



You will pay for Abbott's tax cuts

Anna Pha

Having declared war on budget deficits and government debt, the Coalition has now announced a multi-billion dollar cut in company taxation. The result will be less income for the government. No government can return a budget to surplus and pay off debts by cutting its income. The company tax cuts will have to be paid for by someone, and it's not going to be big business.

"We must start living within our means ..." is the message from the Coalition in their plan for "Real Solutions for all Australians" and "start paying down government debt to protect ourselves against any future economic shocks and to avoid leaving a debt legacy to our children."

"Living within our means" is code for billions of dollars in cuts.

The Opposition has plans, still being kept under wraps, to undertake a massive program of cuts – which it describes as "delivering a better future for all Australians".

Liberal and Labor can debate all they like whether it is \$70 billion or \$50 billion in cuts, but two things are certain. The aim of the company tax cuts is to deliver bigger profits for big business and it is the people who will pay for them. For those who depend on government services and pensions, the future under a Coalition government is looking grim.

At the same time as cutting corporate taxes, the Opposition has committed to additional expenditure on education ("Gonski" reforms) and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (DisabilityCare Australia).

Opposition leader Tony Abbott's planned cuts to the mining tax and emissions trading scheme, would also reduce government income, but in the big scheme of things the amount lost in future years would not be so serious as the corporate tax cuts.

Every extra dollar less paid by business in taxation is an extra dollar in profits. That is the aim of the exercise.

Australia is already one of lowest taxing OECD countries, with only Chile, Mexico, the US and Korea raising a smaller proportion of GDP from national, state and local taxes. Incremental reductions in company and personal tax rates over the past 25 years have resulted in the loss of billions of dollars to government coffers. (See Editorial for more details.)

Abbott's proposed 1.5 percent company tax cut is another step towards reducing the company tax rate to 25 percent, from a high of 49 cents under the Hawke/Keating government.

The Coalition is following the



Smug.

model of former Liberal PM John Howard and Queensland Premier Campbell Newman, by keeping most of its anti-people policies under wraps until elected. Abbott knows that it would be electoral suicide to announce his plans before taking office.

Under a Coalition government the public sector would be crucified. At least 12,000 public servants would be sacked. Services would be cut or privatised, pushing up prices and reducing quality and accessibility. Single parents, the unemployed, age pensioners and other welfare recipients would feel the full brunt of punitive cuts.

Instead of admitting what lies ahead, the Liberals continue to trot out their dishonest promises about "generating jobs" and "establishing a strong and prosperous economy" for all Australians. The only prosperity will be for the big end of town.

GST on agenda

The Liberal Party plan states that once election it would: "Immediately establish a Commission of Audit to identify savings and

efficiencies in all areas of government, so we can reduce government debt and start delivering better value for money and sustainable Budget surpluses in the future." There will be a review of the tax system.

This is the same model that Howard used to justify previously unannounced budget cuts and other anti-people measures.

While Abbott says there are "no plans" for an increase in or extension of the GST into exempt areas such as education and health, there is little doubt that after the Audit, it will appear on the agenda along with a number of other nasties.

Apart from budgetary cuts and company tax cuts, the Coalition has a hit list for workers, again not for pre-election disclosure, to assist their big business mates. These include abolition of penalty rates, a reduction in the minimum wage and an all out assault on trade unions and workers' rights.

It will be WorkChoices on steroids, using the language of the Fair Work Act at the same time as gutting the content. Unions can forget about the right of entry, collective bargaining

or any form of industrial action. The powers of the construction industry special police force, the ABCC, will be strengthened and extended to other industries.

At the same time there will be \$1 billion in savings to businesses through removing a number of regulatory provisions, making it easier and quicker to get permits and licences.

A Coalition government would "End government waste and ensure better value-for-money in government programs so that Australia no longer needs to keep borrowing money to prop up its Budget." This includes the sacking of 12,000 public servants in the first round of cuts. Public hospitals and schools will be privatised and possibly the running of government departments as well as services.

If the Coalition does win government, it is important that they do not gain control of both Houses, without any possibility of curbing their most destructive and painful policies. The Communist Party of Australia is urging *Guardian* readers to support the Greens in the Senate. ✪

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Pie in the sky?

Imagine an Australia with a free, universal, public health system, without hospital waiting lists; an adequately funded and staffed public education system; free universities and TAFE with appropriate income support for students; an expanded public sector which builds public infrastructure, including public housing and public transport. A public sector that offers employees permanent employment, good wages and working conditions. Add to that a 35-hour working week; full employment and job security; pay equity; a social security system with uniform payments for recipients, at least 35 percent of male average weekly earnings; and a universal aged pension.

And imagine the responses from Liberal or Labor, or the media critics to such a vision: “unrealistic”, “unaffordable”, “pie in the sky”. Of course no Liberal government would dream of such pro-people policies and they are far removed from Labor’s neo-liberal agenda. But are they really “pie in the sky” or “unaffordable”?

That was not the view of Labor or the ACTU three or four decades ago. In fact, every single one of those aims was Labor or ACTU policy and some were a reality then. Over those years there have been massive increases in productivity and national wealth alongside the winding back of past gains and expectations. Now the Liberals are telling us (the people) that we are “living beyond our means”, that billions of dollars in cuts are required. But is this because such policies are unaffordable?

The question of affordability raises the question of government income. The federal government’s principal sources of income are from personal and company taxation. Twenty-five years ago, the tax rate for company profits was 49 cents in the dollar. The Hawke/Keating government began the process of reducing this rate, which is now 30 cents in the dollar. In 2012 alone, that amounted to a loss of over \$40 billion in government revenue.

The highest marginal rate of personal income tax has been reduced from 60 percent in the mid-1980s to 45 percent, benefiting the rich and costing the government potential revenue. The government has also foregone billions of dollars in revenue through the privatisation of Telstra, the Commonwealth Bank, airports, ports and other profitable government assets.

