



Criminal neglect of children

Anna Pha

News of the death of a two-year-old Tanilla Opal Warrick-Deaves in NSW last week was a grim reminder of a system in crisis. Relatives of the young girl say they made 33 reports to the Department of Family and Community Services* (FACS) raising serious concerns about her welfare. At least one neighbour is reported as contacting the police. The only call that was responded to was to triple-O when it was too late to save the young life. Tanilla is not an isolated case. There is a long-running tragic saga of neglect of the most vulnerable in our society – our children. The system is failing our children.

According to the NSW government's own statistics, 61,308 children and young people were reported as being at risk in the year 2011-12. But only 16,409 were interviewed by a caseworker and given a safety check. That means 44,899 children – almost 75 percent of those deemed to be at risk – were not followed up that year.

These appalling statistics are not just numbers. They are children whose welfare and safety, even lives, are in jeopardy.

Caseworkers are stretched to breaking point. There are too few to respond to calls, and they have too little time with each family. Staffing cuts have added additional pressures and it is not surprising that staff are suffering from stress and other health problems, and leaving the service.

In 2011-12, the equivalent of 117 full-time caseworker positions were abolished, with the funding for them transferred to the non-government/private sector, as part of a program to make child protection a "shared responsibility".

A leaked internal treasury memo showed the NSW state government has plans to cut nearly 1,000 jobs from the Department of Family and Community Services over four years.

Steve Turner, NSW Assistant Secretary of the Public Service Association (PSA) which represents community service workers, said the O'Farrell government's slashing of community services staff is placing vulnerable children and families at risk across NSW. The government is failing in its duty of care to thousands of the



most at risk children and their families in our community.

"Staff find themselves overwhelmed by insufficient resources and a high administration burden that stops them from essential face-to-face work with vulnerable children and their families," the PSA said.

The NSW budget papers reveal funding cuts of \$16.4 million from \$262.2 million in 2012-13 to \$245.8 million in 2013-14. Instead of increasing the budget allocation, the Minister Pru Goward is in denial that the spending has been cut; the government has just made a few "accounting changes"! The cuts, however, are very evident on the ground.

The Council of Social Service of NSW (CSS) criticised the cut in funding for early-intervention programs for families that provide drug and alcohol services, parenting skills and give mental health support. The CSS of NSW called for a \$20 million funding increase for early intervention programs.

Even in cold economic terms – which is all that neo-liberal governments care about – it is a false economy. In the longer term it costs less if children are protected and families given the assistance they require.

Early this year the NSW Ombudsman confirmed staff concerns about a lack of resources compromising outcomes for children at risk. His report showed there were too many serious cases with not enough caseworkers and support staff to respond.

Pru Goward refuses to increase funding or even acknowledge the freeze or need for more funding.

It is an indictment of a system in which governments can find millions of dollars to subsidise the corporate sector but cannot find enough money to give children and their families the support they need.

It requires more than increased funding for staff and resources to carry out early intervention work and respond to crises. Child protection workers cannot do it alone, even with enough staff and resources to attend to all calls.

The causes behind family breakdown, behind neglect, abuse and violence towards children or partner need to be addressed. They are many and varied, but some of the most common threads include poverty, unemployment, mental illness, family breakdown and drug and alcohol abuse, or a parent having been

subjected to abuse or not had any opportunity in their own childhood.

Families on welfare payments, such as single parents and the unemployed are under enormous stress, as are low income working parents. Casualisation has created additional pressures resulting in lack of income security, family unfriendly work hours and no predictability of working hours. Social security payments must be raised.

The high cost of childcare compounds the problems of low income parents. Early childhood education is also important but out of reach for many. Job security and higher wages are a vital part of the equation.

Housing is another problem. How can parents on the minimum wage keep a roof over their family's heads when rental eats up more than half their income? Part of the solution lies in increasing the provision of public housing and rental controls in the private market.

It should not be left to church and other charities to put food on tables, provide clothing and attempt to find shelter for families or homeless children.

* FACS was previously known as DOCS – Department of Community Services. ✪

That means 44,899 children deemed to be at risk were not checked in that year.

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Guardian

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Indonesia strategic priority

Most of the tabloid media's coverage of the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's recent visit to Indonesia has focused on asylum seekers. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Rudd issued a joint Communiqué which "reaffirmed their commitment to continue to develop a regional solution, involving countries of origin, transit and destination which covers elements of prevention, early detection and protection, to combating trafficking in persons and people smuggling and other related transnational crimes."

The two leaders "stressed the importance of avoiding unilateral actions which might jeopardise such a comprehensive regional approach and which might cause operational or other difficulties to any party." In other words a strong, but diplomatic rejection of Opposition leader Tony Abbott's "turn the boats back." The PM supported proposals by Indonesia for a conference of key origin, transit, and destination countries "to explore concrete operational and policy responses, including regional approaches and efforts to enhance border security, in addressing irregular movement of persons."

Trade, in particular beef, was also on the agenda, with the PM announcing a \$60 million package over 10 years to establish an Indonesia-Australia red meat and cattle forum. Indonesia has imposed import caps on Australian beef following the temporary ban on live exports. It is inviting Australian investors to develop a beef industry there. "I believe a core message from this meeting is we need to expand our economic horizons – do much more in terms of the economic relationship between us," Rudd told a gathering in Indonesia following his talks with the Indonesian President.

The Gillard government's *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* devoted a section to developing stronger relations with the "priority" Asian nations of China, Japan, Indonesia, India and South Korea and the need for deeper and more comprehensive bilateral ties – public and private sector and institutional with those countries. This was one of the prime aims of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's visit to Indonesia. "Indonesia is critical to Australia's interests. I believe Australia is critical to Indonesia's interests. Indonesia is also emerging as an economic powerhouse of South East Asia. GDP of one trillion US dollars ... by 2030 it is estimated to be the seventh largest economy in the world; and by 2050 the fourth largest economy in the world behind China, the US and India. Something big is happening in Indonesia and everyone in Australia and the world should pay attention. This is a population of 250 million people ..."

Apart from seeking to strengthen Australia's economic ties with Indonesia in the interests of big business, Rudd's other priority is defence cooperation. Australia, as US imperialism's deputy in the region, has a particular role in drawing Indonesia into the US fold. Indonesia was a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). It has a large Muslim population and strategically is important to Australia and the US in the US's plans for domination over the Asian Pacific and in particular for the containment of China. Rudd's main focus, almost to the point of obsession, is China.

"Both Leaders reiterated their commitment to strengthening defence and security cooperation, including through the signing of the Defence Cooperation Arrangement by Defence Ministers in September 2012. Both leaders welcomed expanding cooperation, including in strategic policy and planning, and capability building," the Communiqué said. In an oblique reference to China, and in line with the US's wishes to control the seas off China, it continued: "Both countries called for the early conclusion of a code of conduct in the South China Sea."

"Our defence relationship is strong. It's our most important in the region. We have signed defence cooperation agreements and we've held our inaugural defence ministers meeting only last year", Rudd said in a speech following the meeting. He reaffirmed the government's support for Indonesia's ongoing occupation of West Papua and agreed to co-operate in relation to East Timor. "Australia, Bapak President, wants to work with you in a way which you would best suggest we can be helpful in making sure that we bring about a long term, stable, peaceful, prosperous and secure Papua as part of the Republic of Indonesia," Rudd said in the same speech.

The aim is US hegemony and Australia has an important role to play in locking Indonesia into the US's camp as a strong ally. As Labor's 2013 Defence White Paper noted, "The United States will continue to be the world's strongest military power and the most influential strategic actor in our region for the foreseeable future."

PRESS FUND

Last week former federal minister Craig Emerson described his father's anguish at being a prisoner of war in Germany, with no prospects, not knowing where he was, or how long he would be imprisoned. Speaking of which, that's exactly what asylum seekers experience under the current "no advantage" policy! Former immigration minister Chris Bowen, who was responsible for implementing that infamous policy, has now declared that the ALP shouldn't enter into coalitions with other parties. That would include the Greens, who bitterly opposed off-shore processing, mandatory detention and the "no advantage", policy. And so do we! If you agree with us, please send us a contribution for the next edition. Many thanks to the following, for their generous contributions this week:

MH \$500, Ina Heidtman \$40, Mark Mannion \$5, FB Rouady \$50, "Round Figure" \$10

This week's total: \$605 Progressive total: \$4,800

Acknowledged achievements

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) has acknowledged the achievements, history and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples this NAIDOC week.

"In this nation of immigrants, it's important to acknowledge the history and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," said Acting FECCA Chair Dr Sundram Sivamalai. "FECCA, as the peak body representing immigrants to Australia, respects the unique and long-standing culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the traditional owners of the land that is now home to people from around the globe."

"While the circumstances of immigrants and Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander people are very different, there are some areas of opportunity with respect to pursuing common interests.

Both immigrants and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may be subject to racism and discrimination in the community and the workplace. FECCA is proud to participate on the National Anti-Racism Partnership alongside the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples (Congress), to work towards our common goal of eliminating racism and discrimination in Australia."

FECCA is proud to have been the first organisation to sign an Accord with the Congress recognising Australia's First Peoples. "Following the Accord, FECCA's Executive Board voted to insert an

acknowledgement of Australia's First Peoples in FECCA's own Constitution," commented Dr Sivamalai. "FECCA stands behind the Congress in seeking recognition of Australia's First Peoples in the Australian Constitution."

He added, "FECCA looks forward to further discussions about multiculturalism and reconciliation at a dedicated Panel session at FECCA's 2013 Conference at the Gold Coast".

Dr Sivamalai concluded, "NAIDOC week is an opportunity for all Australians to learn more about the distinct cultural identities of Australia's First Peoples and, in the context of our multicultural society, celebrate the incredibly cultural diversity that shapes our communities". ☘

Obituary

Bernie Dwyer, journalist, Cuban Five supporter

Bernie Dwyer, long-time journalist for Radio Habana Cuba, and Irish citizen, died on July 10 after a long and valiant fight against cancer.

Co-producer with Roberto Ruiz of the seminal documentary, *Mission Against Terror*, she quickly won the admiration and support of Cuban Five supporters around the world for the inspiring and educational film that brought to life the anti-terrorist mission of Gerardo, Ramón, Antonio, Fernando and René, and explained so eloquently their freedom struggle. Debuted in 2004, it remains a valuable instrument and one of the most important films about the Cuban Five.

Bernie was recognised not only for her dedicated journalist reporting on the Five, she was also an advocate for the Cuban heroes. She came to the United States for their three federal court hearings, Miami in 2004, Atlanta in 2006 and 2007, and their re-sentencing. She worked tirelessly in Europe to speak to many audiences for their cause.

