



Asylum seeker policy disgrace

Bob Briton

The “debate” over asylum seekers sank to new lows last week. Australia’s Foreign Minister, Senator Bob Carr, declared that “up to 100 percent” of asylum seekers arriving by boat in recent times were “economic migrants” and not refugees. The minister had detected a “changing profile” among the recent arrivals that prompted his media comments. The insight is dubious given that, for almost a year, there have been no applications for refugee status by boat arrivals processed by Australian authorities. This was part of the federal government’s “no advantage” policy for those coming on boats. Detention in camps on Manus Island and Nauru formed the other part of the approach designed to punish asylum seekers and deter others from appealing for refuge in Australia.

Carr was foreshadowing the “tougher, harder-edged” approach to asylum seeker policy. It is poll-driven cynicism at its worst. The senator believes the continuing surge in “irregular maritime migration” is the main issue facing the recycled Rudd government. Labor’s electoral strategists have concluded that Abbott’s promise to “turn back the boats” has appeal in marginal electorates. Rudd was quick to declare there would be a swing further to the right on asylum seekers during his second shift as PM.

This display of opportunism is damaging Australia’s international reputation, which has already taken a battering on this issue and for its involvement in refugee-generating wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Prime Minister stunned listeners at his first press conference last week with the claim that physically turning back asylum seeker boats to Indonesia could provoke a naval conflict. The “turn back the boats” threat is one of the very few points of difference in the approaches of Labor and the Coalition. In every other respect, the ALP has joined the Coalition in a strategy of creating fear and then, hopefully, riding it into office.

Who can be harshest?

The “debate” between the two major parties in the Australian parliament is now reduced to who can present the least welcoming face to would-be refugees. In recent times, a fig-leaf of “concern” for the safety of the passengers on board the boats carrying them towards Australia



has been drawn over a patently xenophobic policy attitude. The new Immigration Minister, Tony Burke, tries to sound compassionate but his message is harsh. When asked whether recent arrivals might be able to work in order to lead a more dignified life in Australia, the ultimate answer was “no”.

“My principle on work rights is I would always prefer people to be in the workforce than on welfare benefits,” Mr Burke said. “But we have a real policy challenge when the right to work is being marketed as a reason for people to get on boats – and that was why the decision on work rights was made and I support it.”

The government is also looking at work for the dole-style obligations for asylum seekers. It may consider restricting their access to refugee tribunals and the courts. Senator Carr speculated publicly that acceptance rates for refugee status have been too high. The suggestion is that Australian authorities are soft on applicants and that this leniency has to stop. Refugee rights groups are outraged by the claims. Authorities apply the same definitions for refugee status that are used throughout the world. Preventing access to tribunals and courts would be a breach

of undertakings under the UN Convention on Refugees.

Myth busted

Labor and the Coalition pedal the myth that self-interested, queue-jumping migrants are playing the Australian people for mugs. The reason there is a surge in arrivals by boat, they say, is that it is too easy to fool authorities regarding the threats to the applicants’ safety in their country of origin. All the government needs to do to “fix” the situation is to make the experience of seeking asylum so unpleasant that the flow of supposed economic migrants will stop. The Coalition hammers the message day in and day out that Howard “stopped the boats” by applying this prescription.

The government denies the modern-day relevance of the former PM’s approach and the Coalition’s claim to have stemmed the flow of boat arrivals. On this question, at least, the government is telling the truth. The latest UNHCR report shows that the “surge” in the refugee numbers is a worldwide phenomenon. There were 45.1 million people displaced from their homes last year as a result of conflict. The

numbers began their steep climb in 2006-07, i.e. just after Howard’s miraculous reign.

And, contrary to the notions pushed by both major parties, refugees are not making a bee-line for presumably soft, first-world countries like Australia in some sort of effort to make the very best of a bad situation. An increased proportion of the world’s refugees (over 80 percent) are located in developing countries like Pakistan and Iran. Germany is rare among wealthier nations by hosting 589,700 refugees. Australia is a lowly 49th on the list of host countries. Its intake of 30,000 refugees and 20,000 asylum seekers in 2012 is pretty light-weight on the international scale. The intake per head of population is headed up by countries like Jordan, Lebanon and Chad; not by Australia.

The bi-partisan generosity shown to refugees from Indo-China during the 1970s and 1980s – no doubt with a bit of anti-Communist expediency built in – has long been ditched and replaced with a shared “fortress Australia” stance. Any illusions that Rudd might try to revive the more humane policies he took to the electorate in 2007 to widespread approval were well and truly dashed last week. ✪

3  NSW rail system split in privatisation agenda

5  Six years of the NT Intervention

6  A New Democracy

12  Was Washington behind Egypt’s coup?

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ALP whitewash

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has not wasted any time attempting to pre-empt the findings of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) report expected later this month. "I want a Labor Party which is free from the taint of some of the things we have seen emerge in ICAC in NSW," Rudd said when announcing moves for federal intervention into the NSW ALP. The Independent Commission has been investigating the affairs of the NSW Labor Party and former ministers Eddie Obeid, Ian Macdonald and others. The hearings lifted the lid on the inner workings of the Labor machine and rampant corruption and abuse of power that saw individuals pocket millions of dollars overnight. "As a party we must stamp out a culture which has allowed this type of behaviour to take hold ...," Rudd said.

Deputy Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, said more about the culture and structures: "The structures have allowed a situation to develop whereby a small group have been able to ... impose their will on the party. Those structures must be reformed. The days of ... factional dominance in NSW must also be reformed because they have clearly led to an abuse of power. These reforms advanced by the Prime Minister today will do just that."

But will they? The PM is proposing a number of relatively minor reforms. There will be a charter of rights and responsibilities for ALP members and a Labor Ombudsman to hear complaints from rank and file members. On the question of corruption, a "zero tolerance" policy will enable the NSW branch to expel anyone found guilty or accused of corruption. The Party's disputes and credentials committee will be disbanded and replaced by a new internal appeals tribunal, chaired by a retired judicial officer or senior legal professional. The present chair is former minister and Labor power broker, Joe Tripodi, a close mate of Obeid and Macdonald.

Property developers will be banned from standing as Labor candidates, as if they need to be in Parliament for an abuse of power to occur. At least 50 percent of the NSW branch's administrative committee will be rank and file members, with an additional three independent directors with board experience. How will they be appointed? Will the factions decide them?

None of these proposals challenge the present power structures. They do not, for example, even seek to ban factions. Not that this would be enough to change the culture. Developers will still be able to buy off parties and government ministers. Not that corruption is limited to developers. It is rife in the mining sector, the military industrial complex, gambling, construction, energy, fuel and anywhere big profits can be made with a helping hand from those in government handing out the approvals or setting the conditions.

The problems are systemic. Anyone seeking a better understanding of the power brokers, the faceless men and links with big business and organised crime should read *The Fixer: The untold story of Graham Richardson*, by Marian Wilkinson (William Heinemann Australia, 1999).

Corruption is endemic to capitalism and, as long as capitalism remains, the incentive will be there for individuals and corporations to "bend the rules" and abuse positions of power. The ICAC inquiry shows what abuse of authority and power can deliver – millions of dollars overnight. Favours are delivered through licences, privatisation, contracts and all sorts of other deals behind closed doors. They are paid for through political donations, deposits in offshore accounts, post-parliamentary directorships, and a host of other ways.

Rudd's move to free his party of the "taint" has two main aims. First, Rudd wants to be Prime Minister after the elections. The second is to restore the façade of the two-party system offering voters a "choice", an "alternative" when one or the other party is on the nose. Prior to Rudd's reinstatement as Prime Minister, Labor was facing a wipe-out that would possibly take decades, if ever to recover from. Without a tight election battle, without a substantial opposition in Parliament, the two-party system's future is uncertain. People might look elsewhere, for a real alternative. The last thing Rudd, a capitalist ideologue, wants is for the working class to start questioning the capitalist system.

PRESS FUND

The federal government is partly responsible for the deaths of four young workers installing home insulation three years ago, because the potentially hazardous federally funded insulation program should have been carried out directly under its supervision.

However, the former Fraser, Hawke, Keating and Howard governments also share the responsibility. They said private firms could do things better than governments, so they downsized and finally abolished the Commonwealth Department of Housing and Construction, which could easily have managed the insulation program. At the *Guardian* we intend to be around indefinitely, but we rely on you, so please send a contribution for the next edition if you possibly can. Many thanks to the following for their generous support this week:

Jessie Kiek, in memory of her husband Laurie Kiek, \$300

Lewis, in memory of Eddie Clynes, \$200

R Girvan \$10, "Round Figure" \$15

This week's total: \$525 Progressive total: \$4,195

Customs needs more funding to fight corruption

The union representing Customs workers says the organisation needs a cash injection if it is going to successfully root out corruption in its ranks.

An initial report by the Customs Reform Board has made a number of recommendations outlining how to deal with criminal elements targeting Customs.

The CPSU said the report acknowledged the fact that the majority of staff are hardworking and honest and want to see corruption banished from the workplace.

CPSU national secretary Nadine Flood said: "This has been incredibly hard for the 99 percent of staff who are honest, hardworking and who've been tarred with the corruption brush. We are pleased this report recognises that the vast majority of Customs staff are proud of their work protecting Australians and our borders and absolutely oppose corruption in any form. It's a tiny criminal minority

that is making the rest of them pay."

She said that Customs needed to be funded properly if the raft of corruption-busting measures were to succeed.

"If Customs is going to change then it needs to have the resources to deal both with the criminal minority and a huge jump in passenger and cargo levels. Tough budgets means over 500 staff have been shed in the last five years, including around 100 lost from frontline positions in airports. We're calling for government to increase staffing and resources in Customs to back in this blueprint," said Ms Flood.

The CPSU has been heavily engaged with the Reform Board, Customs and the Minister and we're pleased a number of our recommendations have been picked up by the Board added Ms Flood.

These include:

- The recognition that integrity needs to start at the top and work

its way down

- The recognition that senior managers in Canberra are "disconnected" from frontline staff
- That staff training needs improvement
- That involving staff and their unions in reform is critical and positive
- That more resources are needed to implement these reforms

However Ms Flood said there were still areas of concern for staff, namely the proposed ban on mobile phones in "sensitive" areas and the impact it will have on workers with caring responsibilities.

"Customs employs over 1,500 staff with young kids and if they can't get hold of mum or dad in an emergency then that's very stressful for staff. We are happy to look at sensible options but knee jerk measures like a blanket ban on mobile phones will only damage staff morale." ✪

Statement, CC of the CP of Turkey (TKP)

The People of Egypt will defeat both the US imperialism and Egyptian capitalists

A statement by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP), "The people of Egypt, who have defeated the dictators, sooner or later will defeat the USA and the capitalists as well" is as follows:

In Egypt the people shook the rule of pro-American Mubarak.