But the amount of income is not the only consideration. Affordability also comes back to how it is spent. A quick look at the budget papers reveals a number of large items that could be slashed or axed, resulting in considerable benefit to the environment and people’s wellbeing. Top of the list is a bloated military budget which is set to rise to \$36 billion in the coming period. There is the \$5.5 billion-plus private health insurance rebate which is nothing more than an indirect subsidy to an otherwise unsustainable private hospital system. Abolition of the fossil fuel rebate to mining corporations would free up a few more billion dollars. So would phasing out state aid to private schools.

Savings can be made from expanding the public sector instead of contracting out. The private sector is far more costly than the public sector because of the layers of private profit involved. In addition, the private sector borrows the funding at higher interest rates than the government – ultimately passed on in higher charges. It would be far cheaper for the government to borrow through the issue of bonds. As the experience of the NBN, pink bat insulation program, school hall program and other such contracted out programs demonstrates, there is nothing cheaper, more efficient or safer about the private sector! As for taxation, company tax rates and higher personal marginal rates should be increased, and a genuine super profits tax introduced to cover all industries.

Claims of unaffordability are capitalist mythology. As the above examples illustrate, there is no shortage of money, it is the distribution of income that is the problem. It comes down to ideology and the political will of a government whether such economic goals are “affordable” or “pie in the sky”. What takes priority – the people and the planet or private profit?

PRESS FUND

According to Tony Abbott, the Rudd government’s anti-asylum seeker ads breach the pre-election “caretaker” convention. The ads are certainly a blatant example of political advertising for a shocking policy, at taxpayer expense. The even more important point, however, is that the policies of both major parties appear to clearly breach the UN Refugee Convention, which obliges signatory nations to fairly consider applications for resettlement from genuine refugees, rather than banning them from entry if they arrive in small leaky boats! We like to bring these very important matters to your attention, but we really need your Press Fund contributions, so please send us something for the next issue if you possibly can. Many thanks to this week’s supporters, as follows:

J McCaulay \$10, MH \$100, Geoffrey Boot \$50, Mark Manion \$5, Charlie Maarbarni \$40, Pio Pagliuca \$50, “Round Figure” \$5

This week’s total: \$260 Progressive total: \$5,440

Homelessness services delivering but too many still in need

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

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

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

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

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

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

safe supported accommodation until homelessness ends” said Ms Clay.

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

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

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

More about Homelessness Australia www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au ✪

Centrelink bill-paying system told to lift its game

An independent review of Centrelink’s free bill-paying scheme that assists people manage their finances has been told to lift its game. The review found that Centrelink lacked the financial acumen to run the scheme, and that “this resulted in laissez-faire commercial practices harming Centrelink customers.”

“Centrelink is an extremely valuable and important service, and it’s critical that it be given a new lease of life,” said Maree O’Halloran of the National Welfare Rights Network.

“Of the 13,540 businesses that are approved by Centrelink to offer Centrelink, most are honest and treat people fairly. However, some business operators have been unscrupulous about signing people to the system. The report highlights the need to better protect vulnerable income support recipients and communities.”

The study supported claims by welfare groups that Centrelink failed to adequately promote take-up and awareness of Centrelink, arguing that “if Centrelink was more widely used by vulnerable groups, there may be less impetus for programs such as Compulsory Income Management.”

Centrelink is used by just 9.3 percent of income support recipients, with the average person having three deductions from their Centrelink account. Started in 1998 as a service to assist Indigenous clients manage their finances, Centrelink has experienced phenomenal growth since then, doubling in size since 2007, to 557,690 users in February 2013. The scheme distributes nearly \$2 billion of income recipients’ funds each year.

Indigenous people are heavy users of the scheme, accounting for 15 percent of Centrelink participants, and have, on average, higher levels of deductions through the scheme. Utilities and housing accounts for over three quarters of all Centrelink revenue. Improved consumer safeguards are needed, as the report notes that 35 percent of people receiving a Centrelink payment “have some form of language or literacy issue impeding them from readily accessing or understanding ... financial documentation”.

The Department of Human Services has a duty of care to ensure that participating businesses do not place already vulnerable people at risk of increased financial hardship.

“It is critically important that people on low incomes including people with vulnerabilities who use the scheme and the broader community maintain confidence with the Centrelink system,” said Ms O’Halloran.

“It is certainly the case that a lack of oversight and responsiveness has resulted in some vulnerable people being harmed by a system that is meant to assist. This report is a wake-up call that there can be no more business as usual at Centrelink.”

“To be blunt, a laissez-faire approach was highlighted by the independent review with respect to risk assessment, IT issues, monitoring, compliance and complaints. This approach has been harmful to some of the nation’s most vulnerable people.”

“Welfare and financial counselling groups have argued that Centrelink lost its way – this report is a road map about how it can get back on track.”

“Welfare Rights is pleased that the Minister for Human Services, Senator Jan McLucas, has supported most of the recommendations in the independent review.” ✪

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Murdoch, Labor and the "free press"

Bob Briton

"Kick this mob out", yelled the headline on the front page of Murdoch's *Daily Telegraph* on Monday last week. "At last, the power is within the hands of the Australian people to deliver a change of government and to rebuild Australia's strength and stability." The front page editorial went on to give the same list of Labor's shortcomings and broken promises that Abbott hammers day in and day out. Inside the paper, the spray finally ended with a strong recommendation of a vote for the Coalition subject, of course, to the same assessment and judgement that both the old parties of capital must endure from the former Dirty Digger's, now US Mogul's media empire.

For months, the Greens, Gillard and now Kevin Rudd have been subjected to sustained attack. There has been little pretence of "impartiality" inside and outside the editorial and opinion pieces. It kicked up a notch last month with the arrival of roving Murdoch "flamethrower" Col Allan, known around the journalists' traps as "Col Pot". His specialty is head kicking to achieve "regime change" or to provide "extra editorial leadership for our papers," as News Corp CEO Robert Thompson put it in a statement in New York recently. Murdoch foreshadowed the escalation of hostilities in June with a tweet: "Australian public now totally disgusted with Labor Party wrecking country with its sordid intrigues. Now for a quick election."

