enough) to the movement of the masses. However, if you want to see the old style history writ large, watch the three-part series *The Rise And Fall of Versailles* (SBS ONE Fridays at 8.30pm from July 5).

This French-made dramatised documentary treats the building of the Palace of Versailles as the sole creation of King Louis XIV helped by an architect doing whatever the King wanted. The enormous number of artisans, craftsmen and labourers who actually built the place are barely mentioned, mainly in one sequence only – when on-the-job casualties are mentioned. A woman worker whose husband was killed on the job berated the "sun king" about it during one of his visits and was flogged for her audacity.

That the French peasantry were basically starving while Louis spent hugely on his palace is essentially glossed over. Perhaps it will emerge more as the series approaches the time of the Revolution. But I doubt it. To the makers of this series Versailles is "the symbol of France's glory".

And there is no question that, if you ignore the suffering of the common people as unimportant, then the vast sum spent on Versailles certainly produced an awe-inspiringly extravagant palace.



Funny As – Dara O'Briain Talks Funny (ABC2 Saturday July 6 at 9.30pm).

I always found GK Chesterton's *Father Brown* stories a bit of a bore. For me, his religion got in the way of his telling a good mystery yarn. However, as a concept, his selection of a Parish priest as the detective certainly had potential. In the words of *Odham's Encyclopaedia*, "Father Brown's intuition and insight into human character, combined with his sense of humour, made him an excellent detector of crime."

Father Brown as a character began life in *The Blue Cross* in 1910 as a short, stumpy Catholic priest, "formerly of Cobhole in Essex, and now working in London", with shapeless clothes and a large umbrella. As he transferred first to films and then to television, he took on the look of the actors who portrayed him and changed his location too.

In his latest incarnation, the ten-part BBC series *Father Brown* (ABC1 Saturdays at 7.30pm from July 6) the stories are set in the

Cotswolds in the early '60s and Father Brown is played by Mark Williams (Ron's father Arthur Weasley in the *Harry Potter* films).

Like all adaptations of vintage English murder mysteries the mayhem is mild and the body count usually restricted to single figures. Unlike most modern crime series, there are no serial killers and the murder is rarely – if ever – sadistic. Williams, although physically unlike Chesterton's fictional detective acquits himself well in the role, supported by a well-chosen batch of character actors as the other leading inhabitants of the local village, including a grim-looking Hugo Speer as the bane of Father Brown's life Inspector Valentine, and Sorcha Cusack in a rather heavy-handed portrayal of Mrs McCarthy, enthusiastic maker of "award-winning strawberry scones".

This week's stand-up act in *Funny As* is Dara O'Briain Talks Funny (ABC2 Saturday July

6 at 9.30pm). Filmed live on stage during a tour of the UK and Ireland in 2008, the program reveals O'Briain to be a very funny man who is better at chatting to audience members in the front row and then making spontaneous comedy from their responses than any other comic I have seen. It might be their occupation, their accent or their name but O'Briain makes good natured comedy from them with remarkable ease and often devastating wit.

He also reveals himself to be a ruthless defender of rational thought and science, putting a savage skewer through "folk medicine", homeopathy, and similar unscientific concepts. He makes no apologies to those of his audience who might be hung up on such fallacies. Clearly, as far as he's concerned, they need to be enlightened.

I found his act to be one of the best stand-up acts I've seen in the *Funny As* skein so far. ✪

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Tad Tieze, Dr, Psychiatrist and campaigner;

July 5

CRISIS OF AUSTRALIAN MANUFACTURING – WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

Tim Ayres, State Secretary, AMWU;

Phillip Toner, Senior Research Fellow, Sydney University;

July 12

TAFE – PRIVATISING THE FUTURE AND CUTTING OUR THROATS

Pat Forward, Federal TAFE Secretary of the Australian Education Union (AEU);

Maurie Mulheron, President of NSW Teachers Federation;

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Syria is becoming Obama's Iraq

Shamus Cooke

In perfect Bush-like fashion, President Obama has invented a bogus pretence for military intervention in yet another Middle East country. The president's claim that the Syrian government has used chemical weapons – and thus crossed Obama's imaginary "red line" – will likely fool very few Americans, who already distrust their president after the massive NSA spying scandal.

Obama has officially started down a path that inevitably leads to full-scale war. At this point the Obama administration thinks it has already invested too much military, financial, and diplomatic capital into the Syrian conflict to turn back, and each step forward brings the US closer to a direct military intervention. Much like Obama's spying program, few Americans knew that the United States was already involved, neck deep, with the mass killings occurring in Syria.

For example, Obama has been directly arming the Syrian rebels for well over a year. *The New York Times* broke the story that the Obama administration has – through the CIA – been illegally trafficking thousands of tons of guns to the rebels from the dictatorships of Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

If not for these Obama-trafficked guns, thousands of deaths would have been prevented and the Syrian conflict over. But even after the gun trafficking story broke, the mainstream media largely ignored it, and continued "reporting" that the US has only been supplying the Syrian opposition forces with "non-lethal aid," a meaningless term in a war setting, since all military aid directly assists in the business of killing.

The US media also buried the truth behind the ridiculous chemical weapons claims by the Obama administration, which, like Bush's WMDs, are based on absolutely no evidence. Having learned nothing from Iraq, the US media again shamelessly regurgitates the "facts" as spoon-fed to them by the government, no questions asked. In reality, however, a number of independent chemical weapons experts have publicly spoken out against Obama's accusations. The US media also refuses to ask: on what authority does the United States have

to determine the usage of chemical weapons in other countries? This is the job of the UN. What has the UN said on the matter?