However, the people of Egypt could not create a popular alternative to the dictatorship of Mubarak. The USA and the conservative capitalists of Egypt, who considered that an Islamist government would serve their regional plans better, created their alternative. Thus, Mohamed Morsi, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood and a close friend of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, took the power.

People did not accept the reactionary dictatorship of Morsi. They took over the streets again and shook also the rule of Morsi. But

again people were not able to create a real alternative of their own.

The USA realised that there is no way to fit Egypt into the model of "moderate Islam", which was applied by the Muslim Brotherhood. Then, in order to control the peoples' movement and protect the American interests the USA encouraged the Egyptian army to intervene.

In the end, pro-American Morsi has left and been replaced by pro-American general Sisi (and his civilian friends).

The people of Egypt, who have been successful in overthrowing the dictators, could not open the way of real freedom.

In Egypt the loser is the Muslim Brotherhood, which is following the same line with that of Turkey's Erdogan. The people's movement in Egypt has shown that this way is a dead-end. This is an important

political gain. The fall of the dictatorship of Morsi is the fall of the pro-American moderate Islam and the Neo-Ottoman dreams of Erdogan and Davutoğlu.

But for a real victory, the people of Egypt should unite around a true revolutionary program and get rid of their pro-American seculars, pro-American Islamists and pro-American liberals.

We know that the struggle of the people will not end here. The toiling masses will certainly build a free and equal order, thus the plans of the opportunist imperialists will fail.

The people of Turkey should learn from what happened in Egypt. But this is not enough. People have to organise, and create an alternative to Erdogan through a revolutionary program. They should not allow local Mubaraks and Sisis to take power. ✪

Statement, Egyptian Communist Party

The People will stay in the Squares until Achievement of their Revolutionary Demands

The Egyptian Communist Party once more addresses the masses of our great Egyptian people with a salute and honour on their heroic position resisting the fascist tyranny of the failed regime. The party sees that this unanimous civilized position only expresses the authenticity, nobility and awareness of this people who confirmed their absolute rejection of compromising their right to live in freedom and dignity, whatever the sacrifices.

The Party also expresses its welcoming of the statement of the armed forces and its unequivocally direct siding with the demands of the

Egyptian people known to all. We emphasise this statement's respect of the armed forces' role as defender of Egyptian national security and protecting the people's will and choice, without getting involved in the political arena.

The Egyptian people, are the only source of legitimacy. They alone, decide what they deem appropriate to get out of this situation. The people decided that Mohamed Morsi Isa El-Ayyat had betrayed the oath he made when he became president. He and his group of Muslim Brotherhood and their allies dared to attack the sanctity of the judiciary and ruined the country's economy dwarfing its

role and threatening its national security, social peace and national unity. Therefore, the people with their epic overwhelming outing have assured that this man and his fascist regime have become usurpers of authority. He should rightfully get out of the political scene and undergo reckoning and trial with co-criminals for what they committed against the people and the country.

We call upon the masses of the people not to leave the squares and not to abandon the revolution until they achieve their demands.

Long live Egypt!

Long live the revolution of its noble people! ✪

NSW rail system split in privatisation agenda

Peter Mac

It seems to be a rule of NSW politics that the larger the fanfare a government makes for a new initiative, the more dubious are its motives. Last week the O'Farrell government announced in a blaze of publicity that RailCorp, the state's rail organisation, has now been split into two separate entities, i.e. Sydney Trains, which will now handle the state capital's rail system, and NSW Trainlink, which will run the intercity and regional railways.

The government has claimed that under the new arrangements passengers will have more help from station staff on the platforms. "It's a bright new era in rail customer services", chirped one Sydney Rail representative.

However, the harsh reality is that there will actually be far fewer staff to help on station platforms, because station managers are being retrenched. Some new managers are being employed, but they will be expected to manage six or seven stations, and will have little day-to-day contact with passengers.

The remaining station staff will be expected to do all the work a station requires, including that of managers and cleaners – for no extra pay, of course. One staff member commented: "We now have to do all the stuff that station managers and duty managers were doing, but we don't get paid any more. In the middle of the shift we just close the [ticket] window and do our cleaning."

In contrast, the government has given no publicity whatsoever to the new Transport Legislation Amendment Bill which quietly passed through the upper house of parliament last August. That event preceded the formation of a new government agency, Transport for NSW, which has the power to contract out all public transport services.

The tip of the iceberg

Until recently RailCorp employed about 15,000 people. However, 836 middle management and administrative positions have now been dumped. Over the next three years another 154 positions will go, together with 450 railway maintenance positions.

Approximately 750 middle management staff have already taken voluntary redundancies, and a number of positions are unfilled or have been taken by employees on temporary contracts. Hundreds of other management staff have had to reapply for their positions, with no certainty they'll be reappointed.

Some new management staff have been employed. However, Bob Newham, an organiser with the Rail, Tram and Bus Union has pointed out that many of them have backgrounds in human resources (personnel) but little experience in rail management. This is tending to deskill the organisation and is likely to lead to difficulties in dealing with train operations.

Government consultants Booz and Co have recommended the slashing of even more jobs, bringing the total number of job losses to 4500. According to State opposition leader John Robertson that would include train guards, cleaners and maintenance staff. Commentator Terry Crook claims that staff who handle safety and risk-related activity will also face cuts, and that testing for drugs and alcohol is to be outsourced.

Sally McManus, secretary of the Australian Services Union, warned last week that the rail system would be privatised after the next election, if the Liberal/National coalition is re-elected.

The job cuts provide a clear indication that this is planned. The culling of jobs and the introduction of new facilities such as the incoming Opal card ticketing system are aimed at maximising the profitability of government businesses for their new private owners or operators. This is often accompanied by separation of the more profitable parts of the organisation as relatively independent entities, to attract potential investors.

That process is perfectly illustrated by the new North-West Rail Link, which is expected to be running from Chatswood to Rouse Hill by late 2019. Costing an estimated \$8.3 billion to construct, and incorporating design features that will prevent it being integrated with the main lines, it will be Australia's first fully automated commuter rail system and will have driverless trains.

And it will be privately operated.



Photo: Anna Pha

It's up to you

Howard Collins, new chief executive of City Rail, has said that "World cities need a decent public transport system. There's no point trying to convince people to jump on trains in the future and get out of their cars if we haven't got a decent reliable railway."

He's right, of course. The trouble is, however, that Sydney is heading for a privately-controlled rail system which will probably be as expensive to ride as Sydney's privately-operated airport stations, and as confusing as London's privately-owned Docklands line, which requires station changing and special ticketing.

The system will also be inefficient because the carriages, rolling stock and engineering in new lines such as the North West Line will be totally different from their equivalents on the main lines. They will also be unreliable, as private lines inevitably tend to be, because of the inherent greed of their profit-driven management.

The private sector isn't wasting any time pursuing their goals. Last year lobby group Infrastructure Partnerships Australia urged the O'Farrell government to offer franchises to private firms for operation

of the Illawarra line, the Eastern Suburbs line, and a number of country services.

And they've got friends in high places. The federal advisory body Infrastructure Australia has declared that state governments should privatise publicly-owned energy, water, transport and forestry services.

The former Gillard government published a white paper recommending sale of electricity assets, and the former federal treasurer wanted to facilitate all privatisations by providing billions of dollars to the states to compensate for the loss of revenue from the privatised government organisations. It remains to be seen which way the Rudd government will head, but the indications aren't good.

The Victorian passenger rail

system was sold off in the 1990s by the Kennett regime. The interstate Australian freight rail system is now owned by Toll Holdings and Patrick Corporation. Much of Queensland's freight rail system has been privatised and the rest is likely to go before the next state elections, possibly along with the passenger services.

For its part, NSW citizens have inherited a vast, efficient rail system that has successfully coped for a century and a half with the city's growth and very complex geography. They're likely to lose it to private interests if they don't throw off the burden of governments that favour the private sector over the public interest. They will have to fight to ensure that they retain control of this priceless public asset. ★

Pete's Corner



Sydney

WideHouse

Nuclear Nation

The Fukushima Refugees Story | A Film By Atsushi Funahashi

62nd Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin Forum

Friday August 9, 2013
Refreshments 6pm | Film 6:30pm

Chauvel Cinema, Paddington Town Hall
Cnr Oxford St & Oatley Rd, Paddington. Bus 378/380 from city.

Pre-sale tickets \$20/\$15 concession via www.webticketing.com.au
Fundraising for the Australian Nuclear Free Alliance | www.anfa.org.au
Search 'Nuclear Nation' on Facebook.

Fed govt must take over Woodhaven Lodge

The Australian Nursing Federation (Victorian Branch) is calling on the federal Department of Health and Ageing to immediately take over the Woodhaven Lodge aged care facility after management has failed to pay nurses for the second consecutive pay period.

The ANF understands the 60-bed Croydon aged care facility, owned by or connected to the Cambridge Aged Care group of companies, employs almost 60 registered and enrolled nurses and personal care workers to care for elderly Victorians who have been classified as "high care".

The union also understands some nurses and carers were paid late, and some not at all, for the pay period Sunday June 2 to Sunday June 16.

All staff report they have not been paid yet for the pay period Sunday June 16 to Sunday June 30 despite the fact that all of the necessary payroll paperwork was completed on time for wages due to be paid on June 30 (pay day).

ANF federal secretary Lee Thomas said: "Aged care facilities operate with significant government subsidies and if a workforce responsible for the care of vulnerable elderly people with complex and multiple chronic conditions is not being paid the authorities must step in.

"Not everyone has a savings buffer of four weeks' pay for living expenses, mortgages and rent payments and bills so nurses and carers are understandably talking about

having to look for other employment if this aged care facility cannot pay wages. They wouldn't want to leave the residents but they have their own families and personal responsibilities and must not be treated like volunteers," Ms Thomas said.

"The Department of Health and Ageing is ultimately responsible for the care of the residents living at Woodhaven Lodge and it must step in to ensure that the nurses are paid immediately and this facility can provide appropriate and safe care," she said.

"We cannot have a system that pays thousands of dollars in taxpayer funded subsidies, ignores the financial warning signs and leaves unpaid nurses and carers with the ultimate duty of care to the residents."

Meanwhile, the ANF, Australia's largest health union, has joined other nurse and healthcare unions from across the world, in the formation of a new international organisation aimed at ensuring the high standards of universal healthcare.