Taste on the front pages of Murdoch's tabloids across Australia took a nosedive. *The Daily Telegraph* depicted Kevin Rudd in a hoodie escaping from a bank with the headline "Rudd's \$733m heist on people's savings." Last Thursday's *Tele* plumbed new depths with a "digitally altered image" of Rudd as the hapless Colonel Klink, Deputy PM Anthony Albanese as Sergeant Schultz and disgraced former ALP back bencher Craig Thomson as the

irrepressible Hogan from the 1960s comedy *Hogan's Heroes*. The attack was continued inside with all sorts of ill-adapted "background" information and detail of Albanese's bar room chat with Craig Thomson.

Why the vitriol? Why has Murdoch turned so sharply against federal Labor when it has bent over backwards to look after big business? It has delivered low company taxation; a mining tax that collects hardly any revenue; a carbon price that exempts or compensates the biggest polluters; the continuation of the privatising agenda, particularly in health and education; Australian troops still support Murdoch-backed US military objectives worldwide; a new US military base has been established in Darwin; and industrial relations remain a paralysing legal minefield for unions trying to defend workers' pay and conditions.

Murdoch's editors defend their daily barrage by saying that the giant media group backed Rudd in 2007 against a Howard government running out of puff and credibility. Rudd wasn't alone recently in pointing to a likely reason for his former mate Rupert's nasty turn. Labor's National Broadband Network could give a boost to competitors to dominant pay TV outlet Foxtel, which is jointly owned by News Corp and Telstra. Murdoch's papers have run hard on the supposed shortcomings of the NBN and relished in every outsourcing stuff up and delay. They fail to point out that these are due to the private sector contractors, not the NBN itself. Loyal columnists and the Opposition have dismissed the NBN motive for the shrill election coverage as a nut-job "conspiracy theory".

News Corp is a huge corporation pursuing its own financial interests. Along with the rest of the corporate media, it also manufactures consent for the system guaranteeing monopoly profits and ideological dominance over the working class. Media barons like Murdoch are well aware of the sort of power you have over public opinion when you own 70 percent of



Why has Murdoch turned so sharply against federal Labor when it has bent over backwards to look after big business?

the papers in the country. The concept of a "free press" and "democracy" are a joke in these circumstances. Even governments are essentially powerless to rein in this sort of influence – witness the failure of Labor to impose broadcast media-style oversight of the press during its last term in office.

Rupert must be grinning from ear to ear. Labor has striven to shore up profits and serve the interests of the likes of News Corp (with the perhaps fatal exception of the NBN) while the Coalition is promising to deliver even bigger bottom lines for business. The media will foster the notion that vigorous "debate" is going on between the two alleged sides of politics battling over how to provide the most conducive environment for business.

From this table some crumbs may be offered to the Australian people. In the meantime, their real interests for jobs, peace, health and education are ignored. The need for more widespread alternative media is clear. The need for an economic and social alternative to the corrupt and cynical system of capitalism is also clear. ✪

Rally says "no" to PNG deal

For the third time in three weeks since Kevin Rudd announced the deal with the PNG government on July 19 to expel all asylum boat arrivals to Manus Island, Sydney refugee supporters held a rally and march on August 10.

The rally called for an end to Labor's PNG deal and the off-shore processing policies of both Labor and the Coalition.

Speakers included Gabe Kavanagh, Amnesty International; Greens NSW MLC MP, Mehreen Faruqi; Macquarie student, Vinil Kumar and RAC speaker, Amy Thomas.

"Politics in Australia has reached a shameful low point when the major issue at the federal election is about whether Labor or the Coalition has the harshest anti-refugee policies," said Nick Reimer for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"The cracks are already appearing in Kevin Rudd's PNG deal. Since the student demonstration a week ago, political opposition is growing in PNG itself. And despite the fanfare about a new deal with the Nauruan government, Labor has had to admit that neither citizenship nor permanent residency will be available to refugees on Nauru.

"The shocking human rights abuses associated with the PNG deal and offshore processing must be ended. Australia is the only country in the region with the resources to process and resettle refugees. When a government so readily tramples on the rights of refugees in the desperate attempt to win an election, the human rights of us all are at risk." ✪

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WA State Public Service Rally to save the public sector

Richard Titelius

In the lead up to the presentation of the State Budget to the WA parliament on August 8, the Community and Public Sector Union/Civil Service Association decided to hold a rally of its members and also invite the broader union movement and community.

After announcements in late June, in which the Treasurer Troy Buswell and Premier Colin Barnett let State Parliament know that they thought there were lots of public servants who were past their use by date, the union knew that they needed to rally their members in the defence of their jobs, salaries and conditions.

At lunchtime on August 6, on a mild wet day, with umbrellas in hand, a thousand public servants and their supporters made their way to the State Parliament for the rally to defend their jobs and the services which they knew were valued by the community.

On the steps of Parliament House CPSU/CSA branch secretary Toni Walkington addressed the rally. "Transparency in government has died," declared Walkington as she described the attitude of the government as it sought to privatise, contract out and simply stop providing some services.

Walkington also stated that 6,000 jobs had been lost in the public service. In the last 10 years it has grown at half the rate of the private sector due to government limits. "Instead of denigrating the public service, they should be supporting the public service."

To demonstrate the support the work of public servants has in the community, a petition with 6,000 signatures calling on the government to halt its plans to cut the public service, was presented to parliament.

The rally heard from a number of public sector workers whose workplaces had felt the impact of the Barnett government's push for redundancies and privatisation. The first was Colin; a Community Social Trainer from the Disability Services Commission (DSC) who was among 30 workers in 2011 told their jobs would be cut – despite a need still existing for the work which they performed.

Their work included teaching people with an intellectual disability how to acquire the life skills necessary to live independent and fulfilling lives, including how to read, write, arithmetic, shopping and home skills. The next worker was a Local Area Co-ordinator from DSC, Jeanette, whose job it was to liaise with service providers and families of people with intellectual disabilities to ensure these people have access to resources within the community including Community Social Trainers such as Colin.

Jeanette and Colin were both slated to lose their jobs to not-for-profit organisations who the government believed could do the same job at less cost. However, the government was yet to come up with a provider whose employees have the skills, experience and qualities to take over from the workers in the public sector.