Top UN rights investigator Carla del Ponte said: "According to the testimonies we have gathered, the [Syrian] rebels have used chemical weapons, making use of sarin gas."

Again, the "rebels" have used chemical weapons, not the Syrian government, according to the UN representative. Many analysts have pointed out the obvious fact that the Syrian government would have zero military or political motive to use chemical weapons, especially when they have access to much more effective conventional weapons. Obama's Bush-like lies are too familiar to the American public, who overwhelmingly do not support military intervention in Syria, or giving direct military aid to the Syrian opposition.

What has the UN said on giving military aid to the rebels? UN chief Ban Ki-moon has called the Obama's decision "a bad idea" and "not helpful." This is because pouring arms into any country where there is a conflict only increases the bloodshed and risks turning the conflict into a broader catastrophe.

But like Bush, Obama is ignoring the UN, and there's a logic to his madness. Obama has invested too much of his foreign policy credibility in Syria. His administration has been the backbone of the Syrian opposition from the beginning, having handpicked a group of rich Syrian exiles and moulded them into Obama's "officially recognised" government of Syria, while pressuring other nations to also recognise these nobodies as the "legitimate Syrian government." Assad's iron grip on power is a humiliation to these efforts of Obama, and has thus weakened the prestige and power of US foreign policy abroad.

More importantly, Obama's anti-Syria diplomacy required that diplomatic relations between Syria and its neighbours – like Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey – be destroyed. These nations have peacefully co-existed for decades with Syria, but have now agreed – under immense US pressure – to sever diplomatic relations while helping destroy the Syrian government by funnelling guns and foreign fighters into the



country, further destabilising a region not yet recovered from the Iraq war. Obama's Syria policy has turned an already-fragile region into a smouldering tinderbox.

If Obama were to suddenly tell his anti-Syria coalition that he's realised his efforts at regime change have failed and that he would instead pursue a peaceful solution, his allies and Middle East lackeys would be less willing in the future to prostitute themselves for the foreign policy of the United States; and the US would thus find it more difficult in the future to pursue "regime change" politics abroad. If Obama doesn't back up his "Assad must go" demand, the US will be unable to make such threats in the future; and US foreign policy is heavily dependent on this type of political bullying.

Furthermore, Obama's anti-Syria puppet coalition is taking tremendous political risks when it shamelessly follows in Obama's footsteps, since the US is terribly unpopular throughout the Arab world. This unpopularity is further proof that the "official" Syrian opposition that is asking for US intervention has zero credibility in Syria, since very few Syrians would like to invite the US military to "liberate" their country, especially after the "successful" liberations of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya.

Obama, too, is worried about domestic politics in his own country

over Syria. He knows that Americans are sick of Middle East wars, while the American public is also worried that arming the Syrian rebels would mean giving guns to the very same people that America is supposedly fighting a "war on terror" against.

In response to this concern Obama has said that the US will only give arms to "moderate" rebels. A European Union diplomat mockingly responded:

"It would be the first conflict where we pretend we could create peace by delivering arms ... If you pretend to know where the weapons will end up, then it would be the first war in history where this is possible. We have seen it in Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq. Weapons don't disappear; they pop up where they are needed."

In Syria US weapons will thus end up in the hands of the extremists doing the majority of the fighting. These are the people who will be in power if Syria's government falls, unless a full US invasion and Iraq-style occupation occurs. It's difficult to decide which outcome would be worse for the Syrian people.

It's now obvious that President Obama is escalating the Syrian conflict because his prized "rebels" have been beaten on the battlefield. Obama has thus chosen the military tactic of brinkmanship, a risky strategy that involves intentionally escalating a conflict in the hope that either your opponent gives in to your demands (regime change), or your opponent gives you an excuse to invade.

Here's how former US General Wesley Clark explains Obama's brinkmanship tactic in a *New York Times* op-ed, which is worth quoting at length:

"President Obama's decision to supply small arms and ammunition to the rebels is a step, possibly just the first, toward direct American intervention. It raises risks for all parties, and especially for Mr Assad,

who knows that he cannot prevail, even with Russian and Iranian military aid, if the United States becomes fully engaged. We used a similar strategy against the Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic in Kosovo in 1999, where I commanded American forces, and showed that NATO had the resolve to escalate.

"The risk of going beyond lethal aid to establishing a no-fly zone to keep Mr Assad's planes grounded or safe zones to protect refugees – options under consideration in Washington – is that we would find it hard to pull back if our side began losing. Given the rebels' major recent setbacks, can we rule out using air power or sending in ground troops?"

"Yet the sum total of risks – higher oil prices, a widening war – also provide Syria (and its patrons, Iran and Russia) a motive to negotiate."

Clark's innocent sounding "no-fly zone" is in fact a clever euphemism for all-out war, since no-fly zones require you destroy the enemy's air force, surface to air missiles, and other infrastructure.

In Libya Obama swiftly turned a no-fly zone into a full-scale invasion and regime change, in violation of international law. A no-fly zone in Syria would also immediately turn into an invasion and "regime change," with the possibility that the US or Israel would exploit the "fog of war" to attack Iran.

All of this madness could be stopped immediately if Obama publicly announced that the Syrian rebels have lost the war – since they have – and will be cut off politically, financially, and militarily by the US if they do not immediately proceed to negotiations with the Syrian government. But this peaceful approach will instead be ignored in favour of untold thousands more dead, millions more made refugees, and a broader regional fracturing of Middle East civilisation.

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