The Global Nurses United (GNU), launched last week in San Francisco, will step up the fight



against the harmful effects of austerity measures, privatisation and cuts in health care services that it says are putting people and communities at risk across the planet.

The ANF was among 14 nurse and healthcare unions from the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe, which endorsed the GNU's declaration.

Lee Thomas said: "The ANF is proud to be joining forces with other leading nurse unions from across the world in founding the GNU fighting for people, our profession and our planet.

"The GNU will provide us with a platform to co-ordinate the action

we need to adopt in tackling issues common to nurses and midwives in all of our respective countries, including cuts to healthcare services and ensuring there's the right nurse to patient ratios to deliver safe patient care."

GNU members said they will kick off the new organisation with actions in member nations in September to coincide with the opening of the next session of the United Nations General Assembly. The focus of the actions will likely be austerity, privatisation of health and other public services, and other attacks on health services, with specific actions and targets tailored to national priorities. ✪

Chance to deliver for new mothers at work

The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) plans to take an active part in a new Human Rights Commission inquiry into the extent of workplace discrimination against women who are pregnant or seeking to return to work after taking parental leave.

Convener of the AMWU's National Women's Committee Anne Donnellan said the inquiry is strongly supported by the union as it aims to bridge the gap between the rights of women and what actually happens in workplaces.

The inquiry announced by the Labor government will collect and analyse information on how widespread the discrimination is.

Many people know of instances where women have been demoted, had their hours reduced, only offered full-time work or even sacked when returning from parental leave but this has not been fully quantified.

The Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick will oversee a detailed national survey to be conducted in August, then hold a series of forums with unions, employers, workers and other groups as a basis for recommending how to effectively make anti-discrimination measures work.

The inquiry was announced before the Parliament passed Labor government changes to the Fair Work Act giving carers and parents returning from parental leave an express right to request flexible work arrangements.

The law also includes a requirement for employers to consult on the impacts of roster changes on workers' family lives.

Ms Donnellan said that while women's workplace rights were also formally protected under the FWA and sex discrimination

legislation, many continue to report disadvantage at work.

While union members can get advice through their delegate and organiser, many employers continue to require rigid workplace practices and rosters without the reasonable flexibility that workers need so they can balance work and family.

"Women should not be placed in a position of having to forgo their job and income security because of caring responsibilities," she said.

Ms Donnellan said many women confronted by demotions, or unreasonable employer rostering demands when trying to return to work decided instead to quit, which was a loss for the member and for their industry.

Another key area of importance for the AMWU was the Fair Work Act change to improve protections for pregnant employees, particularly the right to transfer to a safe job.

AMWU delegate Noo Rodewald had pioneered this cause at Queensland Newspapers, when her persistence finally forced a reluctant management to transfer her away from a print area job working with chemicals during her pregnancy.

AMWU printing industry delegate Jodie Wilson said discrimination against mothers trying to return to work remained widespread.

"I think many employers play on people's ignorance of their rights when they want to return to work after having a child, they get all sorts of scenarios thrown at them and they don't realise they are covered by legislation," she said.

"People often need to come back slowly, part-time initially, with the extra responsibility of a really little kid but that doesn't mean they should lose their right to full-time work later." ✪

Cleaners welcome Fair Work Ombudsman's audit

United Voice, the cleaners' union, says the audit of up to 1,000 cleaning contractors begun by the Fair Work Ombudsman is a warning to shonky contractors and their clients that it is time to clean up their acts.

The Ombudsman has also announced an investigation into tendering and procurement processes of eight major shopping centres in Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne and Brisbane.

Michael Crosby, national president of United Voice said, "Cleaners welcome the Fair Work Ombudsman's investigation into contract cleaning.

"Many companies run successful and ethical businesses. They do the right thing by their clients and ensure cleaners are legally and fairly employed under the Clean Start Agreement, which sets the national quality standards in the industry.

He said that then there are the others – shonky operators, who will do anything for a quick buck:

- undercut competitors to win contracts
- underpay wages and entitlements
- pay cash in hand
- provide inadequate training and unsafe working conditions
- engage in sham contracting (where cleaners are duped into obtaining ABN numbers so the contractors can avoid paying legal obligations such as workers' compensation, sick leave, annual leave, etc).

"Cleaners are especially vulnerable to exploitation. Their work is solitary, all too often performed late at night and early in the morning, when the rest of us are enjoying the comfort of our families and homes. Many are international students and/or from non-English speaking backgrounds.

"For too long many property owners and principal contractors have ignored the real cost of their actions: a hidden workforce of exploited, overworked and underpaid workers struggling to survive on poverty wages.

"We acknowledge the

Ombudsman's collaborative approach to enforcing legal standards and welcome the investigation into tendering and procurement practices, which are the key to ridding the industry of dodgy operators protected by complicated contracting supply chains."

Mr Crosby said that the Ombudsman's message to those companies and individuals is loud and clear: "It is not acceptable for organisations to outsource work to the lowest-cost contractor and turn a blind eye to any subsequent unfair treatment of low-paid workers. Such behaviour can be detrimental to an organisation's reputation and may also be considered unlawful." (FWO, 02/07/2013)

"The industry must heed this audit. It's time all property owners, tenants and contractors took responsibility for their industry and worked with us to build an industry with Clean Start standards.

"The hear no evil, see no evil approach cannot continue," says Michael Crosby. ✪

Commemoration plans for Chile, September 11, 1973

Sydney

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.

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: elrivera29@hotmail.com

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

Joint Statement: Six years of the NT Intervention is six years too long



On the sixth anniversary of the traumatising Northern Territory Emergency Response, known as the Intervention, three leading national community welfare organisations are urging the major parties to dump the policy of mandatory income management, which they assert is wasteful, ineffective and harmful.

The Australian Council of Social Service, the National Welfare Rights Network, and St Vincent de Paul Society say compulsory income management punishes people who are already doing it amongst the toughest and is incredibly expensive. It

should be replaced with a genuinely voluntary scheme, which is part of a broader development plan in communities. The government should abandon plans to further extend wasteful and ineffective income management from July 1, 2013.

The 2012 independent evaluation of income management in the Northern Territory found no clear evidence of the value of the program. At best, some people perceived that they were being assisted by the program. More than two thirds of those surveyed said they felt discriminated against by income management. Three quarters felt it was unfair and

a similar number reported feelings of embarrassment.

Each person subject to income management in the Northern Territory costs between \$6,600 and \$7,900 in remote areas, and \$4,600 in the five trial sites. More than half a billion has been spent so far. The nearly \$100 million per year would be better spent in partnership with Aboriginal people on programs that actually work in their communities.

For too long, the absence of real jobs and basic community infrastructure has been a blight on the social and economic life of many

communities in the NT. The social impacts of prolonged unemployment and lack of basic services in many communities in the NT has demanded a holistic response. However, removing funds via welfare quarantining from entire communities was a crude and unfair response.

Compulsory income management unfairly and wrongly assumes that just because a person receives an income support payment, they can't manage their own affairs. It should only be implemented as a part of an economic and social development plan negotiated with communities.

Income management was expanded to five new locations from July 2012: to Bankstown (NSW), Shepparton (Victoria), Playford (SA) and Logan and Rockhampton (Queensland). In May, there were 423 people on income management in these areas. Ninety-two percent, or 391 of those on income management in these designated areas are voluntary participants. Thirty people were under the "vulnerable" category, due to homelessness or other problems, while just two people were placed on income management under the child protection measure.

The government is to rollout a major expansion of compulsory income management from July 1, 2013 in the five trial sites and the Northern Territory, with little warning and very limited consultation.

Thousands of young people, including many fleeing violent and abusive families, may have their income support payments quarantined. The largest group impacted will be young people unable to live at home because of family violence and abuse. People under 25 leaving jail and moving to one of "declared areas" who claim a Crisis Payment and people under 16 claiming Special Benefit will also be targeted.

Around 2,600 people in the NT and place-based sites who receive the "Unreasonable to Live at Home" Youth Allowance are likely to be subjected to income management from July 1, 2013. No matter how well these young people are managing their financial affairs, they will be placed on income management just because they claim a certain payment and live and a specific location. This blanket approach is a step backwards to the early days of income management, when it targeted people on the basis of their Aboriginality. It will be harmful and hurtful to many young people.

Once again, the government has got it wrong on income management.

Signed by:

Dr Cassandra Goldie, CEO, ACOSS

Maree O'Halloran, President, National Welfare Rights Network

Dr John Falzon, CEO, St Vincent de Paul Society, National Council of Australia

Homelessness services delivering but too many still in need

A new report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows that over 157,000 people accessed homelessness services in the six months from July to December 2012, with almost half of them already homeless when they began to receive support.

The number of people assisted by specialist homelessness services (SHS) in the previous six months appears to have increased when you break the data down from the previous SHS data collection.

"While the increases in the number of people accessing services indicates a greater need for continuing and increased investment in homelessness, it is positive that services assisted so many people," said Narelle Clay AM, Chairperson of Homelessness Australia.

Domestic violence continues to be a significant issue for people accessing services with 23% of people (and 32% of women) citing it as the main reason they sought support.

Children continue to be over-represented in the data with 21% of clients aged under 15. "This is a particular concern for the future," Ms Clay said. "Homelessness has a strongly intergenerational dimension. Failing to provide adequate services to prevent or address homelessness for children can lead to future social problems that are more difficult and expensive to solve."

The report showed that over half of clients required assistance with accommodation, with a further quarter needing assistance to sustain their housing. "Addressing homelessness requires a wide range of strategies – there are people who receive family relationship support, referral, advocacy, practical assistance and other support but there is inadequate accommodation or housing for them. "We need to continue all the strategies to reduce homelessness, and to ultimately end homelessness, but we also need to ensure that people experiencing

homelessness can obtain safe supported accommodation until homelessness ends" said Ms Clay.

Homelessness Australia calls for bipartisan commitment from the major parties for:

1. The strategies identified in the White Paper on Homelessness initiatives including a longer term National Partnership Agreement On Homelessness (NPAH);
2. More affordable housing and;
3. Increased capacity for homelessness support services to ensure that reducing homelessness remains an achievable goal.

"We appreciate the recent one-year extension of the NPAH, but those 180 services to vulnerable people cannot operate effectively on transitional funding and it needs to be a priority to gain commitments for the next longer term agreement" said Ms Clay.

More about Homelessness Australia homelessnessaustralia.org.au ✪

Workers left stunned at Hastings Deering redundancies

The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) has slammed Hastings Deering for fast-tracking their redundancy process – leaving affected workers stunned and outraged.

The AMWU said the company had been targeting specific employees without proper process or genuine consultation with the union.

AMWU Central Queensland organiser Brad Hansen said the company refuses to provide the Skills and Performance Assessments which

would illuminate how they are making these redundancies.