Belinda, a Community Corrections Officer from the Department of Corrective Services, spoke of her desire to join the public service in a capacity where she could make a difference in the community by providing opportunities for offenders to change their behaviour while they are sentenced prisoners. The government has provided such low levels of funding that very few programs are available, "... the only thing offenders



Photo: Richard Titelius

learn in prison is how to become better criminals."

Assistant branch secretary Rikki Hendon added that workloads in the Child Protection Agency had blown out to such levels that even the Industrial Relations Commission had found to be too high for workers to be able to adequately protect children in the agency's care.

Other unions with members in the public sector were represented at the rally, including United Voice, Prison Officers Union and the State School Teachers Union. They pledged their support for the struggle ahead.

Laying siege to public sector

On Thursday August 8, the state Treasurer Troy Buswell delivered his budget to the Parliament of Western Australia.

The budget has imposed a number of increases in fees and charges and even imposed new charges. The first home buyers' subsidy for established homes aimed at stimulating construction, was cut.

Untouched of course are the extravagant infrastructure projects of the Elizabeth Quay and the Burswood Stadium, while the timetable of the

light rail project is pushed further out.

Less people working means less revenue for the state over the medium to longer term. The public sector unions envisage larger rallies to demand change to the government's austerity measures.

The Communist Party of Australia recognises that a strong public sector can give people better, more reliable and cheaper services and more control over the economy.

The CPA defends public sector jobs and opposes the sell off or contracting out of their management to private corporations. ☘

Film review by Richard Titelius

For Marx (Za Marksa)

"There is only one ally against growing barbarism – the people, who suffer so greatly from it." Bertolt Brecht Essay on Popularity and Realism

If there are those in the world today who doubt the relevance and foresight of Karl Marx, a considered and reflective viewing of the new Russian movie, *For Marx* should dispel any doubts.

The movie by controversial Russian director Svetlana Baskova (Baskova is also the screen writer) takes place in Russia as the global financial crisis begins to affect the economy and the workers.

It begins as a bus picks up workers in a large city and takes them to a Soviet era factory that is now run by gangster capitalists who engage in a type of hyper exploitation.

On the bus, an activist union leader has decided that the workers at the decrepit steel foundry have had enough of the wage reductions, the poor safety conditions and the management-run union at the plant. He seeks their

support to establish an independent union.

On arrival at the foundry, the workers dismount from the bus and viewers are taken for a visual tour of the foundry where poor ventilation of the often dangerous fumes from the steel smelting process can be seen and guard rails and so forth are scarce.

This is contrasted by the modern and clean boardrooms of the hyper capitalists who own the plant and try to strip as much surplus value from the workers as possible to fund extravagant art collections and decadent live styles. In one scene, the main character of management is on the phone to an associate saying, "Hired labour is our future. They should be afraid of hunger."

For those viewers who think that the protagonist workers organising the independent union are communists they are to be sadly mistaken as the only mention of the Communist Party is when the independent union finally organises a rally in the city, they hope that enough people come to outnumber the Communists.

However, the leadership core is well read of progressive Russian and German literary figures and quotes from Gogol, Godard, Stanislawski and Mikhail Pokrovsky dot conversations which they have in evening meetings between themselves and with workers to convince them to join their movement.

Pokrovsky, who was a 20th century Marxist historian whose work was acclaimed by Lenin, emphasised the role of economics as the driving force of history.

Perhaps for viewers in Western liberal democracies, the most relevant literary reference is that of the alienation effect of bourgeois theatre of Marxist German playwright Bertolt Brecht.

In Brecht's days from the 1920s to the 1950s when he wrote *Threepenny Opera*, *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Life of Galileo* he used the alienation effect to combat emotional manipulation in the theatre replacing it with an entertaining or surprising jolt. The actors are put in situations where they emotionally step away from their characters

or use skilful self critique amongst other techniques.

In the movie the leaders of the independent union tell others at the factory that they should not have to put up with the awful conditions and the cutting of their wages any longer.

All is not plain sailing and they must confront blackmail, bribery, murder and intimidation, especially from the workplace representatives of the management's union who constantly try to impress upon them that their actions are confusing the workers.

The owners of the foundry want the activists "gotten rid of", resulting in the murder of two of the leaders.

The principle protagonist survives but is in the vicinity of the shooting and must decide to continue with his just fight or withdraw.

There is only one direct quote from Marx and that is, "History repeats itself first as tragedy and the second time as farce," which could relate to the brutal yet clumsy actions of the gangster capitalists.

The workers and their leaders continue to organise speeches, banners and placards for the rally which is a success, resulting in the calling of a strike. The hyper capitalists respond with a "cleaning day" locking out the workers.

The rest of the movie then races towards a gruesome and unexpected yet fitting climax.

The film played to rave reviews in Russia where the *Kommersatn* newspaper reported it as "A merciless sentence to capitalism itself." Meanwhile the "industry" in the US, the *Hollywood Reporter* said, "Although it misses its target, the film should find a readymade audience at further festivals [It was featured at the 64th Berlinale International Film Festival in February 2013], with potential niche appeal to overseas distributors, and more Groucho than Karl."

The movie is a must see for all communists and progressive minded people who believe that a better world is not only possible but inevitable – though it must be planned and well organised. ☘

Sand mining fears for Quandamooka

Rudi Maxwell

Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation (QYAC) chair Cameron Costello is deeply concerned that a close relationship between the Queensland government and sandmining company Sibelco could see sandmining on North Stradbroke Island extended without permission of the traditional owners. "The effects of mining, as one of our Elders put it, are erasing the footsteps of our ancestors," he told the *Koori Mail*.

"That hits it on the head.

"You can understand why some of our mob worked for the mines; you need to pay for your family. But the Quandamooka people as a whole decided on an Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) that brought a complete end to mining in favour of more caring for country."

When the Bligh government passed the *North Stradbroke Island Protection and Sustainability Act* in 2011 QYAC was overjoyed that sandmining would be phased out by 2019, ending nearly six decades of community division for which the traditional owners had received no compensation.