The Cuban Five heroes are in mourning for Bernie's passing. Fernando González from Safford federal prison in Arizona, wrote on July 10, "I just learned from my mother that Bernie Dwyer passed away. It is very sad and a great loss

for all of us. She was a fighter and a staunch supporter of The Five. She had a great talent, too, which she always used to advance just causes."

We in the National Committee to Free the Cuban Five who worked with her since 2001 remember her warmth, verve and journalistic professionalism, and Irish revolutionary spirit. She fought valiantly to survive cancer for several years, and never gave up working for justice.

Our profound sentiments go out to her family and friends and colleagues at Radio Habana Cuba. Bernie Dwyer, ¡Presente! ☘

Help with biography required

Jan Richardson is writing a biography of Don McLeod and needs our help.

The archives have contradictory information about McLeod and the Communist Party, and Jan is trying to get this right in the biography.

Can you answer any of the following questions or put her in touch with Party veterans who may be able to help?

1. How long was Don McLeod a member of the CPA?
2. Did Don McLeod ever stay with Frank Hardy in Sydney?
3. Don McLeod was a consultative delegate at a CPA State Conference in WA. He is reported to have criticised JB

Miles who responded positively while other delegates were incensed by an attack on Miles. When was this conference held and does anyone have more information about it?

4. There is a report that the CPA asked Don McLeod to recruit Aborigines and he refused. Is this true? Does anyone have any more information about this?
5. When and why did Don McLeod leave the CPA?

If you can help, please contact Jan Richardson at janrich@bigpond.com or Hannah Middleton at peace@mira.net

On 1 May 1946 Indigenous pastoral workers walked off the job by pre-arrangement. The decision

to declare the strike had been made through a series of meetings and word circulated throughout the region by the distribution of calendars, marking 1 May 1946 as the day to stop work.

Mass arrests were made, and many of the strike leaders were incarcerated: Strike leaders Dooley Bin Bin, Clancy McKenna and Don McLeod were arrested and sentenced to three months hard labour.

Desert people with McLeod continued working in mining under a new corporate structure called Nomads. Ultimately, McLeod's Nomads Pty Ltd acquired Strelley Station and still maintains its independence. ☘

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Butts to be returned to CPA 74 Buckingham St Surry Hills NSW 2010 by August 19, 2013.

Packer's second stage win for super-parasite casino

Peter Mac

James Packer has won the second (detailed) stage of his bid for a second Casino licence in Sydney, and hence for his proposal to build a huge casino and hotel building at Barangaroo whose proportions perfectly symbolise the corporate greed of his company Crown Holdings.

Echoing the words of Rupert Murdoch (and come to think of it, Uriah Heap) Packer declared: "It's been a long journey, and I'm extremely humbled to be given this opportunity".

He still has to negotiate his way through the third negotiating stage that terminates in either rejection or the signing of a contract. However, that's virtually a foregone conclusion. The government has rejected a rival bid from Echo Entertainment, the company that runs the existing Star Casino at Darling Harbour.

Barangaroo's treatment has been characterised by the insatiable avarice of would-be developers, and the eager complicity of successive state governments.

Nowhere is this more graphically displayed than in Packer's \$1.3 billion super casino proposal. Its proponents say it's as impressive as the Sydney Opera House, but others have stated that it's more suitable to Dubai or Las Vegas than Sydney.

At 250 metres high, it would be Sydney's tallest building, far higher than previously allowed in the Barangaroo concept plan, and would cast enormous shadows on the CBD and surrounding suburbs. It has already caused major changes to the planning of the Barangaroo open recreation areas.

Packer claims the building would be carbon neutral. However, he also says he shouldn't have to meet sustainability targets for the gaming rooms, because the intensive air conditioning they require consumes enormous amounts of energy, and the air-conditioning is required because patrons would be allowed to smoke in them.

But the reason they'll be allowed to smoke is that Packer wants to

attract the high rollers, so the government has given the gaming rooms an exemption from health and safety regulations!

Packer also wants the increase in the value of the hotel caused by the presence of the gaming rooms to be disregarded in determining the price of the site. He says that the government will get quite enough tax, and that increases in the value of the land would decrease the value of the licence.

For or against

By basing the selection for a second casino on the desire to maximise returns for the state coffers, and on the idea that what's good for Packer is also good for the state, the government has effectively joined Packer as a fellow-parasite in the gambling industry.

Announcing the second stage approval, Premier Barry O'Farrell commented with great enthusiasm: "The value to gross state product and the value of extra taxes and fees from Crown was respectively 26 percent and 3 percent higher than the proposal put forward by Echo".

The licence would cost Packer \$100 million, and the gaming revenues would be taxed at 29 percent, not the 27.5 percent for which he was arguing. (Apparently he was entitled to negotiate his tax rate, rather than just having to pay it, as the rest of us do.)

Moreover, as a condition of the approval, the Crown casino must deliver at least a billion dollars in revenue to the state in its first 15 years of operation. But if you think that's hard on Packer, think again.

He's a multi-billionaire, and paying the government that much (on average \$67 million per annum) would be chicken feed for him. With the help of investments in casinos in Macau he has more than recovered from the \$300 million crash of his telecommunications company, One Tel, ten years ago.

Greens MP John Kaye commented:

"It's all too easy for James Packer. For just \$67 million a year Premier Barry O'Farrell is letting him plunge



NSW further into the international casino economy. Far less than 0.1 percent of the state's budget, the minute contribution Crown will make to the state's bottom line is swamped by the social and economic costs".

So many questions

The government agrees in principle (if that's the right expression) with the issuing of a second casino licence, so why didn't it invite open tenders?

In the unlikely event that Packer fails to win the third stage, tenders for a second licence will be invited anyway. So why didn't the government do this initially, instead of treating the Crown scheme as an "unsolicited proposal" and entering into direct individual negotiations with Packer, a practice forbidden under normal competitive tendering processes?

Were the changes in the government's conditions regarding Packer's proposal, particularly the granting of permission for NSW residents to be VIP rollers, also applied to Echo's bid, and if not, why not?

OK, Crown has said that poker machines would be banned in the casino, and that NSW residents who don't qualify as high rollers (i.e. willing to stake \$25,000 minimum) would

not be allowed in the VIP areas. But isn't it true that other areas are to be set aside for them to indulge in bacarrat, blackjack and/or roulette?

Speaking of which, why are the minimum bets only \$30 per hand for bacarrat, \$20 for blackjack and \$25 for roulette? Wouldn't their presence, and the minimum bet size, create what one observer called "a full blown casino" that would ensnare ordinary working people in its vicious grasp, just as other casinos do?

Why is the redevelopment of Barangaroo being dominated by Packer's casino proposal? Why is the government seriously contemplating approving construction of the proposed Crown casino, given that it's a monstrosity, and surely the most arrogant building in Sydney?

Isn't it true that the casino's operations would provide an opportunity

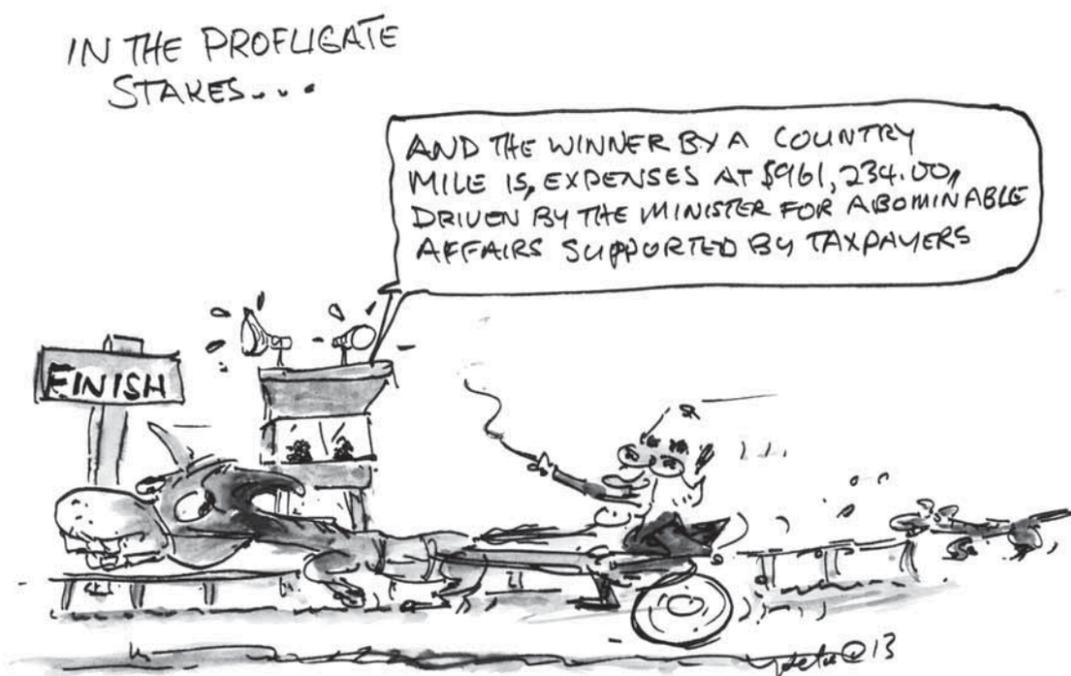
for money-laundering by local and overseas organised crime groups, as has happened in other casinos?

And above all, why should so much reliance for the state's future development be placed on the corrupt gambling industry? Shouldn't we be trying to reduce the devastating impact of gambling instead of promoting it? Shouldn't we be striving to develop really productive industries rather than socially destructive ones?

And to reduce gambling's impact, shouldn't we be using powerful psychological deterrents, like the federal Labor government's enforced inclusion of graphic warnings against smoking and the mandatory use of plain paper packaging for cigarettes?

As Bertolt Brecht observed, so many particulars, so many questions. ★

Pete's Corner



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Income management comes under attack

Darren Coyne

The federal government continues to face fierce opposition to the income management regime, six years after it was first introduced as part of the controversial Northern Territory intervention. The Australian Greens led the charge on June 21, the anniversary of when then Howard government minister Mal Brough announced the legislation, which was then continued by the Labor government.

Greens Senator Rachel Siewert described it as an expensive and unfair regime that continued to stigmatise people rather than help them.

She said the millions that had been spent on income management, both in the NT and at five trial sites, would have delivered far better outcomes for people had it been used to provide actual support

and assistance, rather than just punishment.

"People affected by income management consistently speak about being stigmatised, ashamed and embarrassed. Hurting people in this way is never acceptable, but it is sadly typical of the top-down approach taken by the old parties," Senator Siewert said.

Meanwhile, the Australian Council of Social Service, the National Welfare Rights Network and St Vincent de Paul Society joined forces to call on the government to dump the approach.