"This decision should be shaped from objective criteria; the AMWU expected all avenues to be explored before permanent local jobs were made redundant," Brad Hansen said.

"Hastings Deering has conducted these redundancies at lightning speed and without genuine consultation.

"The AMWU has been left unsatisfied by the way in which the company have dealt with this process; they have not done everything

possible to reduce the effect of these job losses.

"Many people are left feeling angry and hurt. Many are stunned by the swift and callous way in which the company have conducted themselves.

"Hastings Deering must consult properly with the workers and the union throughout the redundancy process."

The AMWU has cautioned Hastings Deering they will take appropriate action to ensure affected workers receive fair treatment during the company's restructure. ✪

Tobacco goes out of sight in all NSW shops

More than 400 tobacconists in NSW will be required to keep tobacco products out of sight in cupboards and drawers – ending a three-year exemption to the health policy. Under NSW legislation passed in 2008, larger general retailers had to put tobacco packs out of sight by the end of 2009, and smaller shops by July 2010.

Specialist tobacconists were given until July 1, 2013 to phase out the advertising displays.

Only South Australia and Victoria still allow tobacconists to display tobacco products in full view – with SA to end the exemption by the end of 2014, says Anne Jones, Chief Executive of Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) Australia:

"This is a welcome milestone for NSW in ending tobacco retail promotion – especially to children. Many tobacconists are located in major shopping malls, where these lethal addictive products have been visible to all – including children.

"So the end of this loophole is welcome – especially in light of new research showing the policy is

effective in reducing impulse purchase of tobacco."

A four-year, four-country study including Australia from 2006-2010 shows "impulse purchasing of cigarettes was lower in places that enacted POS [point of sale] display bans." Australia and Canada, with such policies, recorded falls in impulse buying; UK and US, with tobacco still in view at the time, did not.

"The tobacco industry lobbied Australian governments, just as they did with plain packaging, claiming that these policies 'wouldn't work' and were a waste of time," said Anne Jones.

"This study shows making tobacco branding less visible does deliver health benefits – putting tobacco out of sight at point of sale reduces impulse buying – which is why the industry has opposed it so aggressively.

"A comprehensive out-of-sight retail policy will help the NSW government achieve its NSW 2012 aim to reduce smoking rates by 3% for non-Aboriginal people and 4% by Aboriginal people by 2015." ✪

A New Democracy

Jeff McMullen

Imagine a country where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are recognised as the sovereign owners of lands they have lived on for sixty thousand years or more.

Imagine the freedom to be yourself, culturally, spiritually, linguistically, regardless of your age, gender, colour or ethnic origin.

Imagine a Constitution that enshrines these human rights and upholds all of our international legal obligations.

Imagine a constitutional prohibition on discrimination on the basis of race, colour, religion, ethnic or national origin.

Imagine a positive mandate in that Constitution to ensure laws are made and programs enacted to end the impoverishment of so many of the First Australians as well as others.

Imagine an Australia where the Indigenous value of custodianship binds all of us to a shared responsibility to care for this land and for one another.

In this Constitution there would be power and poetry. It would inspire us, expressing our true sense of place, acknowledging the longer timelines of history, defining us and unifying us as Australians.

This is my dream and I hope you have one too. It is a dream of a new democracy and a constitution that is inclusive of all Australians.

If you can't see that far into the future to a brighter day that some day will come, then you risk settling for the status quo. Maybe you know some of those Australians who don't know the Constitution exists, don't know what's in it or that we have the power to change it for the better?

Constitution

Even a glance at the Constitution reveals the deep stain of racism and discrimination. It is one of the few constitutions in the world today with negative race powers allowing government to make laws and policy that pointedly trample the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In contrast to the constitutions of most Western democracies Australia's says very little at all about human rights.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have long been denied many of the most fundamental human rights including those Australia is obligated to uphold under many international covenants.

So any discussion of a new attempt to belatedly recognise their legal rights as well as the rightful central place of Indigenous Australians as the most ancient founding peoples of the many nations that were here for tens of thousands of years surely must begin with an honest statement of certain facts.

Despite the lie of *terra nullius* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people occupied these lands longer than anyone really knows. Their lands were invaded and many of the settlers used brutal force to take what was never theirs.

To deny the invasion, the massacres and the theft of lands, and I say this with grim irony, would undermine any claim that the Australian Constitution has legitimacy.

The nation constituted by the Australia Constitution Act of 1900, a British Act of Parliament, is founded on the misguided notion of white supremacy and the equal folly of that tragic concept of conquest. As some Australia

judges have noted conquest is a facet of international use to justify claims by other nations to sovereignty. But having witnessed many of the worst conflicts over the past 45 years I am convinced this ancient belief in conquest is a vestige of our most predatory and barbaric traits as a species.

Yet conquest, of a sort, and extraordinary denial or reality is what has landed us all in this constitutional mess. Despite the fact that the original English invader, James Cook, ignored his orders to "consult with the natives", despite the truth that Aboriginal resistance did occur, that there was no surrender of sovereignty and no negotiation of a treaty, the colonies established a constitution that looked right through Aboriginal people as if they were not there.

There were just two references to "natives" in the 1901 Constitution Act and they both tragically excluded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They were not even to be counted in the census because given the prevailing racism it was assumed that out among the flora and fauna they were doomed to extinction. The Parliament was prohibited from making laws for the "natives" but this exclusion did not prevent shameful policies aimed at assimilation and at times acts of genocide.

It was not until the 1967 Referendum that a 92 percent majority of Australians voted emphatically to allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be counted along with all other citizens and yes the Commonwealth could make laws for them too along with other races.

You see the anachronistic, racist and scientifically false notion of a White Australia was built into the Australian Constitution. The race powers are still there today.

Section 25 allows the states if they wish to disenfranchise people on the basis of race. Section 51 (xxvi) allows the federal parliament to pass special laws relating to "the people of any race for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws".

You can see what this means for Aboriginal people when you look closely at the crushing humiliation of the Northern Territory Intervention, as the racial discrimination act was suspended again to allow official discrimination, sanctioned by a Prime Minister, an Opposition Leader and almost all members of the federal parliament.

An Aboriginal child born in one of those remote communities will spend the first 15 years of life controlled by the new Chief Protectors who dictate fundamental aspects of family life, cultural life, work, welfare and education from thousands of kilometres away in Canberra. Their genuine right to an equal opportunity for health, education, housing and a decent standard of living has never been honoured in this hollow Constitution.

At the time the Northern Territory Intervention was launched then Prime Minister John Howard declared that he was not concerned with constitutional niceties when the safety of children was at stake. What extraordinary hypocrisy.

The intervention was a very dangerous government big lie and it shows the tragic flaws in our current democracy that allows a government to discriminate. Gormless politicians playing to the applause of neo-liberals who want to assimilate Indigenous people pass many laws that clearly do not benefit the First Australians.

The land

When I have consulted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people privately and publicly in many places and many forums around the country, overwhelmingly they speak of their land, the land that owns them, the sovereignty they believe is the essence of their being. Sovereignty may mean many different things to different people but to most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people clearly it means the legal right to control their destiny on their lands and waters. Polling by the National Congress of First Peoples tell us that this deep and abiding sovereignty is clearly foremost on the minds of Indigenous people, along with health and the education of their children.

Here then is the first great dilemma in the current approach to constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The consensus paper prepared by the government-appointed panel of experts makes it perfectly clear that sovereignty is not going to be included in any referendum proposal for constitutional recognition and change.

One of the members of the expert panel, Noel Pearson, is quoted as saying that apart from being unachievable, "full-blown sovereignty" may not be necessary and that "local indigenous sovereignty" could exist internally within a nation state "provided that the fullest rights of self-determination are accorded".

Given that the present policy towards Indigenous Australians is that crushing assimilation described euphemistically as modernisation or renovation of culture, and given the astonishing undermining of Aboriginal authority through the Intervention and the ten-year extension known as the STRONGER FUTURES legislation, the "fullest rights of self-determination" sadly seem lifetimes away.

This is where Australia lags behind the rest of the world. The United States government has more than 350 treaties with Native Americans. American courts have upheld Indigenous sovereignty repeatedly and affirmed the right of the First Nations to self-government. Importantly, evidence gathered by many decades of the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development led by Professors Stephen Cornell and Joe Kalt shows emphatically that sovereignty, control of their destiny, is the real key to development.

The only Indigenous people in the world who have equal life expectancy with the rest of their fellow citizens are the Sami spread across Norway, Finland and Sweden. All three of these countries have Sami parliaments and Norway's constitution recognises the country as bi-cultural, a guarantee that the government will consult and negotiate with Sami to maintain their distinct language and culture.

Positive recognition

Such positive recognition and progress by other First Nations shows up the limitations of the Australian approach and the negative restraints imposed by a political reality, a grudging willingness to make symbolic change perhaps but real doubt about how far the politicians or the people will go.

Whatever happened to the belief in a treaty or legal compact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to address their sovereignty and so much of this nation's unfinished business?



The expert panel clearly states that it saw its brief as coming up with recommendations that contribute to a more "unified and reconciled nation, and be capable of being supported by an overwhelming majority of Australians from across the political and social spectrums. In addition they had to benefit and accord with the wishes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and be technically and legally sound". Specifically, the experts wanted a clear expression of support from a majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for any statement of recognition.

But in truth, the panel of experts has inadvertently or intentionally reinforced the political reality that recognising Aboriginal sovereignty is not going to happen and nor is any legal compact or treaty that would in a meaningful way encapsulate land rights.

The panel notes that these are issues of great concern for future discussion.

What the panel is offering all Australians now are five strong recommendations that nonetheless clearly do not meet the priorities for action by the very people the changes are intended to benefit.

I believe this presents a grave threat to any chance of unity on constitutional change.

"Constitutionally speaking, we are still based on White Australia, however much we boast we have changed".

Former High Court Justice Justice



Australia has only ever held 44 referendums and just eight have been carried. Here is the measure of our constitutional conservatism and of just how our nation has been held back by the timidity and lack of leadership by our elected politicians.

It is 36 years since Australians made any change to our Constitution. The last time we could ever find the two thirds majority of voters in a majority of states was for a referendum in 1977 that required federal judges to retire at 70.

A retired judge I hugely respect, former High Court Justice Michael Kirby, has summed up the situation we are now facing, understanding the record and noting the importance of recognising the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

White Australia

“Constitutionally speaking,” Michael Kirby said, “we are still basically White Australia, however much we boast that we have changed”.

Well, you have had months to mull over the expert panel’s five recommendations, what are the prospects that they will change the racism and the discrimination?