Having had their native title rights recognised by the Federal Court on July 4, 2011, and signing an ILUA that included compensation and the transition to joint management of Naree Budjong Djara National Park, QYAC thought they were on pretty safe ground transitioning to a sandmining-free economy for their land.

However, Sibelco, the privately-owned Dutch mining company that owned sandmining licences on North Stradbroke Island, felt differently. Sibelco contracted communications consultants Rowland, who ran an aggressive and public campaign against the decision, which convinced Queensland Premier Campbell Newman, who told ABC radio recently that the LNP had run on a platform of extending sandmining on North Stradbroke Island.

Mr Costello said QYAC felt like the state government and mining

company were "ganging up". "QYAC believes that the mining on North Stradbroke Island should be done as agreed to in the Act and that any extension has to be done with the permission of the traditional owners because it is our land," he said. "We've had conversations with the government but none where they have said or tabled a proposal about extending sandmining.

"We met Mining Minister Andrew Cripps in May and he didn't table a proposition and said it was up to the mining company. We haven't met with the mining company because they told us they want legislation to be passed first.

"Good faith"

"The Quandamooka have always acted in good faith and we expect the Queensland government and the mining company to act in good faith.

"The Quandamooka people are very disappointed with the government and the mining company not coming to us and dealing on a level playing field."

Sibelco registered for a third party campaign in the 2012 state election, posting a late return saying they had spent \$91,840.

Mr Newman refused to answer a question on whether any of that money had been spent in his electorate of Ashgrove, which he won from Labor's Kate Jones, but the *Koori Mail* understands the mining company posted letters without required disclosure urging a vote for Mr Newman in Ashgrove.

Sibelco did not answer a question by the *Koori Mail* asking in which electorates it spent the money, saying the campaign was "not aligned to any political party".

However, according to material regarding the Sibelco campaign, available on Rowland's website but now removed, "In January 2012, then-Opposition Leader Campbell Newman announced that, if elected, he would overturn the Bligh government's decision. His public commitment made on Brisbane radio underlined the key arguments in favour of extended sandmining made



Concerned ... Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation chair Cameron Costello and Elder Uncle Bob Anderson.

Photo: *Koori Mail*

by Sibelco Australia's public affairs campaign."

In a recent Budget Estimates hearing, Labor MP Jo-Ann Miller accused Minister Cripps and the LNP of a "filthy, dirty, rotten deal" regarding the extension of sandmining on North Stradbroke Island.

Ms Miller said that according to the Integrity Commissioner's website, the government had meetings on eight separate dates in two months with Sibelco.

Mr Cripps refused requests for an interview or to answer email questions.

However, ABC TV's 7.30 obtained a ministerial briefing paper by Sibelco on how to frame new legislation and a pre-cabinet government circular seeking permission to put this proposal into practice. The documents say mining at Enterprise (the largest mine) will extend through to 2035, eight years longer than had been announced.

They also say legislation extending the leases could be found invalid.

"We felt safe when we signed the ILUA regarding federal legislation

that our rights were safe, but it appears the Queensland government wants to act solely for the benefit of the mining company," Mr Costello said.

He said he was also concerned about health impacts from sandmining.

"I'm worried about radiation levels, dust from trucks and dust in the marine park area on oyster leases," he said. "But the other issue is the effect mining has setting Quandamooka people against each other.

"Our community has been divided by mining, and the companies run very sophisticated campaigns of divide and conquer. They employ some of our mob and they're adept at sowing seeds of conflict.

"My concern is that this is happening again; that it's reopening old wounds just when they were starting to heal, because we were able to focus on other pillars of the economy: tourism, forests, and sustainable industries. We've got investors keen to invest - now that's throwing that in doubt as well.

"Once again history is repeating. We're being pushed aside. After 19 years of struggling for our native title rights and having the Federal Court grant a consent determination, the government, within two years, is legislating to get out of it," he said.

"It raises questions about the Native Title Act, because essentially, if the Newman government gets away with breaking the ILUA with the Quandamooka, what could be flow-on effects for the rest of the country?"

"We need Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country to support the Quandamooka because if the Newman government gets away with this, every state government will be after them.

"Our door is always open to meet with the Premier and Mining Minister, any of his mob, and I hope we can have a constructive relationship with the government, with joint management of the national park, but, if we have to drag them kicking and screaming to do it properly, we'll do it."

Koori Mail ☘

McDonald's pushes on with plans to build massive 24/7 store

Gary Muratore

McDonald's plans to build a huge 24/7 store and drive-through in our town of Tecoma on the Dandenong ranges - demolishing local iconic buildings on the site and ensuring it goes directly opposite the kindergarten and school.

For our kids, the nearby national park and our beautiful small-town culture, there could be nothing worse.

Every day, kids as young as five years old would need to walk past a giant advertisement for junk food just to go to school. This is despite health experts warning of the damaging impact of junk food on young children - and child obesity spiralling out of control. Perhaps

even more worryingly, if it goes ahead here, it could set a dangerous precedent of junk food stores being built next to schools.

Our community doesn't want that. The plan is opposed by 90 percent of residents. The application was rejected by council. But instead of respecting our wishes, McDonald's appealed the decision and are using their huge financial and legal power to bully their way into our town. They're now suing locals who are objecting to the building of the store - in the Victorian Supreme Court - and there are accounts of McDonald's private security on the proposed site threatening and intimidating locals who have peacefully protested against the plan.

If McDonald's win this fight, it'll break our hearts. This town, our special part of the world that we think deserves protecting, would be irreversibly changed. That's why we need your help. The only way McDonald's will walk away now is if they see it becoming a huge brand risk for them - that thousands of consumers will stand with us in opposing their plan.