"It should be replaced with a genuinely voluntary scheme, which is part of a broader development plan in communities," the heads of those organisations said in a statement.

They pointed to the costs of the regime, saying that a person subject to income management in the NT

cost between \$6,600 and \$7,900 in remote areas, and \$4,600 in the five trial sites. "More than half a billion dollars 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," they wrote.

They also warned that the regime was expanding. "The government is to rollout a major expansion of compulsory income management from July 1 in the five trial sites and the Northern Territory, with little warning and very limited consultation," they wrote.

"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 aged under 25 leaving jail and moving to one of the '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.

"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 at 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."

In Playford, South Australia,

which is one of the five trial sites, a coalition of more than 40 organisations has formed to fight the introduction of income management into the area.

The coalition believes the \$23 million that has been budgeted for income management in Playford should instead fund more community services that empower and build the skills of at-risk people, like anti-addiction programs, family therapy, financial counselling, and other support and training programs.

But despite the opposition, the federal government appears intent to continue the regime. Just recently, federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin announced funding to investigate income management for Ceduna in South Australia as part of a broader package of measures to combat alcohol abuse in the area.

Koori Mail ✪

Women union membership the majority in WA

Vinnie Molina

Recent data released by the Australia Bureau of Statistics (ABS) on Trade Union Membership, showed there has been a steady decline in trade union membership in recent years.

The report, released in April 2013 presents data from the years 2011 and 2012. It clearly shows how changes in the economy and ideological attacks on the right to organise by both Labor and Liberal governments have had a direct impact on trade union membership.

The ABS reports that out of 9 million workers only 18% belong to a trade union on a national basis but trade union density varies from state to state. Only 14.5% of workers in Western Australia are members of a trade union.

A significant outcome in recent times is that for the first time in WA's history the number of women who are trade union members is higher than men. In WA 52% of all union members are women; despite these figures in WA, women are still earning less than men, the biggest wage gap in the country.

Legislation contributes to the gap in wages and represents a real attack on the right to organise. The fact that women in WA represent the majority of union members in the state is a great achievement and should be emulated in all other states. History has shown when women are organised they have been able to achieve real gains, such as the right to vote.

The CPA calls for the repeal of all draconian laws that attack the right to organise and campaigns for the elimination of the gender wage gap. ✪



CFMEU members at the Mundaring Water Treatment Plant. (Photo: Vinnie Molina)

Deakin staff reject pay offer

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) has rejected Deakin University's proposed salary increase of just 3% a year over 4 years. "Staff are not about to get excited just because the Vice-Chancellor has opened her purse and rattled a few coins," said Dr Colin Long, NTEU Victorian Division secretary, and member of the Deakin bargaining team.

"Staff expect a realistic offer that both protects their existing working conditions and recognises their work in generating record profits for the institution."

An analysis of Deakin's annual reports by the NTEU reveals a university with extremely strong income, profits and operating cash flows, and high holdings of cash and investments.

"The university recorded a 2012 surplus of \$108.9 million," Dr Long said. "The university's holdings

of cash and investments were at a record level of \$337.7 million at the end of 2012.

"The Deakin Vice-Chancellor pockets \$750,000, a quarter of a million dollars more than the salary of the Australian Prime Minister. The top ten earners at Deakin reward themselves with salaries totalling \$4.1 million.

"These are the people who think a 3% salary offer to the average Deakin worker is generous," Dr Long said, "The average Deakin worker is angry that the hard work they put in every day is somehow lost in the minds of the millionaire bosses."

He said that Deakin staff won't accept that they have to absorb federal funding cuts, especially given the record profits that their work generates. Staff won't accept cuts to working conditions such as redundancy provisions that make it easier to sack people, watered down grievance

procedures or limited attempts to address insecure work.

"We are also extremely angry that Deakin management has not taken seriously our demand to reduce the level of academic casualisation. Offering six fixed-terms contracts and six ongoing positions when there are hundreds of casual staff struggling to make a living at Deakin is insulting.

"The NTEU takes seriously the need to improve teaching quality by reduced academic casualisation and improved workforce planning, even if management doesn't."

The current collective agreement expired a year ago. Deakin staff have been negotiating a new collective agreement with management for over eight months. Staff are implementing industrial actions including a ban on the transmission of results, with industrial action set to escalate if an agreement is not made soon. ✪

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Sydney

Cheap groceries costing the earth

Bob Briton

It was Jeff Kennett who sparked the sudden media interest in the plight of "fresh food" in Australia. The former Victorian Premier, as keen on a fresh loaf as anybody else, was incensed that the bread he was tempted to buy at Coles was labelled "Made in Ireland". Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) chief Rod Sims got onto the matter and eventually a case was brought against the giant supermarket chain for misleading people that their bread is made from scratch in their stores.

The higher-ups had seemingly caught on to what the rest of us have known for years – that, in this era of capitalist globalisation, our food has to travel a hell of a long way before it winds up in our stomachs.

The health benefits of fresh food are well known while the ultimate consequences of all these extremely well-travelled supermarket purchases can only be guessed at. The recklessness of burning huge amounts of fossil fuels to get "fresh" food to far flung markets is of no concern to global food monopolies, either.

Kennett's Irish bread has become symbolic of a problem that capitalism can't solve because it involves the

basic way it operates. Capital scours the globe looking for any minimal advantage to maximise profits. In this instance, frozen dough is sent over 17,000 kilometres from Ireland to Australia to save cents on every loaf. Giant factories like Hiestand in Switzerland are in on the act, too. If we ever thought that, at least, food processing jobs were safe from job-crunching effects of globalisation, we can think again.

The effects of \$1 and \$2 a loaf bread on convenience stores have been devastating. A piece in *The Australian Financial Review* last month noted that Australian bakers Goodman Fielder and George Weston are trying to restore margins by charging delivery fees and refusing to take back their unsold bread. Local bakery sales have slumped since the cut price loaves hit the shelves in the big two supermarkets and their allied petrol stations.

"The sad thing for Australia is that international companies have production lines massively larger than our own," Mr Kennett said, "so therefore our duopolists can easily import just the off-runs, to put it that way, of some of these and sell them cheaper but at a higher profit, than our local producers can produce." Wake up and smell the capitalism!

Obviously, access to such vast international markets gives the

duopolists a big stick to deal with local suppliers. A race to the bottom is underway for many lines previously thought immune to competition from low-wage centres. Asian cauliflowers and cabbages are now squeezing locally-grown ones out of the "fresh" produce sections of the big supermarkets. "Our labour makes it just so expensive compared with Third World labour arrangements," Victoria University Institute for Supply Chain and Logistics director Dr Hermione Parsons said recently. As poor as the piece-rates are on Australian farms, they can always go lower if the monopolists get their way.

Australia is still a net exporter of food but the times are changing. Fruit growers were among the first hit by the globalising trend and it has some way to play out. More than 750,000 trees are expected to be uprooted and burned soon in northern Victoria's Goulburn Valley after demand from the SPC Ardmona cannery dropped by half since April. Third generation growers are fighting to stay on farms established by soldier-settlers in the late 1940s. Elsewhere, farmers are banding together to fight the encroachment of coal interests keen to begin "fracking" for gas on prime agricultural land.

Jeff Kennett has apparently joined that group of former Liberal leaders



who spent their political lives serving big business interests but now wish to patch up some of the damage. He wants a national agriculture and water plan to do something about the trends that disturb him in his retirement.

He says he raised this with former PM John Howard in 1996 but, obviously, nothing was done to rein in the corporate interests wreaking havoc in rural Australia. We needn't expect change from the ACCC, either. They

have previously "investigated" the purchasing practices of Coles and Woolies and found nothing wrong. Promises from the Coalition of a "root and branch" review of the *Competition and Consumer Act* ring hollow. The parlous state of "fresh" food in Australia and across the world is one more demonstration that, while we might be able to afford Irish bread in our weekly shop, we cannot afford capitalism any longer. ☹

Sydney

Solidarity night with Iranian workers movement

The Iranian workers are struggling with pickets & strikes under the dictatorial, anti-worker & despotic, religious regime continuously.

Those who suffer the worst experiences under the Islamic regime at work or in custody are struggling & resisting vigorously.

The fearless & revealing speeches of Reza Shahabi in the notorious Evin prison are a great example of our claims.

* Freedom fighters & revolutionaries,

* Defending equality, justice & freedom are necessary & humanitarian acts.

Come & join us in the solidarity night with the struggle of the Iranian workers & show your support.

The program includes:

Speeches of labour activists & the leaders of working class

Poems & music with the support of the Toprak music group

Entrance fee including dinner \$15 (Free entrance & dinner for children)

7 pm August 3

70 Yarrara Rd, Pennant Hills

Contact number: 0413 489 420

Solidarity Committee with Iranian Workers Movement- Australia

SA CPA celebrates 24th State Conference



On July 27, we will be celebrating our 24th State Conference and we'd like to invite you to join us to toast the occasion at the conclusion of official business.

The Conference is being held at the Royal Park Doghouse Club, 66 Wattle Avenue and the public event will begin at 4.30pm, concluding at around 6pm.

Anna Pha, former editor and now regular contributor to Party's weekly newspaper, *The Guardian*, is our guest speaker.

Toast the 24th Conference of the Communist Party of Australia (SA)

Saturday July 27, 4.30pm - 6.00pm

Royal Park Doghouse Club, 66 Wattle Avenue, Royal Park, Adelaide
Catching the bus? Closest stop is Stop 33A, Tapleys Hill Rd.

We look forward to you joining us to celebrate the work of the CPA and our 24th State Conference (South Australia).

Melbourne

COME AND ENJOY THE ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF THE CPA'S WEEKLY PAPER The Guardian



We invite you to celebrate and help us improve the paper by talking to our comrades. Say what you like and needs to change.

SUPPORT OUR 12th CONGRESS 2013

ACTIVE AND UNITED FOR A SOCIALIST AUSTRALIA

This will be the main fundraising event in Melbourne for the CPA's 12th Congress to be held in October 2013.

HELP US BUILD A PARTY WHICH IS A CENTRE OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY

There will be an introduction to what will be discussed at the 12th Congress.

Also speakers on the current international struggles for worker, democratic and secular rights and against military intervention.

The struggles in Greece, Turkey and Syria are only part of the significant people's fight back.

WHERE: Democritus House
583 High Street, Northcote.

WHEN: Sunday 28th July 2-5pm

COST: \$15

Afternoon Tea Provided, Drinks Available
Enquiries 9639 1550

Edward Snowden: A conscience,

William Blum

In the course of his professional life in the world of national security Edward Snowden must have gone through numerous probing interviews, lie detector examinations, and exceedingly detailed background checks, as well as filling out endless forms carefully designed to catch any kind of falsehood or inconsistency. The *Washington Post* (June 10) reported that “several officials said the CIA will now undoubtedly begin reviewing the process by which Snowden may have been hired, seeking to determine whether there were any missed signs that he might one day betray national secrets.”