The first recommendation to erase forever section 25 of the Constitution would prevent

the states from ever taking away the right to vote based on race.

The second recommendation to remove section 51 (xxvi) would eliminate the negative race power that has been used to make laws that harm the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The third recommendation is for a new power that would give the federal parliament power to pass laws that benefit Indigenous Australians. This new section would also set out a clear statement of recognition of the prior occupancy of the continent and the ongoing relationship with land and waters. Echoing the Sami Constitutional recognition, there is also a proposal in this section to require the government to secure the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This may or may not give more of the right kind of support to programs that could bring equality in health, education, employment and life expectancy.

The fourth recommendation is the one that I believe is the most urgently needed because it addresses so many burning injustices right now. It would prohibit the Commonwealth, States and Territories from discriminating on the basis of race, colour, ethnic or national origin. Disappointingly, gender has not been included in this list. Why not emphasise that important human right while we are engaged in this effort to improve our Constitution?

Finally, in their fifth recommendation, the expert panel seeks a language provision that states that English is the national language but also affirms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders languages as part of our national heritage.

It is up to you, my brothers and sisters, to raise your voice wherever and whenever you can to let the Aboriginal voice ring out loud and clear.

I have shared my dreams with you and I will walk with you.

I am certain that more than words in any document what this nation needs most is a change of heart.

The Beacon ✪

Lenin on Australia still relevant

Howard Patterson

In 1913 Lenin commented on the Federal election in Australia of that year which the Labor Party lost. What he articulated about our society 100 years ago is just as relevant today and in especially understanding the ALP and the leadership of the unions in the lead up to this year’s federal election. The following is an extract.

A general election recently took place in Australia. The Labour Party, which had a majority in the Lower House 44 seats out of 75 was defeated. It now has only 36 seats out of 75. The majority has passed to the Liberals, but this majority is a very unstable one, because 30 of the 36 seats in the Upper House are held by Labour.

What sort of peculiar capitalist country is this, in which the workers’ representatives, predominate in the Upper house and, till recently, did so in the Lower House as well, and yet the capitalist system is in no danger?

An English correspondent of the German labour press recently explained the situation, which is very often misrepresented by bourgeois writers.

The Australian Labour Party does not even call itself a socialist party. Actually it is a liberal-bourgeois party, while the so-called Liberals in Australia are really Conservatives.

This strange and incorrect use of terms in naming parties is not unique. In America, for example, the slave-owners of yesterday are called Democrats, and in France, enemies of socialism, petty bourgeois, are called Radical Socialists! In order to understand the real significance of parties, one must examine not their signboards but their class character and the historical conditions of each individual country.

Australia is a young British colony.

Capitalism in Australia is still quite youthful. The country is only just taking shape as an independent state. The workers are for the most part emigrants from Britain. They left the country at the time when the liberal-labour policy held almost undivided sway there, when the masses of the British workers were Liberals. Even now the majority of the skilled factory workers in Britain are Liberals or semi-Liberals. This is the results of the exceptionally favourable, monopolist position enjoyed by Britain in the second half of the last century. Only now are the masses of the workers in Britain turning (but turning slowly) towards socialism.

And while in Britain the so-called Labour Party is an alliance between the non-socialist trade unions and the extremely opportunist Independent Labour Party, in Australia the Labour Party is the unalloyed representative of the non-socialist workers trade unions.

The leaders of the Australian Labour Party are trade union officials, everywhere the most moderate and capital serving element, and in Australia, altogether peaceable, purely liberal.

The ties binding the separate states into a united Australia are still very weak. The Labour Party has had to concern itself with developing and strengthening these ties, and with establishing central government.

In Australia the Labour Party has done what in other countries was done by the Liberals, namely, introduced a uniform tariff for the whole country, a uniform educational law, a uniform land tax and uniform factory legislation.

Lenin Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1977, Moscow, Volume 19, pages 216-217.

How accurate is Lenin! The history of liberal ideology in Australia since 1913 is at one of gradually moving to a Left Liberalism on certain policies such as nationalising some industries to since the 1980s moving to very Right Liberalism, so much so that the ALP’s policies today almost seem to differ little from the conservative capitalists that rule our society. The move by the ALP to the Left in the late 1920s was due to the world-wide communist movement which was eroding their false propaganda that they represent the working-class. Today most of the Greens policies place that party in the category of Left Liberals.

The common catch cry of ALP liberal ideology is “a fair go” which is a very vague term but is basically a plea to the bourgeois conservative establishment for at least some sort of policies that allow everyone “equal” access to climb up the ladder if they work hard enough, so says the rhetoric. Bill Shorten and Paul Howes from the union movement are examples of liberals always pleading to the capitalist’s dictatorship for a “fair go”, even though Labor is the present government. Liberalism is the right of the individual to climb up the ladder. Of course

only a small percentage of the population can climb up the ladder.

So liberalism believes in public education for all but not tertiary education. For a second rate public health system if you cannot afford the private health system. For food handouts for the poor via charity organisations or limited government payments but no guarantee of a job. For unions to be allowed to occasionally strike. Liberalism has a history of outlawing or suppressing communist-led trade unions for the benefit of ALP trade unionism.

They argue that the working-class who is missing out is not due to not being given a “fair go” but is due to their own individual laziness. There is 40 percent youth unemployment in a number of areas of Australia. Also the unofficial 10 percent adult unemployment, single parents, most of Aboriginal society, the working poor who cannot even afford a roof over their heads. In other words a big percentage of the population are being abused by liberal ideology.

Lenin stated that the “mass of workers in Britain are turning (but turning slowly) towards socialism”. The question is how slowly is slowly. ✪

Basically
that

Judge Michael Kirby

Latin American governments blast hijacking

Bill Van Auken

Five South American heads of state joined with Evo Morales in Cochabamba to denounce the US-instigated grounding of the Bolivian president's plane. The action was ostensibly taken in response to faulty intelligence that the former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden, who has exposed massive illegal spying by the NSA, was on board the aircraft.

Speaking on the occasion of Venezuela's Independence Day, President Nicolas Maduro said he would offer asylum to Snowden. "In the name of America's dignity ... I have decided to offer humanitarian asylum to Edward Snowden," he told a televised military parade. It is not clear whether Maduro is attaching any conditions to the offer.

Also, Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega appeared to make a conditional offer of asylum. Speaking at a public event, he said, "If circumstances permit it, we would receive Snowden with pleasure and give him asylum here in Nicaragua."

The meeting, which included half of the heads of state of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR, its acronym in Spanish), was convened after Morales returned to Bolivia aboard a presidential jet that had been detoured from its approved flight path and forced to land in Vienna, Austria, where it remained for nearly 14 hours.

Some three hours into the plane's flight from Moscow, the governments of France, Portugal, Italy and Spain refused it permission to travel through their airspace, compelling it to make

the emergency landing in Vienna due to dwindling fuel. The actions of these governments was in violation of international treaties and air traffic agreements and placed the lives of Morales and other senior Bolivian officials on board at risk.

The joint declaration issued following the meeting between Morales and Argentine President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, Uruguayan President Jose "Pepé" Mujica and the president of Surinam, Desi Bouter, accused the European powers of turning the Bolivian president into "virtually a hostage" and setting "a dangerous precedent in relation to existing international law."

It went on to demand that the governments of France, Portugal, Italy and Spain provide explanations for their actions and issue "public apologies" for the "grave acts" committed against Morales.

The statement denounced the extraordinary forcing down of a head of state's aircraft in mid-flight as an example of "neo-colonial practices" and condemned "illegal acts of espionage that threaten citizens' rights and the friendly co-existence between nations."

The statement made no direct mention, however, of Edward Snowden, the target of the extra-legal US manhunt, whose reported presence on Morales' plane was the motive for the European governments' bellicose actions.

The former NSA contractor is reportedly still trapped in the transit zone of Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport, where he arrived on June 23. According to



Bolivia's President Evo Morales, left, talks to Austrian President Heinz Fischer at Vienna's Schwechat airport on Wednesday last week. (Photo: AP)

WikiLeaks, he has made applications for asylum to 27 countries, many of which have summarily rejected his request.

The governments of Ecuador, Bolivia and Venezuela have indicated that they would consider his bid for asylum. The Ecuadorean government, however, made a sharp shift from its earlier cooperation with Snowden. Having initially provided him a safe-passage document for his flight from Hong Kong to Moscow, it then declared the move a "mistake" and rescinded the document. Quito has since insisted that Snowden would have to be on Ecuadorean soil before asylum could be considered.

Venezuela's President Maduro,

meanwhile, announced that his government would await "the reaction of the world" before deciding on the asylum request.

While in Moscow attending a summit of gas-exporting nations, Morales gave the most forthright statement on Snowden's appeal, stating that Bolivia was "ready to accept those who disclose espionage." Asked directly if he would grant asylum, Morales replied, "Yes. Why not?"

It is by no means clear whether the US really suspected that Snowden was on Morales' aircraft – which departed from a different airport than the one where the ex-NSA contractor has been confined – or whether it sought through an act of international gangsterism against the Bolivian president to intimidate anyone considering aiding Snowden.

Spain's foreign minister, José Manuel García-Margallo, in an interview with Spanish state television, TVE, rejected the demand from UNASUR, insisting that his government had no reason to apologise.

"They told us he [Snowden] was inside" the plane, he said, while claiming that Spain's overflight authorisation had not been rescinded, but merely expired after France and Portugal refused to allow Morales' plane to enter their airspace. "The reactions of the European countries was because of the information that they gave us that he was inside," he added.

While García-Margallo did not volunteer who "they" were, he was asked directly whether the Spanish government had been in telephone contact with US officials regarding the incident. "That information remains secret," he replied.

Morales has charged that while he was detained on the ground in Vienna, the Spanish ambassador to Austria came to the airport and asked to be invited onto the airplane "to have a coffee." The Bolivian president refused, charging that the request amounted to a thinly veiled attempt to search the aircraft for Snowden. "I am not a criminal," he declared.

For its part, Washington has refused to comment on the widespread charges that it instigated the forcing down of Morales' plane, which amounts to an act of war between nations.

Venezuela's President Maduro stated that a European minister "told

me personally that it was the CIA that gave the order to the air traffic authorities, which gave the alert that Snowden was going in the plane."

Both Bolivia and Venezuela have rejected demands from Washington that they extradite Snowden should he land on their soil. The extradition request arrived in La Paz just a day after Morales' ordeal in his flight back from Moscow.

The Bolivian foreign ministry described the request as "strange, illegal and unfounded," given that Snowden wasn't even in the country.