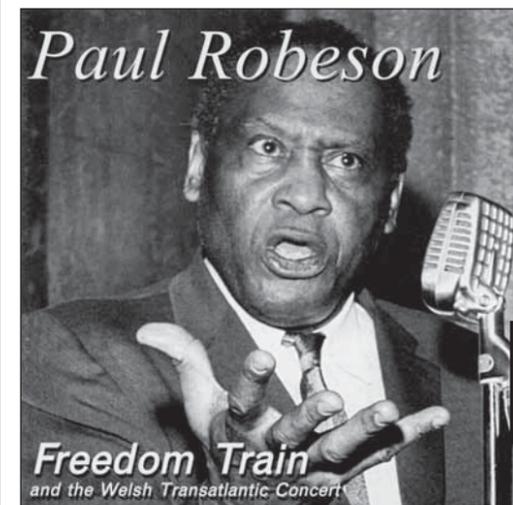
Please sign my petition Change.org and join our community standing up against McDonald's - and help ensure they abandon plans to build the store opposite our primary school.

It'd be devastating for our beautiful little town and national park. ☘

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Free Stephen Murney, victim of British political repres

Steven Katsineris*

"Those unfortunate to find themselves interned by remand, despite not being found guilty of anything, can be imprisoned for lengthy periods with no sign of either a date for trial or release. Political internees can find themselves in jail for up to two years, or more, under this repressive, draconian policy, awaiting a trial ..."

Stephen Murney 01/06/2013.

Stephen Murney is a political and community activist, who lives in Newry in the north of Ireland. He is also a member of Eirigi (Arise) which is a legal, registered Irish socialist republican political party. Stephen has frequently documented, photographed and recorded incidents of harsh PSNI (Police Service of Northern Ireland) stop and searches of people, house raids and other rough treatment in the Newry area. Stephen regularly highlighted these issues in local newspapers and on the internet.

In late November 2012, Stephen Murney wrote a letter to a local newspaper expressing his strong condemnation of several early morning raids by the PSNI on homes in the Derrybeg Estate, Newry. He stated that these incursions were causing deep distress to the targeted families and maintained the raids were excessive, unnecessary and avoidable. On November 28, some 24 hours after Stephen's letter was published, in scenes similar to those he had described and criticised, police smashed in his front door and stormed into his home in a dawn raid. Police officers searched his house, seized a computer, political literature and a flute band uniform and arrested Stephen.

The PSNI then three days later charged Stephen Murney with three "offences". The first charge is, collecting information which may be of use to terrorists. The second charge is, distributing information which may be of use to terrorists. The third charge is, possessing items which could be used for terrorist purposes.

The first charge concerns Stephen openly taking photographs of people, including PSNI officers at a protest rally in Newry in June 2012. The PSNI didn't question, or arrest Stephen, or confiscate or examine his camera/phone or ask for certain images to be deleted at that time. The police did ask him to stop taking photographs and he promptly agreed and did so. The second charge relates to Stephen later posting the same photographs on Facebook, as well as having other political images on this computer. The third charge is in regards to the items of clothing (flute band uniform), two airguns and political literature seized from his home.

At a hearing on December 21, Stephen's lawyer said the photographs had been openly taken, that Stephen had stopped when instructed and that the posting of some photographs was also for a perfectly legitimate purpose. Some of these photos were taken by Stephen at political protests, commemorations and other events. But most of the photos were downloaded from the internet, many were old, dating back to the Civil Rights Movement in north of Ireland in the late 1960s.

The lawyer added that the items that could allegedly be used for "terrorist" purposes consisted of flute band uniforms, possessing two ball-bearing airguns (belonging to his son and are legal and widely available throughout Ireland), legal political leaflets and images freely available to the public on the internet. Many supportive references from community organisations in Newry in support of Stephen Murney were also presented to the court.

It is common practice for political activists around the world to take photographs of demonstrations and of police at political protests. In fact, legal and human rights groups regularly advise political activists to record such protests and any instances of police harassment or mistreatment that occur. Like many hundreds of thousands of other people Stephen loads this information on his computer and sometimes posts some of it on social media sites.

After querying the vague nature of the charges the judge granted Stephen bail. But at the request of the PSNI, the judge imposed several draconian bail conditions, including: banning Stephen from living at home with his wife and family, banning him from entering Newry, his home town, where almost all his family and friends live and banning him from attending any political events or meetings. The judge additionally, ordered that Stephen, reside at least five miles from Newry, report daily to the PSNI barracks (a further 12 miles away), accept a daily curfew from 7pm to 10am and wear an electric tagging device at all times.

Stephen rejected the humiliating bail conditions the court imposed, declaring his total innocence of the charges. Several efforts by Stephen's lawyers to change the harsh bail conditions were refused and he remains in imprisoned in Maghaberry Jail.

The Orwellian state of affairs in the North of Ireland

"There has been an accelerated erosion of legal rights since 1998." Pat McNamee, member of the Stormont Assembly and former local councillor.

At a recent protest, a member of the Stormont Assembly and friend of Stephen Murney, Pat McNamee, stated that only through entering the world of "newspeak" could we obtain the answer as to why Stephen Murney is imprisoned. He said, "Newspeak is the term used by Orwell, in his book 1984, to describe the language employed to oppress people in what was a fictional totalitarian state. That state is not really so fictional nowadays."

Pat continued, "Stephen Murney is charged with having a band uniform that he wore whilst a member of a local republican flute band. In 'newspeak', that is having a paramilitary uniform and being equipped for terrorism."

"Stephen Murney is charged with having photographs of protests he had taken part in, which inevitably included images of members of the PSNI, who were also present at these demonstrations. In 'newspeak', that is having information useful to terrorists."

"Stephen Murney is charged with having his son's toy guns in his home. In 'newspeak', that is having an imitation firearm."

"In 'real speak', Stephen has been held in prison for over six months solely because he is an effective republican and community activist."

Congratulating all of those present at the rally, Eirigi activist Shane Jones said that it was representative of a growing awareness of the plight of Stephen Murney across the country and of the excesses of the British state.

"However, if those within the British establishment, its puppet parliament at Stormont, its compliant judiciary or its corrupt police force thought that they could isolate Stephen Murney and smother his criticism of their collective actions, they have misjudged the situation. People once unaware of the true nature of the continued British presence in Ireland are being exposed to it across the country. Over the past couple of weeks alone pickets, protests, leaflet drops and information stalls have been held in Newry, Offaly, Wexford, Wicklow, Belfast, Galway and Dublin, with many more to come," Shane Jones said.