Yes, there was a sign they missed – Edward Snowden had something inside him shaped like a conscience, just waiting for a cause.

It was the same with me. I went to work at the State Department, planning to become a Foreign Service Officer, with the best – the most patriotic – of intentions, going to do my best to slay the beast of the International Communist Conspiracy. But then the horror, on a daily basis, of what the United States was doing to the people of Vietnam was brought home to me in every form of media; it was making me sick at heart.

My conscience had found its cause, and nothing that I could have been asked in a pre-employment interview would have alerted my interrogators of the possible danger I posed because I didn't know of the danger myself. No questioning of my friends and relatives could have turned up the slightest hint of the radical anti-war activist I was to become. My friends and relatives were to be as surprised as I was to be. There was simply no way for the State Department security office to know that I should not be hired and given a Secret Clearance.

So what is a poor National Security State to do? Well, they might consider behaving themselves. Stop doing all the terrible things that grieve people like me and Edward Snowden and Bradley Manning and so many others. Stop the bombings, the invasions, the endless wars, the torture, the sanctions, the overthrows, the support of dictatorships, the unmitigated support of Israel; stop all the things that make the United States so hated, that create all the anti-American terrorists, that compel the National Security State – in pure self defence – to spy on the entire world.

Eavesdropping on the planet

The above is the title of an essay that I wrote in 2000 that appeared as a chapter in my book *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*. Here are some excerpts that may help to put the current revelations surrounding Edward Snowden into perspective ...

Can people in the 21st century imagine a greater invasion of privacy on all of earth, in all of history? If so, they merely have to wait for technology to catch up with their imagination.

Like a mammoth vacuum cleaner in the sky, the National Security Agency (NSA) sucks it all up: home phone, office phone, cellular phone, email, fax, telex ... satellite transmissions, fibre-optic communications traffic, microwave links

... voice, text, images ... captured by satellites continuously orbiting the earth, then processed by high-powered computers ... if it runs on electromagnetic energy, NSA is there, with high high tech. Twenty-four hours a day. Perhaps billions of messages sucked up each day.

No one escapes. Not presidents, prime ministers, the UN Secretary-General, the pope, the Queen of England, embassies, transnational corporation CEOs, friend, foe, your Aunt Lena ... if God has a phone, it's being monitored ... maybe your dog isn't being tapped. The oceans will not protect you. American submarines have been attaching tapping pods to deep underwater cables for decades.

Under a system codenamed ECHELON, launched in the 1970s, the NSA and its junior partners in Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada operate a network of massive, highly automated interception stations, covering the globe amongst them. Any of the partners can ask any of the others to intercept its own domestic communications. It can then truthfully say it does not spy on its own citizens.

Apart from specifically-targeted individuals and institutions, the ECHELON system works by indiscriminately intercepting huge quantities of communications and using computers to identify and extract messages of interest from the mass of unwanted ones. Every intercepted message – all the embassy cables, the business deals, the sex talk, the birthday greetings – is searched for keywords, which could be anything the searchers think might be of interest

All it takes to flag a communication is for one of the parties to use a couple or so of the key words in the ECHELON “dictionary” – “He lives in a lovely old white house on Bush Street, right near me. I can shoot over there in two minutes.” Within limitations, computers can “listen” to telephone calls and recognise when keywords are spoken. Those calls are extracted and recorded separately, to be listened to in full by humans. The list of specific targets at any given time is undoubtedly wide ranging, at one point including the likes of Amnesty International and Christian Aid.

ECHELON is carried out without official acknowledgment of its existence, let alone any democratic oversight or public or legislative debate as to whether it serves a decent purpose. The extensiveness of the ECHELON global network is a product of decades of intense Cold War activity. Yet with the end of the Cold War, its budget – far from being greatly reduced – was increased, and the network has grown in both power and reach; yet another piece of evidence that the Cold War was not a battle against something called “the international communist conspiracy”.

The European Parliament in the late 1990s began to wake up to this intrusion into the continent's affairs. The parliament's Civil Liberties Committee commissioned a report, which appeared in 1998 and recommended a variety of measures for dealing with the increasing power of the technologies of surveillance. It bluntly advised: “The European Parliament should reject proposals from the United States for making private messages via the global communications network [Internet] accessible to US

intelligence agencies.” The report denounced Britain's role as a double-agent, spying on its own European partners.

Expanding surveillance

Despite these concerns the US has continued to expand ECHELON surveillance in Europe, partly because of heightened interest in commercial espionage – to uncover industrial information that would provide American corporations with an advantage over foreign rivals.

German security experts discovered several years ago that ECHELON was engaged in heavy commercial spying in Europe. Victims included such German firms as the wind generator manufacturer Enercon. In 1998, Enercon developed what it thought was a secret invention, enabling it to generate electricity from wind power at a far cheaper rate than before. However, when the company tried to market its invention in the United States, it was confronted by its American rival, Kenetech, which announced that it had already patented a near-identical development.

Kenetech then brought a court order against Enercon to ban the sale of its equipment in the US. In a rare public disclosure, an NSA employee, who refused to be named, agreed to appear in silhouette on German television to reveal how he had stolen Enercon's secrets by tapping the telephone and computer link lines that ran between Enercon's research laboratory and its production unit some 12 miles away. Detailed plans of the company's invention were then passed on to Kenetech.

In 1994, Thomson SA, located in Paris, and Airbus Industrie, based in Blagnac Cedex, France, also lost lucrative contracts, snatched away by American rivals aided by information covertly collected by NSA and CIA. The same agencies also eavesdropped on Japanese representatives during negotiations with the United States in 1995 over auto parts trade.

German industry has complained that it is in a particularly vulnerable position because the government forbids its security services from conducting similar industrial espionage. “German politicians still support the rather naive idea that political allies should not spy on each other's businesses. The Americans and the British do not have such illusions,” said journalist Udo Ulfkotte, a specialist in European industrial espionage, in 1999.

That same year, Germany demanded that the United States recall three CIA operatives for their activities in Germany involving economic espionage. The news report stated that the Germans “have long been suspicious of the eavesdropping capabilities of the enormous US radar and communications complex at Bad Aibling, near Munich”, which is in fact an NSA intercept station.

“The Americans tell us it is used solely to monitor communications by potential enemies, but how can we be entirely sure that they are not picking up pieces of information that we think should remain completely secret?” asked a senior German official. Japanese officials most likely have been told a similar story by Washington about the more than a dozen signals intelligence bases which Japan has allowed to be located on its territory.



Edward Snowden.

In their quest to gain access to more and more private information, the NSA, the FBI, and other components of the US national security establishment have been engaged for years in a campaign to require American telecommunications manufacturers and carriers to design their equipment and networks to optimise the authorities' wiretapping ability. Some industry insiders say they believe that some US machines approved for export contain NSA “back doors” (also called “trap doors”).

“Back door” access

The United States has been trying to persuade European Union countries as well to allow it “back-door” access to encryption programs, claiming that this was to serve the needs of law-enforcement agencies. However, a report released by the European Parliament in May 1999 asserted that Washington's plans for controlling encryption software in Europe had nothing to do with law enforcement and everything to do with US industrial espionage. The NSA has also dispatched FBI agents on break-in missions to snatch code books from foreign facilities in the United States, and CIA officers to recruit foreign communications clerks

In September 1999 it was revealed that NSA had arranged with Microsoft to insert special “keys” into Windows software

waiting for a cause



abroad and buy their code secrets, according to veteran intelligence officials.

For decades, beginning in the 1950s, the Swiss company Crypto AG sold the world's most sophisticated and secure encryption technology. The firm staked its reputation and the security concerns of its clients on its neutrality in the Cold War or any other war. The purchasing nations, some 120 of them – including prime US intelligence targets such as Iran, Iraq, Libya and Yugoslavia – confident that their communications were protected, sent messages from their capitals to their embassies, military missions, trade offices, and espionage dens around the world, via telex, radio, and fax.

And all the while, because of a secret agreement between the company and NSA, these governments might as well have been hand delivering the messages to Washington, uncoded. For their Crypto AG machines had been rigged before being sold to them, so that when they used them the random encryption key could be automatically and clandestinely transmitted along with the enciphered message. NSA analysts could read the messages as easily as they could the morning newspaper.

In 1986, because of US public statements

concerning the La Belle disco bombing in West Berlin, the Libyans began to suspect that something was rotten with Crypto AG's machines and switched to another Swiss firm, Gretag Data Systems AG. But it appears that NSA had that base covered as well. In 1992, after a series of suspicious circumstances over the previous few years, Iran came to a conclusion similar to Libya's, and arrested a Crypto AG employee who was in Iran on a business trip. He was eventually ransomed, but the incident became well known and the scam began to unravel in earnest.

In September 1999 it was revealed that NSA had arranged with Microsoft to insert special "keys" into Windows software, in all versions from 95-OSR2 onwards. An American computer scientist, Andrew Fernandez of Cryptonym in North Carolina, had disassembled parts of the Windows instruction code and found the smoking gun – Microsoft's developers had failed to remove the debugging symbols used to test this software before they released it. Inside the code were the labels for two keys.

One was called "KEY". The other was called "NSAKEY". Fernandez presented his

finding at a conference at which some Windows developers were also in attendance. The developers did not deny that the NSA key was built into their software, but they refused to talk about what the key did, or why it had been put there without users' knowledge.

Fernandez says that NSA's "back door" in the world's most commonly used operating system makes it "orders of magnitude easier for the US government to access your computer."

In February 2000, it was disclosed that the Strategic Affairs Delegation (DAS), the intelligence arm of the French Defence Ministry, had prepared a report in 1999 which also asserted that NSA had helped to install secret programs in Microsoft software. According to the DAS report, "it would seem that the creation of Microsoft was largely supported, not least financially, by the NSA, and that IBM was made to accept the [Microsoft] MS-DOS operating system by the same administration."

The report stated that there had been a "strong suspicion of a lack of security fed by insistent rumours about the existence of spy programs on Microsoft, and by the presence of NSA personnel in Bill Gates' development teams." The Pentagon, said the report, was Microsoft's biggest client in the world.

Recent years have seen disclosures that in the countdown to their invasion of Iraq in 2003, the United States had listened in on UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, UN weapons inspectors in Iraq, and all the members of the UN Security Council during a period when they were deliberating about what action to take in Iraq.

It's as if the American national security establishment feels that it has an *inalienable right* to listen in; as if there had been a constitutional amendment, applicable to the entire world, stating that "Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of the government to intercept the personal communications of anyone." And the Fourth Amendment had been changed to read: "Persons shall be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, except in cases of national security, real or alleged."