For his part, Morales threatened to expel the US diplomatic mission and shut down its embassy. "We don't need the pretext of cooperation and diplomatic relations so that they can come and spy on us," said the Bolivian president.

Venezuela's Maduro said that his government had received a similar request from Washington. He rejected it saying that Washington has "no moral authority" to pursue Snowden after he exposed "crimes against humanity."

"They have no moral authority to request the extradition of a young man who exposed the illegality under which the Pentagon, the CIA and the power of the US work," said Maduro. "I reject any request they are making for extradition."

The Venezuelan president added that the US government should first comply with Venezuela's demand for the extradition of Luis Posada Carriles, who is wanted in Venezuela for the 1976 terrorist bombing of a Cuban passenger plane that killed all 78 people aboard. The US has rejected the request and effectively provided the Miami-based Cuban exile terrorist with political asylum.

Bolivia can make a similar case, with Washington dismissing its demands for the extradition of the country's former president, Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, who is wanted not for exposing government crimes, as in the case of Snowden, but rather for massacring scores of unarmed demonstrators.

Snowden's life remains in grave danger, with the Obama administration demanding his return to face espionage charges, which carry a potential death penalty. As the Morales episode makes clear, Washington is prepared to kill him or those it believes are aiding him.

globalresearch.ca

US spies on EU

Emile Schepers

The Influential German magazine Der Spiegel last week revealed that the United States National Security Agency bugged the communications of the European Union and some of the United States' closest allies, as well as international bodies. The reaction is shaping up to be furious. The new revelations also undermine the US government's argument that the surveillance program revealed by Edward Snowden, who had been working for NSA contractor Booz Allen Hamilton, is essential to fighting terrorism.

Der Spiegel, basing itself on Snowden's material, says that the surveillance of online and telephone communications targeted European Union offices in Washington DC, at the European Union embassy to the United Nations in New York, and at the organisation's main headquarters in Brussels, Belgium.

The new revelations suggest that the NSA had put some of the United States' closest allies in Europe under surveillance. There are, according to the story, over 500 intercepts of German communications per month.

Some of the activity may have been directed from NATO facilities. The activities are being compared to Cold War methods.

In addition, when the surveillance story was first broken by Snowden last month, the US administration and leaders of both parties in Congress claimed that the surveillance was being done to protect the United States from terrorist attacks. These new revelations undermine that story.

The original revelations already set off a spat between the United States on the one hand, and China and Russia on the other. When Snowden, helped by the WikiLeaks organisation, first showed up in Hong Kong and then appeared in the international transit area at the Sheremetyevo airport in Moscow, with stories circulating that he might be given asylum in Ecuador (which has given WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange asylum at its embassy in London), Venezuela, or Cuba, the White House and State Department waxed indignant and made veiled threats against those countries if they did not hand him over for prosecution. The Der Spiegel revelations will assure that few European countries with the exception of the United Kingdom, whose GCHQ (Government Communications Headquarters) is also accused of illegitimate surveillance activities, will support the United States in diplomatic conflicts that result from this.

Public figures throughout Europe are now lining up to denounce the US activities, and some suggest that the quarrel may sink the new free trade agreement that the United States is negotiating with the European Union. Several pointed out that the spying may have targeted European Union offices involved in trade matters.

Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn of Luxembourg, one of the 27 states that belong to the European Union, was quoted by Der Spiegel's online English language edition as saying, "If these reports are true, then it is abhorrent."

German Justice Minister Sabine Leutheusser-Scharrenberger said that the spying report "defies belief that our friends in the US see the Europeans as their enemies."

She and others also compared the US surveillance activities as being comparable to Cold War tactics.

In an initial response, Secretary of State John Kerry tried to downplay the uproar, saying that it is well known that countries take measures to protect their national security. He added that the United States will respond to questions about the surveillance through diplomatic channels.

People's World

Fight we must and fight we will

Dave Prentis*

BRITAIN: The 65th birthday of the National Health Service (NHS) is a time to celebrate. Despite everything that has been thrown at it by successive governments, the NHS remains the fairest and most cost-effective health service in the world – second to none.

The Olympics last year showed how highly the health service is regarded.

Even better, the NHS tops the list of icons that make Britons proudest – ahead of the armed forces and Team GB. When asked which anniversary in 2013 made them most proud to be British, the public put the 65th birthday of the NHS ahead of the Queen's coronation.

It is only right then that up and down the country Unison has been organising and joining its many supporters in highlighting and celebrating the amazing work performed by the NHS and its staff.

It treats more than 1.5 million patients every single day, 14,000 babies are born each week and more than nine million procedures and interventions performed each year. Every patient is seen on the basis of medical need – not on how much they can pay – and Unison wants to keep it that way.

Last week saw a series of events to not only celebrate the NHS but to raise the profile of the huge threats to the health service posed by the Tories.

This government is systematically

and cynically running down the NHS verbally, at the same time as cutting it physically. Pointing an accusing finger at “failing” hospitals, long waiting times and “uncaring” nurses, it creates a vicious circle where the only saviours are private healthcare companies gearing up to “come to the rescue.”

In truth the NHS does need rescuing – but from this government and its damaging policies.

The NHS has come through a period of unprecedented upheaval and uncertainty over the past three years, since the bombshell of the NHS white paper led to the Health and Social Care Act limping through Parliament, followed by a further year of transition up to April this year.

Although the health service and its workforce have, as always, done their best to weather these storms, the NHS has already entered dangerous waters.

Waiting times are edging up, accident and emergency problems show alarming signs of turning into a full-blown crisis with ambulances and patients regularly left queuing outside for hours on end.

And in furthering its privatisation agenda the government could not resist tampering with the successful NHS Direct and introducing a fragmented market of 111 providers, with the inevitable consequences of patient complaints and failures.

The role of healthcare companies is expanding substantially, with a 10 percent increase in NHS money



Waiting times are edging up, accident and emergency problems show alarming signs of turning into a full-blown crisis.

spent in the sector in the past year and analysts predicting a £20 billion “opportunity” for companies through both provision and commissioning.

The government's botched implementation of the Section 75 procurement regulations has done little to convince clinical commissioners that they will be given the autonomy they crave, which was ostensibly the point of the Tories' “liberating” reforms. This direction is unlikely to change with the Prime Minister reaching out to right-wing think tanks to staff his own health policy functions.

There is now a need for urgent repeal of the Health and Social Care Act, which has the potential to unravel much of what patients and staff know and love in our NHS.

The N in NHS needs to be reasserted by getting rid of economic regulation, restoring the role of the secretary of state, and insisting on a more rigid cap on private patient income. Winding back the market also means saving money, which is likely to continue to be a big issue for the foreseeable future.

The transaction costs associated with administering the market are eye-watering.

The Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) is the central database for European public-sector tender notices and the average cost of running an OJEU tender process is estimated at a massive £100,000.

To safeguard the NHS for the next 65 years, Unison is also calling for minimum staffing levels to ensure patients and staff are safe. To deliver high-quality patient care the health service must have appropriate funding.

The government has been forced to admit that it's been misleading the public about claims it is protecting the health budget. The frank truth is that the NHS budget has been cut and hospitals are being told they must make £20 billion in so-called efficiency savings.

This is all at a time when demand on the NHS is increasing – there are more patients, more costly drugs and therapies and an increasingly ageing population, with complex medical needs.

And patients must come before profits, with taxpayers' money being spent on improving care, not going to enrich the shareholders of private healthcare companies or on employing

expensive and unnecessary management consultants.

Protection for staff terms and conditions is another area with knock-on benefits for those receiving care. An increasing body of academic research from the likes of Aston Business School and the National Nursing Research Unit points to a definite link between staff well-being and patients' experience of care.

With a government determined to destroy the NHS as we know it, is it any wonder that we are fearful it will not make its next important milestone?

And that is why the events organised for the 65th birthday are being used to warn people of the dangers facing our NHS and to rally support for the fight to preserve a health service under threat.

These events will continue over the summer and into the party conference season. At Unison's own conference a couple of weeks ago I called on the Trade Union Congress to organise a mass rally in support of the NHS at the Conservative Party Conference.

We are already mobilising branches for the lobby in Manchester on September 29. We will be taking our message to the heart of the Tory Party that they mess with the NHS at their peril.

As Nye Bevin the founder of the NHS said, “The NHS will last as long as there are folk left with the faith to fight for it” – fight we must and fight we will.

* Dave Prentis is general secretary of Unison. *Morning Star*

The Obamas do Africa

Glen Ford

The President and his family are spending a week in sub-Saharan Africa, with Senegal, Tanzania and South Africa on the itinerary. The focus of the trip, if you believe the White House, is trade, an arena in which the United States has been eclipsed by China since 2009.

China, by some measurements, now does nearly twice as much business with Africa as the US, and the gap is growing. It is now commonly accepted that the Chinese offer far better terms of trade and investment than the Americans, that they create more jobs for Africans, and their investments leave behind infrastructure that can enrich their African trading partners in the long haul.

No one expects Obama to offer anything on this trip that will reverse America's declining share of the African market. That's because the US is not in the business of fair and mutually beneficial trade – it's about the business of imperialism, which is another matter, entirely. The Americans ensure their access to African natural resources through the barrel of a gun.

So, while the Chinese and Indians and Brazilians and other economic powerhouses play by the rules of give and take, the US tightens its military grip on the continent through its ever-expanding military command, AFRICOM.

To justify its rapid militarisation of Africa, Washington plunges whole regions of the continent into

chaos. US policies, under presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama, have utterly destroyed Somalia, made the Horn of Africa a theatre of war, drawn the northern tier of the continent into America's cauldron of terror, and killed six million people in the eastern Congo.

The face of America in Africa is war, not trade; extraction of minerals by military intimidation, not conventional commerce. Washington's priority is to embed AFRICOM ever deeper into the militaries of African states – rather than configuring more favourable trade relationships on the continent. But you won't learn that from the US corporate media, which chooses to focus on the US\$100 million cost of Obama's African trip, or to look for human interest angles on Obama's decision not to touch down in his father's homeland, Kenya. However, even that angle is too sinister for deeper exploration by the corporate press, because Kenya's absence from the itinerary is meant as a threat.

The United States is angry because Washington wanted the Kenyan people to elect a different president, one more acceptable to US policymakers. The Americans expected the whole of Kenyan civil society to bend to Washington's will, and reject the candidacy of Uhuru Kenyatta, simply to please the superpower. When that didn't happen, it was decided that Kenya must be shunned, despite its past services to US imperialism.