Concluding the rally, Davy Hyland, independent councillor in Newry and Mourne District Council, vowed that ... he and those assembled would continue to raise the case of Stephen Murney until he is released and allowed to return to his family, home and community.

Despite the Good Friday Agreement, injustice continues

"Despite all the supposed 'changes', many of the old repressive injustices remain, including internment, political policing, Diplock courts and ongoing M15/British army military activity." Stephen Murney.

Highlighting that Stephen Murney is but



one victim of an increasingly oppressive British state apparatus, Pat McNamee said that after two decades of "peace processing", the rights of the individual, rather than being protected through a Bill of Rights, which was but one of a number of promises enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement, had been reneged upon without sanction.

"Through extended periods of detention, increased stop and search powers, the reduction of the right to a trial by jury and 'closed evidence hearings', where judges are presented with secret 'evidence' which can neither be disclosed to nor challenged by the accused or their legal representatives, the British state apparatus is more draconian now than at any time during the years from 1969 through 1999. Instead of moving forward with human rights, it is they who are dragging us back," Pat McNamee stated.

Stephen Murney is a victim of British injustice in the North of Ireland, but he is one of many of those suffering from an increasingly oppressive British state system. The terms of the Good Friday Agreement offered better times, a period of peace and healing, yet people's human rights and civil liberties are still constantly violated. And the basic rights that were meant to be upheld by the Good Friday Agreement process are being grossly abused.

Calls for the release of Stephen Murney grow

Since the arrest and imprisonment of Stephen Murney a number of Irish republican and various other organisations have campaigned for his freedom, including Eirigi, Republican Network for Unity, Irish Republican Socialist Party, Republican Sinn Fein, 32 County Sovereignty Movement, as well as local Councillors and other individuals. Independent Councillor Davy Hyland from the Newry and Mourne Council stated that, "Stephen has been held...on the most spurious charges ... he tried to get bail, but was given the most atrocious

conditions that he couldn't possibly meet". He added, "Stephen's treatment has been absolutely deplorable." While Sinn Fein Councillor Brendan Curran said the bail restrictions imposed were "excessive and unacceptable" given the "dubious" charges.

And human rights groups are starting to take up his case. On 14, June, Justice Watch Ireland wrote to the British Secretary of State Theresa Villars and Justice Minister, David Ford, calling for the immediate release of Stephen Murney. JWI also issued a press release on the facts of the case and their conclusions. JWI's press release said, "Justice Watch Ireland are more than concerned that Mr Murney may be a victim of the most blatant abuse of the justice system seen in the last decade."

"We are equally concerned that should this practice of judicial abuse be allowed to continue unabated, it could well threaten the democratic rights of all citizens in the future. We call on all politicians and those opposed to losing their democratic and human rights, to voice their disapproval of such abuses continuing. Justice Watch Ireland calls for Stephen Murney to be released on unconditional bail as a matter of urgency. We believe his detention is nothing short of 'internment by definition'. 'Internment by remand' is being claimed by many, in which we are currently investigating, but in this case our conclusion is that Mr Murney truly is interned by definition with the use of the remand process currently being implemented."

"Political policing and internment is nothing new. They are practices which have been in place for some decades, practices that we in Eirigi have been to fore in highlighting, exposing and opposing. As a result, those of us who have been most vocal in opposing these unjust activities and our families have paid a heavy personal price in the form of constant PSNI harassment, frequent 'stop and searches', house raids, assaults, threats, intimidation and ultimately, the loss of liberty." Stephen Murney.

Stephen Murney is imprisoned, not because he has done or planned to do anything unlawful,

ssion

UNAC statement on the conviction of Bradley Manning*



Bradley Manning is an American hero. He helped expose the crimes of the US government as it wages immoral and illegal wars against people around the world. Manning exposed the fact that the US military was killing civilians, including first responders, without cause. He exposed the fact that the CIA was conducting an undeclared war in Pakistan, that the US tortures prisoners and looks the other way when others do the same, and much more.

There were no military or government secrets in the material that Manning leaked, only reports of immoral and illegal activities that our government and military were conducting. This material was classified so that we would not know about this. But people have the right to know about such activities in order to make informed decisions about what we want our government to do. Neither politicians nor the corporate media were telling us these truths, so we needed Bradley Manning to come forward to speak truth to power.

Manning was acquitted of aiding the enemy but was found guilty on 20 charges that could result in his being sentenced to 136 years in prison. We can be sure that the military court will give him a hefty sentence; because he did something that the government wants no one else to do – expose government crimes. A stiff sentence will say to all, “If you expose the crimes of this government, you we be tracked down and locked away forever.”

The biggest fear the US government has is that it will be exposed as a government supporting the interests of the 1% at the cost of the needs of the 99%. The US government fears the truth more than anything else. Bradley Manning revealed the truth.

but he is in jail due his dissident political views and because he is an active, outspoken and effective Republican and community activist. In a normal, civil society in another place there would have to be substantial evidence against Stephen Murney to warrant the serious charges he now faces. But the British occupied North of Ireland is not a normal, ordinary place. So, instead of these charges being clearly recognised as weak and ridiculous, in the six counties, they are depicted by the PSNI as a very grave matter and bring the prospect of lengthy prison sentence if Stephen is convicted.

The British authorities have used a policy of selective internment against Stephen Murney in an attempt to silence him and other opposition. A political activist is now in effect interned without trial on the basis of the most ridiculous “evidence”. Stephen Murney has done nothing wrong, but freely exercised his democratic right to attend political demonstrations, to take photographs and to be critic of PSNI actions and of British rule in the north of Ireland. Stephen Murney is innocent and his imprisonment is utterly unjust. The flimsy charges against him should be dropped and Stephen should be immediately and unconditionally released.

“Internment was wrong and unjust in previous years and it remains as equally wrong and unjust today. I would encourage all those that disagree with its continued use to organise and publicly oppose internment in its current form.”
Stephen Murney.