The leading whistleblower of all time: Philip Agee

Before there was Edward Snowden, William Binney and Thomas Drake ... before there was Bradley Manning, Sibel Edmonds and Jesselyn Radack ... there was Philip Agee. What Agee revealed is still the most startling and important information about US foreign policy that any American government whistleblower has ever revealed.

Philip Agee spent 12 years (1957-69) as a CIA case officer, most of it in Latin America. His first book, *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*, published in 1974 – a pioneering work on the Agency's methods and their devastating consequences – appeared in about 30 languages around the world and was a best seller in many countries; it included a 23-page appendix with the names of hundreds of undercover Agency operatives and organisations.

Under CIA manipulation, direction and,

usually, their payroll, were past and present presidents of Mexico, Colombia, Uruguay, and Costa Rica, "our minister of labour", "our vice-president", "my police", journalists, labour leaders, student leaders, diplomats, and many others. If the Agency wished to disseminate anti-communist propaganda, cause dissension in leftist ranks, or have Communist embassy personnel expelled, it need only prepare some phoney documents, present them to the appropriate government ministers and journalists, and – presto! – instant scandal.

Agee's goal in naming all these individuals, quite simply, was to make it as difficult as he could for the CIA to continue doing its dirty work.

A common Agency tactic was writing editorials and phoney news stories to be knowingly published by Latin American media with no indication of the CIA authorship or CIA payment to the media. The propaganda value of such a "news" item might be multiplied by being picked up by other CIA stations in Latin America who would disseminate it through a CIA-owned news agency or a CIA-owned radio station. Some of these stories made their way back to the United States to be read or heard by unknowing North Americans.

Wooing the working class came in for special treatment. Labour organisations by the dozen, sometimes hardly more than names on stationery, were created, altered, combined, liquidated, and new ones created again, in an almost frenzied attempt to find the right combination to compete with existing left-oriented unions and take national leadership away from them.

In 1975 these revelations were new and shocking; for many readers it was the first hint that American foreign policy was not quite what their high-school textbooks had told them nor what the *New York Times* had reported.

"As complete an account of spy work as is likely to be published anywhere, an authentic account of how an ordinary American or British 'case officer' operates ... All of it ... presented with deadly accuracy," wrote Miles Copeland, a former CIA station chief, and ardent foe of Agee. (There's no former CIA officer more hated by members of the intelligence establishment than Agee; no one's even close; due in part to his travelling to Cuba and having long-term contact with Cuban intelligence.)

In contrast to Agee, WikiLeaks withheld the names of hundreds of informants from the nearly 400,000 Iraq war documents it released.

In 1969, Agee resigned from the CIA (and colleagues who "long ago ceased to believe in what they are doing").

While on the run from the CIA as he was writing *Inside the Company* – at times literally running for his life – Agee was expelled from, or refused admittance to, Italy, Britain, France, West Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway. (West Germany eventually gave him asylum because his wife was a leading ballerina in the country.) Agee's account of his period on the run can be found detailed in his book *On the Run* (1987). It's an exciting read.

Information Clearing House ✪

Agee's goal in naming all these individuals, quite simply, was to make it as difficult as he could for the CIA to continue doing its dirty work.

Arab oil cash to kill democracy in Egypt

Finian Cunningham

In order to determine whether the turmoil in Egypt is in the best interests of the mass of ordinary Egyptians, we should use the trusted maxim – follow the money. Within hours of the military's arrest of now-deposed President Mohamed Morsi, the Persian Gulf Arab monarchies were offering their congratulations to defence minister Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi and the new interim president, Adli Mansour.

With Morsi still under arrest, incommunicado, and his whereabouts as yet unknown, the Persian Gulf oil kingdoms have swiftly moved, in the words of the *Financial Times*, "to prop up" the new rulers of Egypt with US\$12 billion in cash grants, central bank deposits and oil deals.

That capital transfusion is seen as critical to bailing out the sinking Egyptian economy and ensuring the viability of the military-led interim administration.

Widespread popular discontent over the parlous state of the economy was one of the main grievances that drove millions of Egyptians on to the streets in protest against Morsi since his election last year.

Over the past two years, political upheaval and the faltering of Egypt's crony capitalist economy has seen the country's foreign currency reserves plummet by nearly 60 per cent, down from US\$36 billion to US\$15 billion. That plunge in state funds has hit the ability to cover import costs, which has led to shortages and soaring inflation, all of which hit the poor majority of Egyptians hardest.

The money pledges from the Persian Gulf Arab monarchies are welcome relief to stabilising Egypt. Saudi Arabia is to supply US\$5 billion, the United Arab Emirates US\$3 billion and the latest to stump up is Kuwait with a pledge of US\$4 billion.

To put these huge sums into perspective, the annual bilateral foreign aid to Egypt from the US – America's second biggest foreign recipient after Israel – amounts to US\$1.5 billion.

Another comparative figure is the loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that Egypt is still trying to negotiate – some US\$4.8 billion.

Thus, the Arab monarchs are all of a sudden donating funds to Egypt that are approximately double the combined sum of annual US aid and the prospective IMF "mega loan". That urgency is more than telling.

Moreover, the oil money from the Persian Gulf is not all told yet. Missing so far from the list of Arab sponsors of the new regime in Egypt is Qatar. Its recently appointed Emir, Sheikh Tamin, joined with the other autocrats of the Persian Gulf to congratulate Egypt, but he has refrained from putting up money – yet.

Qatar is, however, expected to open its coffers soon as a way of distancing itself from the sacked Morsi administration. Qatari officials told the *New York Times* "Qatar's financial aid in the past had been to the Egyptian people, not any individual figure or party."

Furthermore, the *Financial Times* reported this week that US President Barack Obama has been on the phone to the rulers of Qatar and the United

Arab Emirates to emphasise the need for their support to the Egyptian interim regime.

Putting those two developments together – massive Arab oil money and US coordination – spells a significant response to the events in Egypt. But the significance is not what it may appear to be, that is, promoting the wellbeing of the Egyptian people – far from it.

We should not be under any illusion about this apparent largesse from the oil-rich Arab autocrats and their American patron. Much of the promised money will in reality go towards subsidising the luxurious lifestyles of the Egyptian elite and paying off the debts that they have racked up with US-dominated international banks, not to help the Egyptian masses overcome unemployment, poverty and destitution.

Proof of this? The pointed refusal by Washington to condemn the blatant interference of the Egyptian military in the country's political process, including the de facto arrest and ongoing abduction of President Morsi, as well as the massacre of dozens of civilian protesters in the aftermath, speaks of chilling American cynicism towards international law and human rights.

Even when the military junta-appointed interim president, Adli Mansour, assumed dictatorial powers to personally oversee the drawing up of a new constitution, Washington did not blink an eye at the astounding doublethink. Instead, US officials revealed that the Pentagon would be proceeding with the delivery of F-16 fighter jets to the Egyptian armed forces.



Earlier this year protesters hang a giant banner in the colors of Egypt's national flag on barbed wires in front of anti-riot soldiers at the entrance to the presidential palace in Cairo.

A devil's advocate might say that Washington is acting pragmatically, trying to stabilise the most populous Arab country, to encourage the military to return to the civilian political process, and to stave off further bloodshed.

For a start, you don't defend the people of a nation by pandering to a military machine with a long record of brutally repressing its own people during 30 years of US-backed dictatorship under Hosni Mubarak, before his ouster in February 2011.

To give Washington the benefit of the doubt in motives towards Egypt is to be recklessly in ignorance of the facts about American imperialism in the Middle East and its congenital reliance on repressive regimes to crush democracy.

But if there were any lingering doubts about the recent turmoil in Egypt, the role of its military and agenda of its American sponsor, those doubts can be dispelled by following the money of the US Arab puppets in the Persian Gulf.

These absolute feudal despots are the last place we should look to as evidence of democratic support.

Indeed, the speed with which these family fiefdoms have rushed to throw money at the new rulers of Egypt tells us the exact opposite.

The Arab oil money is being used to shore up the military regime precisely in order to make sure that the people of Egypt do not realise democratic freedom. Democracy in Egypt, and its possible contagion across the region, is anathema to the Arab dictatorial monarchs, as it is to Washington and its imperative of maximising corporate profits.

Deposed president Morsi had more than his share of faults. But his dismissal by the American-backed military machine cannot in any way be seen as progressive. It is rather a regressive onslaught against the historic struggle for democracy and freedom by the Egyptian people.

The money flowing into Egypt's new dictatorial elite from the even more dictatorial Persian Gulf Arab oil sheikhdoms is designed at buying off the country's pro-democracy movement by sweetening the rule of autocrats. It is a sure sign of the wrong direction Egypt is currently taking. International Clearing House ✪

Killings, harassment of union in Philippines

Trade unions in the Philippines and abroad are urging the Aquino government to press the police to look into the connection between the killings of leaders of transport workers in Davao City and their corruption exposé against an official of the local office of the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB).

This was underscored during an indignation rally last week in front of the Mandaluyong head office of the Department of Transportation and Communications (DOTC) whose attached agencies include the LTFRB.

Led by the labour centre Alliance of Progressive Labour (APL), the protest coincided with the funeral in Davao City of Antonio "Dodong" Petalcorin, which was attended by hundreds of protesters from different unions and activist organisations.

Petalcorin, president of the Network of Transport Organisations (NETO), was executed gangland style as he was leaving his house in Matina Aplaya on July 2. He was shot three times in the chest by a lone gunman who calmly escaped on a motorcycle. This cold blooded murder was captured by a CCTV camera nearby.

Petalcorin's colleague, Emilio Rivera, former chair of the Matina

Aplaya Transport Cooperative (MATRANSO), was also shot dead by unknown assailants last January 25.

This was followed on May 21 by an obvious attempt to terrorise Carlos Cirilo, chair of the Mindanao Alliance of Transport Organisations (MATO), when a grenade was placed on the terrace of his house.

"Dodong, Emilio and Carlos have one thing in common – they were very active in disclosing many irregularities in LTFRB-Davao," revealed Luis Macailao, vice chair for Luzon of the National Confederation of Transportworkers' Unions (NCTU-APL), to which NETO is affiliated.

Macailao added that Petalcorin and his colleagues, especially in NETO, NCTU and APL-Davao, were in the thick of finalising all the evidences needed to file a corruption case and other charges, including frequent absenteeism, in the Office of the Ombudsman against Benjamin Go, director of LTFRB-Davao.

NCTU explained anomalies in LTFRB offices that usually victimise small-time public transport drivers and operators by demanding from them bribes to facilitate the release of franchises, among others. Edwin Bustillos, APL deputy

secretary general, said that not only Philippine-based trade unions and other mass organisations put across their indignation over the cowardly killings, especially of Petalcorin, but also groups from abroad.