Skipping Kenya was a warning that more serious repercussions

may lurk in the future – which is a potent threat, because the US controls most of the guns of Africa. As the US-backed warlord in Somalia said in Jeremy Seahill's excellent film *The Dirty War*, “The Americans are masters of war.” War, and the threat of war, is the reality behind every US presidential visit, to Africa and everywhere else. Whether the terms of trade are good or bad, the declining US empire will get access to the resources it needs, or thousands – millions! – will die.

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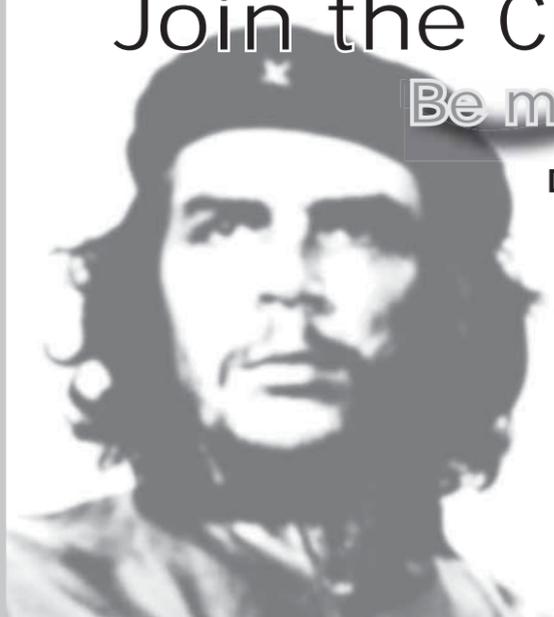
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Letters to the Editor
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Oppose benefits cuts to accident victims

Some of your readers will be aware of a NSW government proposal to alter the rights of people injured on our roads. The changes – contained in a Bill before Parliament – would cut benefits available to innocent victims of road accidents and extend benefits to at-fault drivers. The government has also said that by cutting benefits to innocent injured people it could cut the cost of Third Party Compulsory Insurance Premiums.

Thanks to the diligent work of the NSW Upper House, most notably those on the cross bench, the government has agreed to re-look at its plans to cut benefits.

These plans may not be shelved for long – it is expected they will come back before the Parliament in August – but the time between now and then, and the consultations that we hope will occur, will provide an important opportunity for members of the community to have their say about what is important to them.

Under these changes, the vast majority of those injured on our roads

would have their compensation for loss of earnings and medical expenses cut off after five years. These payments will be stopped even if the person is unable to work as they did before the accident or needs further surgery.

The vast majority of children injured on our roads will suffer a similar loss of rights. Even though surgery for children is often done some years later due to growth, most will not get medical support after five years and their loss of capacity to work would not be compensated.

We have one of the best compulsory insurance systems in the country and we hope that the decency and common sense that has been injected into the debate by the Upper House will prevail so that fundamental rights will be preserved.

This legislation will have a very real impact on the lives of people within your community. Whatever your view, take this opportunity to contact your local member and express it.

Genevieve Henderson
Slater & Gordon Lawyers

Standing up for what matters

After the ALP leadership change we now don't know when the election might happen. Sydney is one of the most progressive electorates in the country and the Greens need a strong voice and presence to present a real alternative.

The Greens stand up for what matters; a fairer society for the one in six Australian children living in

poverty, a transition to a renewable energy economy so all children can grow up in a safer world, and opportunities for them to get all the education they need.

We need to lift the game above domestic politics in so many areas. Deterrence to appease swinging voters is not enough to redirect refugee flows as people seek safety and protection and the pre-occupation with ALP in-fighting meant little attention was given to President Obama's historic initiatives on climate change.

Sydney deserves a representative who will speak for our community – from a party who will stand up for our future. Business as usual is no longer a safe option. It's time for real change.

Dianne Hiles
Greens candidate for Sydney

Government back down on unsupervised hunting

The Public Service Association of NSW has welcomed the state government's response to the Dunn Report and its backdown on allowing unsupervised access for hunting in national parks.

The report found there was an "inherent conflict associated with its [Game Council] functions to both represent the interests of hunters, and to regulate their activities". Leaving hunters to regulate themselves was never a good idea. And letting hunters run free inside National Parks, unsupervised, was an even worse idea.

The Dunn Report highlighted the need to have an independent regulator in place to oversee the behaviour of hunters and sporting shooters.

We have been campaigning on this issue for many months, and we are pleased to finally see some progress.

Greg Delprado
PSA

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Joan Coxedge invites you to the launch of *Old Cuba World Heritage*

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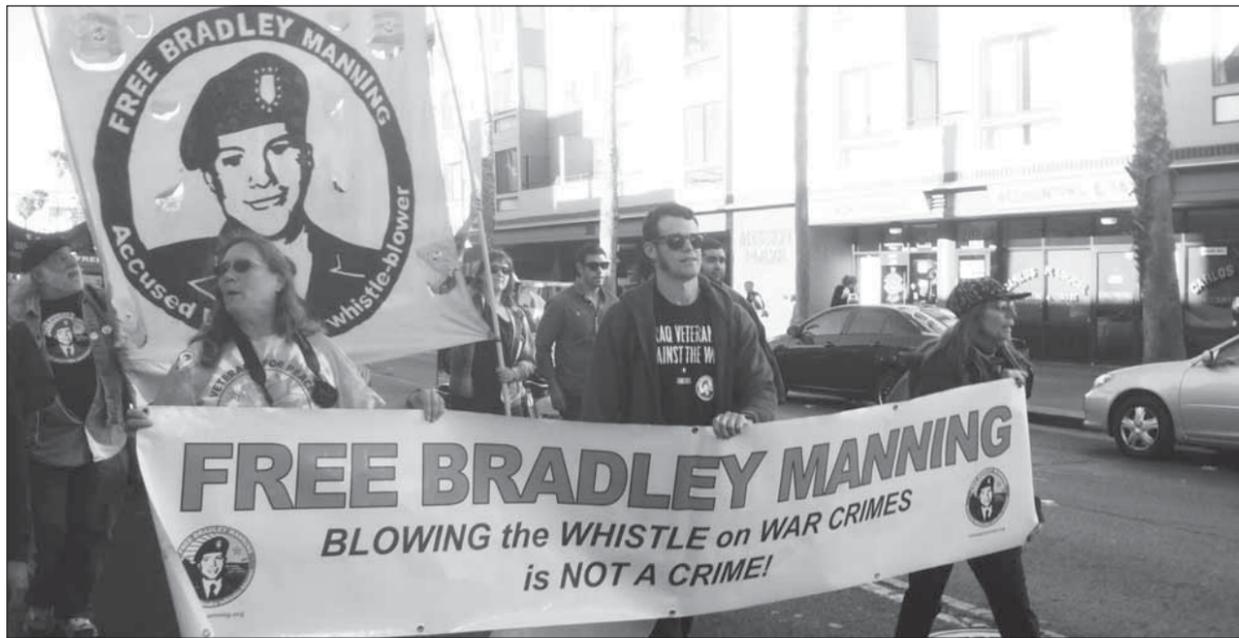
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Write a letter to the Editor

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Of drones and whistleblowers



Supporters march in San Francisco last year demanding Obama uphold his campaign promise to protect whistle-blowers.

While courageous whistleblower Bradley Manning continues to languish in a US military prison for daring to tell the world about the deliberate US policy of assassinating civilians and other unarmed opponents of its policies, the US leadership continues to pursue those same policies.

Manning is buoyed up by the multitude of expressions of support from around the world, including marches in support of his actions by concerned citizens in the USA itself.

Ben Griffin, a former soldier with Britain's SAS, who fought in both Iraq and Afghanistan and refused to return to Iraq for reasons of conscience, went on to found Veterans For Peace UK. Griffin told a public meeting in support of Manning held outside the US Embassy in London that "Bradley Manning is the most significant resister within the military in the last ten years. He saw that what was happening in Iraq and Afghanistan wasn't just a few

bad apples as our governments tell us, but a systematic policy."

However, ever since US President Barack Obama embraced the use of unmanned "drones" to kill those deemed "enemies" by the US government, the people who had such high hopes of him at the time of his election in 2008 have been sorely disappointed.

Of 368 total US drone attacks so far, 316 have been made since Obama became US President. Doesn't sound like a lot, you think? Those attacks have resulted in the deaths of 3,500 people. That sounds like a lot to me.

During the Vietnam War, the US bombed Vietnam savagely, but flyers as well as ground troops regularly returned to the USA in body-bags, a spectacle that went down very poorly with the US public, whose carefully nurtured image of America at war is one of glorious victory, not flag-draped coffins. Drones have no crew, so even if one is shot down there is no

embarrassing body-bag or loquacious prisoner to worry about.

For a modern-day aggressor, drones are ideal: as well as avoiding the possibility of body-bags, they are capable of accumulating masses of reconnaissance data, they can stay in the air for 18-20 hours continuously, they are much cheaper to run than conventional military jets and there are no pilots who might turn into anti-war resisters, whistle-blowers or peaceniks.

For these reasons, drones are being used more and more, with a wave of targeted drone attacks (assassinations) in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen. And it is not only the US that has increased its drone strikes. Britain's Ministry of Defence has also intensified its use of drones leased from Israel while it is reportedly in the process of doubling its own drone fleet.

I noted in this column two issues ago (#1599) that China was building drones now and

selling them to countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, so they can hit back at the aggressors. It's a measure that might help to force Britain and the US (and Israel) to agree with the growing number of countries calling for a ban on drones.

While the US is riding rough-shod over other countries' sovereignty and carrying out assassinations at will in the Third World, it is extremely probable that drones are being actively used elsewhere for intelligence gathering and keeping the populace terrorised. And if push comes to shove, I cannot see the US hesitating about the expediency of using drones for getting rid of troublesome critics in developed Western countries, can you?

After all, I am sure there are plenty of hawks in the White House or Congress who would see a drone attack on the Ecuadorean Embassy in London as a splendid way to finally silence that Julian Assange character. ☛



Sunday July 14–
Saturday July 20

Compass, the ABC's religious program slot, this week begins a series devoted to "what-ever happened to ..." various radical religious or social movements. The first episode deals with *The Hare Krishnas* (ABC1 Sunday July 14 at 6.30pm).

With their blatant brainwashing of children, their staffing of their restaurants etc with slave labour (however willing), the constant emphasis on abasing themselves before images or idols of their god Krishna, and the inevitable revelations that the top hierarchy of the Krishna church were having a high old time while their flock chanted and worked, it's a sad tale.

However, some people simply have a need to believe in a god. They cannot cope with the world as explained by science. And so the Krishnas are enjoying a renaissance. That's the saddest part of all.