Some of which include the global union International Transportworkers' Federation (ITF), of which the NCTU is a member; the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the largest global labour centre; KSBSI, a national trade union centre in Indonesia; and the list is growing.

Protest letters on the murder of Petalcorin are posted on the Internet and are being sent to Malacañang, Department of Justice (DOJ), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), DOTC, and the Commission on Human Rights (CHR).

The letter senders stressed their "outrage over the ruthless killing of Petalcorin, who may become just another statistic to the long and bloody list of victims of extrajudicial murders, especially among trade unionists and human rights defenders, in the Philippines."

It added that they wish to convey their "grave concern regarding the virtual reign of impunity that apparently continues to worsen in the country." ✪

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Walmart's Bangladesh safety pact "weak and worthless"

Mark Gruenberg

WASHINGTON: A voluntary Bangladesh building safety pact signed by the biggest Western retail customer for the South Asian nation's clothing, Walmart, is "weak and worthless", the leaders of Change To Win and the union umbrella organisation AFL-CIO say.

And the pact was negotiated behind closed doors with a DC think tank partially funded by Walmart and without any input from workers

or unions, here or in Bangladesh, CTW chair Joe Hansen and AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka added.

On July 10, Walmart, The Gap and 15 other US retailers that buy clothes from Bangladeshi factories signed what they call the "Bangladesh Worker Safety Initiative." That pact calls for inspections of all Bangladeshi factories within a year, development of common safety standards and for the firms to share inspection results.

Worldwide pressure led the two big firms and other signers, including

Macy's, Nordstrom, Penney's, Target and Sears, to act after the Rana Plaza building collapse killed 1,127 Bangladeshi garment workers who toiled for firms there. The Bangladeshi factories, suppliers to the retailers, ordered the workers back in despite safety warnings.

The same pressure, led by the two labour federations, pushed 75 other retailers earlier to sign a much stronger Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh.

Unlike the new pact, that accord

is enforceable, Hansen and Trumka said. The International Labour Organisation and other international unions – including Bangladeshi unions – and human rights groups back that stronger pact.

"The so-called Global Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, announced by Walmart, Gap, and the Bipartisan Policy Centre, was developed without consultation with workers or their representatives and is yet another 'voluntary' scheme with no meaningful enforcement mechanisms. Companies that sign onto the alliance but fail to meet a commitment face no adverse consequences beyond expulsion from the scheme. Instead, workers will continue to pay," Trumka and Hansen said.

"The AFL-CIO and Change To Win reject the Walmart/Gap plan," they added. It's "a way to avoid accountability, limit costs and silence workers and their representatives. Rather than sign the binding accord, Walmart and Gap push a weak and worthless plan that avoids enforceable commitments. The centre, which has clear financial and political connections to Walmart," drafted the pact in "a closed process."

The pact that Walmart, the Gap and the other 15 retailers signed "only maintains a long and bloody record of failure" in Bangladeshi garment factory enforcement, added Hansen and Trumka. A Change To Win spokesman summed it up as "a sham." *People's World* ✪



Communists among those arrested in Turkey

Greg Rose

On the heels of a campaign by the Turkish government to blame it for the recent upheavals, leading members of the Turkish Communist Party (TKP) are being rounded up and arrested.

In Istanbul, Turkey prosecutors last week called for the arrest of 12 activists in the ongoing struggle against construction of a shopping mall complex in Taksim Gezi Park, including leaders of the Taksim Solidarity Platform, TKP central executive board member Erkan Bas and TKP Istanbul Provincial Chairman Kamil Tekerek.

Several other party members were taken into custody, as well as Taksim Solidarity Platform member Mücella Yapıcı, Istanbul Medical Chamber General Secretary Ali Çerkezoglu, members of the Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions, and members of the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions. Bas and Tekerek were already in detention for

participating in a demonstration in Taksim Gezi Park, but the latest charges represent a serious escalation of Turkish government repression.

The demonstrations against the Taksim Gezi Park development, which began on May 28, have spread throughout Turkey and escalated to calls for the resignation of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Islamicist Justice and Development Party government on grounds of authoritarianism and brutality in suppressing the demonstrations.

Citing a police report on documents seized from searches of the homes of the accused, the prosecutor claimed that "calls for thousands of people to gather in Taksim Square prepared the ground for the marginal groups' provocations ... They caused the injuries of hundreds of police officers and citizens and the calls continued despite these injuries."

The government red-baiting campaign accuses the Turkish

Communist Party of having masterminded the demonstrations. There were television commentators who claimed that "Communist protesters" had turned peaceful protests into "violent attacks that ruin social order."

This red-baiting included an article in the Egyptian newspaper, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, by Turkish broadcaster Aylin Kocaman, claiming that young demonstrators were susceptible to the Taksim Gezi protests "because they have not been educated against the threat of communism."

The mainstream Turkish media has a history of subservience to the Erdogan government and of abetting a government disinformation campaign against the demonstrators.

In related developments approximately 50 demonstrators being detained by police continued their hunger strike, begun on July 10, to protest extension of their detention by prosecutors in Istanbul. *People's World* ✪

Spotlight on PM's chum

Paddy McGuffin

BRITAIN: Amnesty International has urged David Cameron to add his voice to calls for an international investigation into extra-judicial killings and torture in Kazakhstan. The Prime Minister visited the central Asian country last month on a multimillion pound trade junket and was heavily criticised for failing to raise the issue of human rights abuses in the country.

In a damning new report Amnesty has accused Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbaev of "pulling the wool over the eyes" of the international community after making and then breaking promises to eradicate torture.

In particular, the charity is

calling on Mr Nazarbaev to allow an international investigation into the security forces' use of lethal force during a notorious incident in the town of Zhanaozen following strikes and protests there in December 2011.

At least 15 people were killed and more than 100 seriously injured when security forces used excessive force to disperse protesters. Subsequently, scores of people were rounded up by the authorities and tortured.

Amnesty's report – "Old habits: The routine use of torture and ill-treatment in Kazakhstan" – comes just a week after the Prime Minister made a two-day trade visit to Kazakhstan.

Asked about human rights during the trip, Mr Cameron emphasised that the visit was primarily about economic issues but said "nothing

is off the agenda, including human rights" – though no further details of any human rights discussions have emerged, Amnesty notes.

Its senior director of research Nicola Duckworth said: "It is clear that the Kazakhstani government's assertions of its commitment to eradicate torture are for international consumption only.

"They are an attempt to pull wool over the eyes of the public at home and abroad, while torture and other ill-treatment continue unabated and unchecked."

The UN high commissioner for human rights Navi Pillay has called for an international investigation into what happened at Zhanaozen and the charity is urging the PM to do likewise. *Morning Star* ✪

Judge bans cavity searches at Guantánamo

Washington District Court Chief Judge Royce Lamberth ordered the US government last week to stop cavity searches of Guantánamo Bay detainees. Judge Lamberth said that the motivation for searches had not been to enhance security but to deter detainees' access to lawyers.

He also ordered prison commanders to return to older search methods and abandon genital-contact searching.

"As petitioners' counsel argued the choice between submitting to a search procedure that is religiously and culturally abhorrent or forgoing counsel effectively presents no choice at all for devout Muslims," the judge wrote.

He quoted President Barack Obama's comment at a speech in May in which he said his administration would make judicial review available for every Guantánamo detainee.

The judge wrote that the actions

of President Obama's commanders at the military-run prison for terrorist suspects at Guantánamo can't be squared with that.

Judge Lamberth also ordered the government to allow detainees who were weak because of their participation in the continuing hunger strike, or those who had a medical condition that made it difficult to travel outside the camp, to meet their lawyers at the camp rather than travel across the US enclave.

Mr Lamberth wrote that Guantánamo search procedures "flagrantly" disregarded the need for sensitivity in religious and cultural matters.

Defence lawyer Brent Rushforth said that the Obama administration "was flouting the rule of law as recognised by the Supreme Court."

"Judge Lamberth's decision sets that right." *Morning Star* ✪

Union leads the way

Chile's largest trade union held a nationwide strike last week to demand improved working conditions and tax reforms.

Students and copper miners joined thousands of other workers in largely peaceful marches in major cities, chanting and waving banners.

Protest organisers estimated the crowd in the Chilean capital Santiago at close to 150,000 people.

But Interior Minister Andres Chadwick claimed that only 6.4 percent of all public-sector workers,

or about 10,000 out of 161,000, had joined the strike.

Education and tax reform remain key issues ahead of the November 17 presidential election.

Small groups of hooded protesters set up barricades prior to the Santiago strike, blocking morning traffic in the capital.

Police arrested 67 people and six officers were injured in clashes with demonstrators.

Morning Star ✪

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

A tight grip

The ALP was formed by the trade union movement to give the trade unions a voice in Parliament, but that voice can barely be described as a whimper with the tight grip of the Right and weakness of those calling themselves Left.

The Right of the ALP have little allegiance to the working class these days. Right-wing power broker Mark Arbib is a classic. He was exposed in WikiLeaks as an informant providing the US embassy with information on the government and inner workings of the ALP.

At the time he was general secretary of the party's NSW branch and then later a Senator. In one US Embassy cable it was stated, "He understands the importance of supporting a vibrant relationship with the US while not being too deferential ... He has met with us repeatedly throughout his political rise."

Now he has turned up as an adviser to billionaire media mogul James Packer who is in the process of gaining a licence (through slightly unorthodox means) from the Liberal government for an

exclusive casino at the controversial Barangaroo development in the heart of Sydney.

**T Southern
Brisbane**

Strengthened law against workplace bullying

It was pleasing to see laws ensuring Australians' right to work in a safe environment strengthened before Federal Parliament rose late last month.

The *Fair Work Amendment Bill 2013* was passed by the Senate on the last sitting day. Among other important reforms enhancing workers' rights, the legislation provides workers with greater recourse if they genuinely believe they have been the victims of systematic workplace bullying.

As well as introducing a standard definition of workplace bullying, the new laws, which come into effect in January 2014, will ensure workers who claim they are victims of systematic bullying would have the Fair Work Commission begin to deal with the matter within 14 days of making a complaint.

Slater & Gordon commissioned research earlier this year which showed one in three Australians believed they had been victims of bullying at work. Bullying can have a devastating impact on a person's self-esteem and enjoyment of work and, when not dealt with, can result in a workplace injury and health issues for workers.

The introduction of strengthened

legislation to give employees who are the victims of serious and systematic workplace bullying a clear pathway to have their issue resolved is very welcome.

Furthermore, setting out a clear policy defining bullying in the workplace and a procedure to deal with complaints will also assist employers.

**Marcus Clayton
Industrial and Employment Law
Slater & Gordon**

No social contact for 20 percent of disabled people

The heartbreaking truth is that people who have a disability, such as muscular dystrophy, are often socially isolated and can go months on end without a friendly visit because it is too physically difficult to leave the house.

A recent paper released by the Productivity Commission 'Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia' found that 13 percent of people with a disability have experienced deep social exclusion.

The paper also found that around 18 percent of people with profound limitations, such as a disability, had not had any social contact in the last three months and 59 percent had not had a telephone call for that same period.

Social isolation is a huge issue within the disability sector that needs to be addressed because we are talking about human beings who are just like everyone else who want friends to visit and share a laugh over a cuppa.

In a lot of cases it is far too

Melbourne

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

"A personal story about Cuba during my three visits to the tiny island nation with drawings, text and a potted history".

This book will be launched by Dr Ralph Newmark,
Director La Trobe University Institute of Latin American Studies.

6pm – 9pm Friday July 19

Bella Union Level1 Trades Hall Carlton

RSVP: Joan on 03 9857 9249 or joancoxs@tpg.com.au

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

Write a letter to the Editor

difficult for most people with MD to leave the house so if they live by themselves they are alone for most of their days but even if they live with family members they can be left by themselves all day while everyone is out at work or on social engagements.

I have seen this happen too many times, where it just becomes a routine of loneliness.

While many have family members who visit for special occasions, it is a friend that is missing from their lives because when you don't get out of the house, how are you expected to form new friendships.

Muscular Dystrophy Australia

has established a network of social volunteers The MDAngels" to visit the homes of people with MD to have a chat over a coffee and break this cycle of societal exclusion.

Even if our volunteers just pop over for an hour and play a game of cards, the positive benefit is enormous.

There are no personal care duties; it is the simple act of catching up and showing that you care enough to ensure a person with a disability knows they're not alone and that someone cares.

**Boris M Struk
Muscular Dystrophy Australia**

Culture & Life

by

Rob Gowland

When profits, not people, rule

When Labor was in power in NSW, the Liberal Party campaigned vigorously against the rampant corruption clearly evident within the ranks of the ALP government. Property developers, big coal, casino operators – they all seemed to have a very cosy relationship with Labor in office.

Barry O'Farrell, in Opposition, talked tough about ending this corruption. In particular, he told the people of the NSW Central Coast that when he became Premier there would be no more new coal-mines within the Coast's precious water catchment areas. And the people, desperate and trusting, believed him. And why not? He stood before a public rally and made a solemn promise – "no ifs, no buts, a guarantee" – that if elected his government would not allow coal mining in the water catchment valleys of the Coast.

His instant renegeing on those undertakings once elected has dismayed many (if not all) of his supporters in the community. However, it shouldn't have, should it? After all, Barry is a Lib and one of the most crooked premiers this state ever had was a Lib, named Robin Askin. Remember him?

Askin, later knighted – presumably for services to organised crime – held the top job in NSW when the illegal casinos flourished and everyone knew where they were except the police, who just couldn't find them anywhere. I knew a chap who was attending one of these lucrative criminal playgrounds one night, when he fancied a sandwich. He went from the gaming

room into the kitchen in search of one and found instead that it was full of uniformed police (the same folk who officially did not know of the existence of any casinos). A waiter was running the coppers' bets to the gaming tables for them.

This was the era when coppers used police cars to transport prostitutes to their beats for the night, and when a copper who was not on the take was an embarrassment to his colleagues, "cramping their style". Such honest coppers were usually moved around to some of the lucrative postings in the hope that they would see the light and "get with the program". If they stayed honest they tended to end up invalidated out of the NSW Force.

With as notorious a predecessor as Robin Askin for comparison, no one should have been surprised that Barry O'Farrell turned out to be an unmitigated liar who would make deals with anyone in return for their vote in Parliament. The media however were steadfastly denouncing Labor's crooked record and refusing to remind people of the Libs' similar record, so Barry was able to sweep into office as the man who was going to "clean up" NSW and in particular put a stop to the ravages of big coal.

Once he was elected, however, Barry was quick to backpedal on his promises. New coal-mines were suddenly back on the agenda. And the people were not happy. But Barry was in the Premier's chair and apparently couldn't care less.

Last month, an angry crowd of over 250 residents of the Dooralong and Jilliby Valleys attended a meeting to voice their concerns over subsidence impacts from the proposed new Wallarah 2 underground long-wall coal mine. The environmental impact statement (EIS) prepared by the mine's proponents admits that 245 homes will be affected by subsidence once the mine goes ahead. And 118 of those will subside by at least one metre and up to 22 metres!

Kate da Costa, Central Coast spokesperson for The Greens, said in a statement that "Wallahrah 2 will cause subsidence in the Jilliby Valley and surrounds. This, coupled with mining activities, will cause loss of water to bores, remove up to 740,000 litres of groundwater every day and risks cracking of creek and river beds as has been seen in the Nepean catchment."

Wallahrah 2 is a joint venture with South Korean resources company Kores. In their own EIS, Kores predicts a loss of groundwater equivalent to 40 in-ground pools every day. The creeks in the mine area flow into the Wyong River, which is now linked by a \$125



Robin Askin held the top job in NSW when the illegal casinos flourished and everyone knew where they were except the police, who just couldn't find them anywhere.

million pipeline to the Mangrove Mountain dam which is the main drinking water supply for the Central Coast.

Calling for the federal Environment Minister to intervene and prevent the potential permanent damage to the Central Coast's water supply, Kate da Costa said "we don't need any new coal mining. We need to take the billions of dollars given in subsidies to the fossil fuel industry, and use it in ways ... to help convert Australia to 100% renewables as quickly as possible.

"Our major trading partners, China and India, are both implementing large renewable programs which will quickly reduce their coal and gas requirements. Instead of hitching all our fortunes to exporting dirty energy, Australia, which is blessed with ample sun and space to build wind farms, should follow Scotland's lead and legislate for the electricity grid to be 100 percent renewable by 2030."

The Greens' lead NSW Senate candidate Cate Faehrmann met with residents campaigning against the Wallarah 2 coalmine and commented

afterwards: "More and more communities across NSW are drawing a line in the sand when the real costs of mining coal become clear. The long-term damage to the environment and the climate system, for example, is just not worth some of the supposed short-term gains.

"The majority of the world's top climate scientists are now quite clear. We cannot continue digging up and burning coal if we are to have any hope of preventing a dangerously warmer world. If we are to stay within the two degrees warming limit that the world has agreed to, four-fifths of the world's coal and oil reserves need to stay in the ground. ...

"Our land and water should not be sacrificed for the profit of overseas coal giants."

And local campaigner Mike Campbell, of the protest group Australian Coal Alliance, said: "Water, dust emissions and subsidence are the three main concerns for the Central Coast. The local community ... is simply not going to stand by and have Wallarah 2 thrust upon us. The consequences would be horrific." ☘



Sunday July 21 –
Saturday July 27

The world, as it is presently organised, is full of contradictions and anomalies, things that impact most adversely on the poor and the powerless. In the face of this constant evidence that goodness is apparently *not* in the ascendency, many religious people find themselves all at sea. If they cannot rely on God to make life better, what hope is there?

They could put their faith in humanity, of course, but they have been taught to look elsewhere, and so they seize on whatever “new, improved” form of their religion comes along. Forty years ago it was the Charismatics, a movement of Christians that used all the manipulative tools of psychology and salesmanship to convince people that “speaking in tongues”, “faith-healing” and similar mumbo-jumbo was evidence of a “direct relationship with God”.

It only lasted 20 years, but why did so many fall for it? Because they felt there had to be something better than capitalism, but they did not know what that might be. For an interesting example of where faith without science can lead you check out *Compass: Whatever Happened To The Charismatics?* (ABC1 Sunday July 21 at 6.30pm).

Episode 2 of *First Footprints* is titled *The Great Drought* (ABC1 Sunday July 21 at 9.35pm) and deals with the last ice age, a ten thousand-year stretch during which

the sea level fell 130 metres below today’s level and deserts spread over 90 percent of Australia. Much of the mega fauna died out as did the top predators like the marsupial lion that preyed on them.

People adapted to the severe conditions and survived, a remarkable tribute to human tenacity and ingenuity.

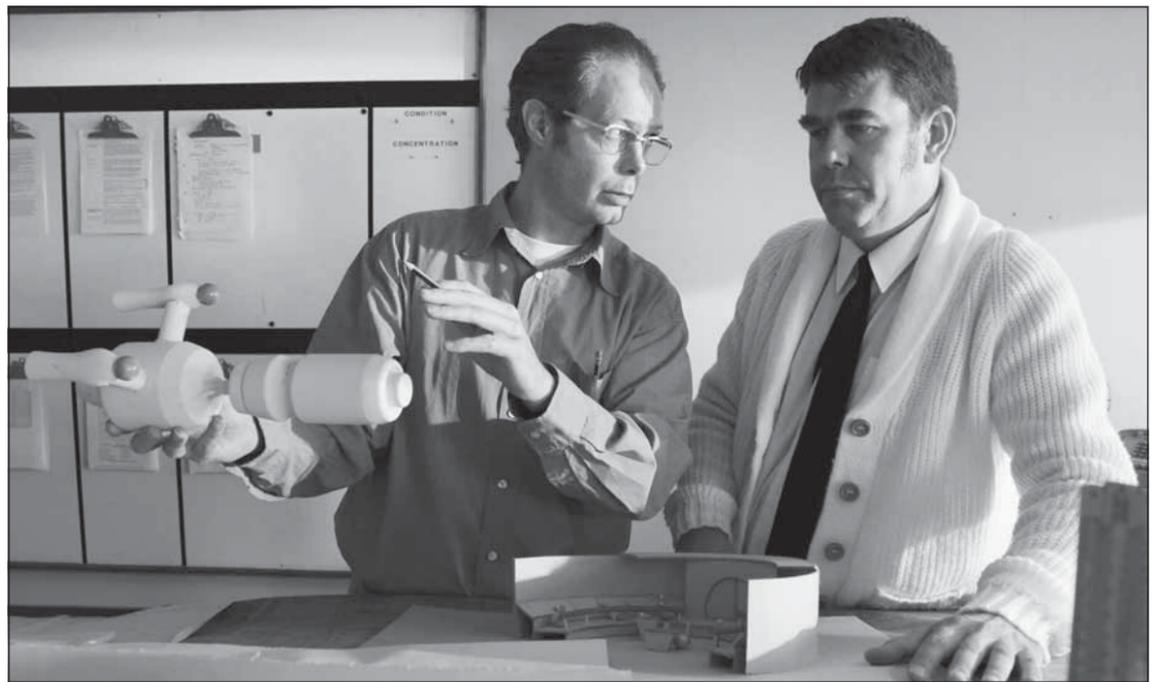
The new three-part documentary series *Pain, Pus and Poison* (SBS ONE Mondays from July 22 at 8.30pm) looks at the role of chemistry in aiding and augmenting the human body’s own natural defences against injury and infection. Along the way the first episode considers the way the pharmaceutical giants also discovered and mass marketed such things as Bayer’s super-painkiller, Heroin. (When you are that big and that rich, apparently being the company that gave the world Heroin does not impinge on your bottom line one jot!)