Australian Aborigines are very conscious of the fact that their ancestors arrived here about 50,000 years ago. They were a late part of a series of migrations out of Africa by early humans, in search of game and edible plants, probably beginning with *Homo Erectus* and *Homo Habilis* many thousands of years earlier and culminating in the migration of *Homo Sapiens*. It was the last-named who ultimately walked all the way from Africa's east coast

around the rim of the Indian Ocean and down the edge of South East Asia and – via a bit of adventurous island hopping – finally reached Australia, and the end of the road.

They were hunter-gatherers, of course, and in Australia they found a land suited to that lifestyle, but very deficient in the things necessary for human society to develop beyond the hunter-gatherer stage. The ancient continent's grasses did not contain the grain-bearing varieties that people in other parts of the world were able at a later stage to develop into crops: rice, wheat, barley, or corn. Without grain-bearing grasses settled agriculture would prove impossible to achieve. The native wildlife had no suitable beasts of burden. Man was limited to what he himself could carry.

Without agriculture to provide a food surplus, civilisation was stalled. Even the trees were unhelpful, there being no softwoods, only the aptly-named hardwood which stone tools were helpless to work and shape effectively.

Elsewhere in the ancient world, agriculture was the stimulus for the development of metallurgy, as copper and then bronze (a mixture of copper and tin) tools became essential. Although both copper and tin could be found in Australia, the objective conditions did not make a quest for ways to make metal tools necessary or even advantageous. Metallurgy never developed because there was no use for it.

Those objective conditions kept the Aboriginal people stalled at the hunter-gatherer level with stone tools for 50,000 years. As the Russian naturalist and explorer Miklouho-Maclay showed in the late 19th century, this was not the result of some "flaw" in the Aboriginal makeup (as some experts thought at the time) but was simply the result of the objective conditions. Any other isolated group given the same conditions would have developed in the same way.

How the Aborigines reached Australia and then spread out across the continent is the subject matter of



Jawoyn Elder Margaret Katherine, Gabarnmung, Arnhem Land – *First Footprints* (ABC1 Sundays from July 14 at 9.35pm).

the new four-part documentary series *First Footprints* (ABC1 Sundays from July 14 at 9.35pm).

The commentary, read by Ernie Dingo, is understandably keen to highlight Aboriginal achievements: the first representation of the human face in early rock art is found all over Central Australia. French archaeologists reveal the impressive way an entire ridge in Arnhem Land was hollowed out over a very long period to leave a series of galleries that are covered in vivid ancient paintings. The vast gallery is older than Stone Henge and must have been just as difficult to build. Aborigines also carved the world's first maps into the rock in prominent places, to guide people to water-holes.

I have never before seen a program about the great apes that really brought home just how closely we are related to them, as does *Great Expectations* (ABC1 Friday July 19 at 8.00pm). And it does not appear to set out to do this. It simply emerges

through observing the behaviour of the two "leads".

First of all, the title is a pun and the program has nothing to do with Charles Dickens' classic. Instead it refers to the dedicated efforts of keepers at Adelaide Zoo to help their 30-year-old pregnant Sumatran orangutan Karta to have a successful birth. Her first four babies have all died shortly after birth and she is beginning to be thought of as a "bad mother". If that view persists, Karta will be taken out of the breeding program and separated from her mate, Kluet, a younger orangutan whom the keepers say is a "real sweetie".

In the course of the program, Karta has her baby but to the distress of the keepers, the baby's umbilical cord became tangled around the baby's neck and the infant never drew breath. However, Karta was not to blame and the breeding program is able to proceed.

What is fascinating to watch in this program is the behaviour of the

two orangs, their concern for each other, Karta's dislike of a too-intrusive camera, their willingness to cooperate with their keepers, and their mutual distress at the death and disappearance of the baby. The way they both search for it is very affecting, as they lift blankets to peer underneath.

John Hinde, the ABC's film reviewer many years ago, used to refer to orangs as "our hillbilly cousins", and never did the expression seem more apt than when watching this appealing pair of apes going about their business.

English stand-up comedian *Russell Kane* performs his live show *Smokescreens and Castles* in this week's episode of *Funny As* (ABC2 Saturday July 20 at 9.30pm). Kane frequently refers to himself as "left wing" but there is not much evidence of it here. True, it's about his own working class family and his right-wing father, but it rarely strays into wider issues. Probably a matter of personal taste. ☹



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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;

July 19

ASIO'S ABSURD POWERS – WHY THE CAMPAIGN FOR REFORM NEEDS TO SUCCEED

Stephen Blanks, Secretary, NSW Council for Civil Liberties;

Nicola McGarrity, Lecturer, Law UNSW;

July 26

THE FUTURE OF EUROPE – REFORM OR DECLINE?

Satyajit Das, ex-banker and author of *Extreme Money and Traders, Guns and Money*;

August 2

INDONESIA – WHAT ARE THE PROGRESSIVE FORCES AND WHAT ARE THEIR INFLUENCE?

Peter King, Dr, Research Associate, Sydney University;

Vanessa Hearman, Dr, Lecturer Sydney University;

August 9

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Was Washington behind Egypt's coup?

Michael Chossudovsky

“[US Defence Secretary] Hagel and [US Chief of Staff General] Dempsey were walking a fine line ... expressing concern while attempting to avoid the impression that the US was manipulating events behind the scenes.” (Military.com, July 3, 2013)

The protest movement is directed against the US and its proxy Muslim Brotherhood regime. The Muslim Brotherhood had been spearheaded into the government with the support of Washington as a “replacement rather than an “alternative” to Hosni Mubarak, who had faithfully obeyed the orders of the Washington Consensus from the outset of his presidency.

While the Armed Forces have cracked down on the Muslim Brotherhood, the coup d'état is ultimately intended to manipulate the protest movement and prevent the accession of a “real people's government”. The overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi by the Egyptian Armed forces was not carried out against US interests; it was instigated to ensure “continuity” on behalf of Washington.

The Muslim Brotherhood and the CIA

Western intelligence agencies have a longstanding history of collaboration with the Brotherhood. Britain's support of the Brotherhood instrumented through the British Secret Service dates back to the 1940s. Starting in the 1950s, according to former intelligence official William Baer, “The CIA [funnelled] support to the Muslim Brotherhood because of “the Brotherhood's commendable capability to overthrow Nasser”.

These covert links to the CIA were maintained throughout the government of Hosni Mubarak.

From the outset of the “Arab Spring”, the Obama administration's objective was to undermine secular governments in the Middle East and North Africa and install a model “Islamic State”, which would serve US geopolitical and corporate interests.

“Strong economic medicine”

The protest movement against Mubarak in early 2011 was in response to the devastating impacts of IMF reforms. Initiated at the height of the Gulf War in early 1991, these reforms – which span over a period of more than 20 years – have served to impoverish the Egyptian people, while also “opening up” the Egyptian economy to the influx of “foreign investors”.

The Nile Valley which was Egypt's breadbasket for more than 3,000 years was destroyed in favour of food imports from the US and the European Union.

The resulting deregulation of food prices, sweeping privatisation, austerity measures had led to poverty and mass unemployment. In turn, social programs collapsed, Egypt's economy and financial system were destabilised.

Continuity pertaining to neo-liberal economic reform is central to US sponsored regime change. Morsi's accession to the presidency was conditional upon his acceptance of IMF “economic medicine”.

In August 2012, IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde stated candidly that “The IMF will accompany Egypt as it undertakes this



A fiery demonstrator motivates the demonstrators while compatriots wave flags and picket signs in support of his anti-Morsi message.

challenging journey... It's an Egyptian journey and the IMF is a partner in that journey.”

“We are impressed by the strategy that President Morsi and Prime Minister Kandil have proposed during our meetings today,” Lagarde said at a press conference attended jointly by Kandil. (IMF, August 22, 2012)

A new IMF package of (deadly) macro-economic reforms was launched with a view to “managing Egypt's political and economic transition” (Ibid). The resulting IMF sponsored “transition” imposed by Egypt's external creditors has served to exacerbate rather than alleviate the economic and social crisis.

Social conditions have deteriorated dramatically since the demise of Hosni Mubarak. The mass protest movement against President Morsi was in large part motivated by the fact that the Mubarak-era macro-economic reforms imposed by Washington and Wall Street continued to prevail, leading to a further process of impoverishment.

The role of the Armed Forces

The media has portrayed the Egyptian armed forces as broadly “supportive” of the protest movement, without addressing the close relationship between the leaders behind the military coup and their US counterparts.

The fact that segments of the mass movement called for the armed forces to play a “supportive role”, is an obvious play:

This is the message that the armed forces received from all over urban Egypt, its cities, and its villages; it (the military) recognised the

invitation, understood its intentions, appreciated its necessity and got closer to the national scene hoping, willing and abiding by all limits of duty, responsibility and honesty.

Known and documented, the mass movement has been infiltrated. Sectors of the opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood government are supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and Freedom House. The Kifaya civil society movement is supported by the US based International Centre for Non-Violent Conflict.

The role of the armed forces is not to protect a grassroots movement. Quite the opposite: the objective is to manipulate the uprising and quell dissent on behalf of Washington.

The objective of the military takeover is to ensure that the downfall of the Muslim Brotherhood government does not result in a political transition which undermines US control over the Egyptian State and military.

Let us be under no illusions. While there are important divisions within the military, Egypt's top brass ultimately take their orders from the Pentagon.

General Al Sisi was in permanent liaison by telephone with US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel from the very outset of the protest movement. Press reports confirm that he consulted him several times in the days leading up to the coup d'état. It is highly unlikely that General Al Sisi would have acted without a “green light” from the Pentagon.

Hagel phoned al-Sisi last Thursday [June 30] as the huge demonstrations calling for Morsi's

ouster took on an increasingly anti-US tone, and spoke with him again on Tuesday [July 2] after al-Sisi delivered an ultimatum warning that the military would act if Morsi failed to make concessions.

In turn General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, was in permanent contact with his counterpart General Sedki Sobhi, chief of staff of Egypt's Supreme Council of the Armed Forces:

“Pentagon officials declined to give specifics on the conversations between Hagel and al-Sisi, but chief Pentagon spokesman George Little said that ‘US officials at all levels [of the military] have made it clear that we support the democratic process in Egypt and that we hope that this period of tension can be resolved in a peaceful manner and that violence can be avoided’...” (Military.com)

According to Military.com, Hagel and Dempsey “were walking a fine line” ... “expressing concern while attempting to avoid the impression that the US was manipulating events behind the scenes.”

Egypt is the largest recipient of US military aid after Israel.

The Egyptian military is controlled by the Pentagon.

In the words of General Anthony Zinni, former Commander of US Central Command (CENTCOM):

“Egypt is the most important country in my area of responsibility because of the access it gives me to the region.”

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