This is a very interesting little series and well worth catching.

I was not expecting much from *Australia With Simon Reeves* (SBS ONE Wednesdays from July 24 at 8.30pm). Made for English viewers, it follows Reeves as he visits the kind of places a well-paid agent might line up for a celebrity host: a “ranch” in the Red Centre, a gold-mine in WA, and a lorry-drivers’ school (also in WA) teaching Brits to drive huge lorries in Australia’s mining boom. However, the program turns out to be much better than that suggests. Reeves is an observant and savvy traveller, who sees beyond the surface glitz to some of the reality underneath.

Nevertheless, by its nature, the series is in fact superficial, but is still watchable. The sequence in the commercially top secret breeding facility for blue-fin tuna is really interesting and has tremendous potential.

Professor Brian Cox’s series *Wonders Of Life* examined natural history from the perspective of physics to reveal how a few fundamental laws gave rise to the



Gene Roddenberry and Matt Jeffries creating the Enterprise – *The True Story* (ABC2 Saturdays July 27 at 7.30pm).

most complex and diverse system in the universe – life. This week’s final episode (ABC1 Thursday 25 July at 8.30pm) seeks to show what it is that makes a planet into a home.

He finds two essential ingredients are water and sunlight, and demonstrates them both through a visit to Mexico. There, he also visits a deep cave where there is neither water nor sunlight, but there is life nevertheless: microbial life that suggests how life must have begun on Earth.

A fascinating series that for the layman would benefit from repeated viewing, and perhaps a supplementary booklet!

The two-part feature-length drama series *Better Man* (SBS ONE Thursdays from July 25 at 8.30pm) is the story of Van Nguyen, a 25-year-old Vietnamese Australian who was convicted of drug trafficking in Singapore in 2005 and hanged. The program opens with a title proclaiming that it is “a true story”, but then adds the information

that certain characters and incidents have been invented for dramatic purposes, which does tend to undercut its claims to “truth”.

The program is written and directed by Khoa Do, a former Young Australian of the Year, but I found the early sequences deliberately baffling. We aren’t told why Van is making deals with an obvious underworld drug dealer; we are left to deduce that the deal is going sour because of greed but it is never made clear, and consequently becomes tiresome. I gave up on it.

Gene Roddenberry, who created the *Star Trek* series – which became in time “the Star Trek franchise” with six television series consisting of 726 episodes, and 12 feature films – had a vision of a humane future in which all people including aliens could live in peace and harmony. His original series was about seeking out new worlds and new peoples, but not interfering and certainly not trying to conquer them.

It was this aspect that gave his

series its unique edge and ensured its hit status. Subsequent series and spinoffs put much more emphasis on war and violence.

Roddenberry’s own concept and the story of how the series was originally taken up and then dropped and subsequently rescued by pressure from its fans, makes up this week’s instalment of the intermittently interesting series *The True Story* (ABC2 Saturdays from 27 July at 7.30pm).

Intermittently is also the adverb I would use to describe *Demetri Martin: Person* the stand-up comedy act this week on *Funny As* (ABC2 Saturday July 27 at 9.30pm). In Martin’s case, he is intermittently funny. When he is funny he is original and clever, but a disproportionate part of his act misfires.

The program was taped live in Austin, Texas, and to judge by the over-the-top audience reaction, the audience were all his friends and neighbours. He is funny, but their reaction was too much. ☺

Melbourne

Conch plays for cuba

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Independent Arab cinemas: against all odds

There's a wealth of diverse Arabic films out there, if you know where to find them. **Giedre Steikunaite** unearths some gems.

Planting the flag of Palestine on the moon in her 2009 short film *A Space Exodus*, artist and filmmaker Larissa Sansour says: "That's one small step for Palestinians, one giant leap for mankind." In *Nation Estate*, shown at the Rotterdam International Film Festival (IFF) in early 2013, she projects a single skyscraper that houses the entire Palestinian population – Jerusalem on the 13th floor, Ramallah on the 14th – "living the high life".

Sansour's aesthetically polished and politically challenging futuristic visions contain two elements under-represented in Arab cinema – science fiction and comedy. "These genres are big budget studio productions – by definition, independent films don't have that capacity," says Mona Deeley, director of Zenith Foundation and producer of Cinema Badila (Alternative Cinema) on BBC Arabic. "Yet that doesn't mean that Arab films are without humour." Sansour's shorts are a case in point. "If she makes a feature sci-fi film, that will really be news."

Many other independent Arab films have been making the news recently on the international stage. Production and distribution capacity in the region varies greatly: there is not a single cinema theatre in Saudi Arabia, but many in UAE shopping malls; Egypt, the regional hub of commercial cinema, has had to catch up with others in independent filmmaking; the Sudan Film Factory project is encouraging this non-existent industry; in Lebanon, infrastructure exists, but blockbusters score much higher than independent films. Jordan and the Gulf states are increasingly entering the stage. Subject trends are also highly diversified. "Otherwise it wouldn't be independent cinema, we'd be talking about a factory," Deeley says.

A pluralist image

For these reasons, as filmmaker, curator and author of *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity* Viola Shafik pointed out at the panel of Safar: A Journey Through Popular Arab Cinema in London, "labelling it 'Arab cinema' is problematic"; the French version – les cinémas arabes (Arab cinemas – in the plural) – is much more adequate as it describes "a pluralist image of what has been created in the Arab world".

Judging from the selection of last year's IFFs, certain topics might be passé in the media, but not in the wider imagination. One such is suicide bombing: Ziad Doueiri's *The Attack* about a female suicide bomber in Israel won the first prize at the Marrakech IFF; Nabil Ayouch's *Horses of God (Les Chevaux de Dieu)* is based on true story of two brothers who detonated themselves in Casablanca in 2003 ("It's interesting to see a native take of people doing horrific things to their own country, see where they come from, and try to understand them," Deeley says); Merzak Allouache's *The Repentant (Le Repenti)* is also about extreme violence. Yet Deeley is cautious in calling it a trend: "These films are in that range, but others, of course, aren't."

Those others deal with matters as diverse as Egypt's uprising (e.g. Ibrahim El Batout's no-budget, no-script thoroughly researched improvised documentary); the slavery of solitude (*Coming Forth by Day* by Hala Lotfy); marriage traditions and relationship taboos in modern-day Paris (*Hold Back / Rengaine* by



Films don't necessarily have to be political to be seen as such: in *Wadjda*, a girl wants a bicycle, but her being a Saudi girl adds political dimensions.

Rachid Djaidani); a police officer's cowardice, fear, and inferiority in Casablanca (*Zero* by Nour-Eddine Lakhmari); or a girl who wants to buy a bicycle. The latter is *Wadjda*, a film by Saudi Arabian filmmaker Haifaa al Mansour that's been shown at various IFFs, including Dubai, and will be on general release in Europe. Although such huge interest partly stems from the fact that *Wadjda* is probably Saudi Arabia's first feature-length film, and directed by a woman, to Deeley there's something more profound: "Saudi Arabia is a society covered in other people's projections of it because it never represents itself. The film gives an insight into things we never see, from streets to schools to life behind closed doors."

More than just politics

Yet such international interactions might be limited. As Shafik wrote in her book, "It is hard to distribute anything from the Arab and Muslim world in Europe that offers alternative or simply unspectacular stories that go beyond dominant, often negatively coded images and discourses on the region." Deeley has also heard complaints from Arab filmmakers over favoured subjects and Western funders and distributors being interested in the region merely as a political entity. But films don't necessarily have to be political to be seen as such: in *Wadjda*, a girl wants a bicycle, but her being a Saudi girl adds political dimensions; a film from Palestine will be de facto political: the occupation cannot be escaped. Can such interest be rationalised? "Cinema is international. Thousands of films are being produced every year. For a festival or a

cinema screen, it either has to stand out from everything else in terms of amazing filmmaking, or the subject itself has to draw audiences," Deeley says.

"Independent films anywhere are niche films watched by people who are looking for culture beyond formulaic filmmaking. They're about aesthetic, soul, and mental satisfaction."

Have the uprisings played a role? "One can argue that cinematic representations are part of a wider phenomenon of self-reflection that was growing in the Arab world and reached its peak with the revolutions of the Arab Spring," says Lina Khatib, head of program on Arab Reform and Democracy at Stanford University. "You can count on the Middle East to have one crisis or the other, so there's always interest in the region for that reason," Deeley says, half-jokingly. "In the mainstream media, there's still a top-down narrative of what goes on there; not enough is being shown about culture." That's why BBC Arabic's commissioning of Cinema Badila was a positive step forward: "When you give so much air time for a region, there should be some allocated to things that are not to do with war and destruction and give more depth to what you're reporting on."

Accessibility is another concern. In the absence of general releases in cinemas, IFFs have become the main platform for independent filmmakers. Even if their films are not seen by mass audiences, they become part of the cultural heritage and conversation. Yet IFFs are only part of the solution. With this in mind, Deeley co-founded Zenith Foundation, a non-profit platform for independent cultural production

focused on the Arab region. Its online shop sells DVDs of carefully selected Arab films. However, Deeley admits that the project hasn't taken off very well: "When you have films that people don't know how to Google and directors they never heard about, even an online platform is an obscure platform."

Art and industry

So cinema is not only art – it's also an industry. The twin financial challenges of production and distribution are giant struggles for filmmakers at both public and private level. That's why Deeley believes that, not being a big ticket-seller, the art sector, including independent cinema, must be subsidised: "As societies we recognise that in life, industry and buildings are not enough. We need culture. Independent films anywhere are niche films watched by people who are looking for culture beyond formulaic filmmaking. They're about aesthetic, soul, and mental satisfaction."

Is the future bright for independent Arab cinemas? "It has triumphed against every single odd," Deeley says. "If it's done that so far, I'm very optimistic." And, as Sophie Chamas, co-editor of *Mashallah News*, wrote: "The independent Arab film industry is a veritable orchestra of diverse voices and perspectives that have the potential to crack or even pry open many a closed, angry and rigid regional mind, initiating curiosity or, at the very least, introducing confusion and doubt into what was once a disciplined house of unwavering conviction."

New Internationalist ✪



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