For those wanting more information and to support Stephen Murney you can contact: Free Stephen Murney Now on Facebook.

If you would like to write to Stephen, his address is-
Stephen Murney, Roe 4, Maghaberry Jail, Old Road, Ballinderry Upper, Lisburn, BT28, 2PT, Northern Ireland.

*Steven Katsineris is Vice Chairman of the James Connolly Association, Melbourne. ✳

Edward Snowden also revealed the truth when he exposed the fact that the US government is spying on every American and on millions of others around the world. This is why they twisted arms of governments around the world to violate Snowden’s right to seek asylum. Our government again violated international law and the safety of the Bolivian president, Evo Morales, by forcing down his plane in Austria, thinking Snowden might be on board. It was also fear of the truth that led them to jail civil liberties lawyer Lynne Stewart for the “crime” of sending out press releases from her client, the blind sheik, and it is why they deny her compassionate release as she nears death from cancer in a Texas prison.

It is fear of the truth that has led the Obama administration to crack down on whistleblowers more than any other administration in history, including using the 1917 Espionage Act to persecute whistle blowers. It is fear of the truth that holds Julian Assange as a virtual prisoner in London’s Ecuadorian Embassy and seeks to discredit WikiLeaks for publishing Manning and Snowden’s revelations. The Obama administration has demanded that journalists reveal their sources or risk going to jail. To hide the truth, this administration’s representatives have committed felonies by lying to Congress, as was done by Intelligence director James Clapper when he told congress that the government does not collect data on millions of Americans.

To hide the truth, our government now classifies much that the public has a right to see and all of the embarrassing and illegal activity in which it is involved. Therefore, to expose any of this information is considered a crime. It is a crime in the US today

to expose the truth, and that is why they are prosecuting Bradley Manning. Manning released the “Collateral Murder” video, for example, which reveals no military secrets, only military crimes. If knowledge of these crimes helps the enemy, then let’s stop the crime, not punish the one who exposes it.

In the cases of the hundreds of Muslims living in the US who have been framed by the FBI, classified material and “secret evidence” that the defence is not allowed to see is almost always used. There was a similar attempt to keep much of the Manning trial secret, as the government tried to control the narrative about Manning’s character and his deeds.

This attempt was partially thwarted when the defence published highly redacted material that the government did not want the people to see. The government did not want the words of Bradley Manning to be heard, either, so they did not allow recording or transcripts of the trial to be published. However, a reporter for the UK *Guardian* succeeded in transcribing and publishing Bradley Manning’s long pre-trial statement. The statement shows Manning as an intelligent young man doing what he understands to be in the interest of the American people and exposing wrongdoing on the part of the military and the government.

The government’s attack on Bradley Manning is an attack on us all. It is an attack on democratic rights in general. We must all come to his aid. Please support the Bradley Manning Defence Committee: www.bradleymanning.org.

*United National Antiwar Movement ✳



Fleecing pensioners to save the banks

Ellen Brown

The Detroit bankruptcy is looking suspiciously like the bail-in template originated by the G20's Financial Stability Board in 2011, which exploded on the scene in Cyprus in 2013 and is now becoming the model globally. In Cyprus, the depositors were "bailed in" (stripped of a major portion of their deposits) to re-capitalise the banks. In Detroit, it is the municipal workers who are being bailed in, stripped of a major portion of their pensions to save the banks.

Bank of America Corp and UBS AG have been given priority over other bankruptcy claimants, meaning chiefly the pensioners, for payments due on interest rate swaps they entered into with the city. Interest rate swaps – the exchange of interest rate payments between counterparties – are sold by Wall Street banks as a form of insurance, something municipal governments "should" do to protect their loans from an unanticipated increase in rates.

Unlike ordinary insurance, however, swaps are actually just bets; and if the municipality loses the bet, it can owe the house, and owe big. The swap casino is almost entirely unregulated, and it is a rigged game that the house virtually always wins. Interest rate swaps are based on the LIBOR rate, which has now been proven to be manipulated by the rate-setting banks; and they were a major contributor to Detroit's bankruptcy.

Derivative claims are considered "secured" because the players must post collateral to play. They get not just priority but "super-priority" in bankruptcy, meaning they go first before all others, a deal pushed through by Wall Street in the Bankruptcy Reform Act of 2005. Meanwhile, the municipal workers, whose pensions are theoretically protected under the Michigan Constitution, are classified as "unsecured" claimants who will get the scraps after the secured creditors put in their claims. The banking casino, it seems, trumps even the state

constitution. The banks win and the workers lose once again.

The argument for the super-priority of derivative claims is that non-payment on these bets represents a "systemic risk" to the financial scheme. Derivative bets are cross-collateralised and are so inextricably entwined in a US\$600-plus trillion house of cards that the whole financial scheme could go down if the betting scheme were to collapse. Instead of banning or regulating this very risky casino, Congress has been persuaded by the masterminds of Wall Street that it needs to be preserved at all costs.

The same tortured logic has been used to justify the fact that the federal government deigned to bail out Wall Street but not Detroit. Supposedly, the mega-banks pose a systemic risk and Detroit doesn't. On July 29, former Obama administration economist Jared Bernstein pursued this line of reasoning on his blog, writing:

"The correct motivation for federal bailouts – meaning some combination of managing a bankruptcy, paying off creditors (though often with a haircut), or providing liquidity in cases where that's the issue as opposed to insolvency – is systemic risk. The failure of large, major banks, two out of the big three auto companies, the secondary market for housing – all of these pose unacceptably large risks to global financial markets, and thus the global economy, to a major industry, including its upstream and downstream suppliers, and to the national housing sector.

"Because a) there's not much of a case that Detroit is systemically connected in those ways, and b) Chapter 9 of the bankruptcy code appears to provide an adequate way for it to deal with its insolvency, I don't think anything like a large scale bailout is forthcoming."

Holding Main Street hostage

Detroit's bankruptcy poses no systemic risk to Wall Street and global financial markets. Fine. But it does pose a systemic risk to Main Street,



Ballroom, Lee Plaza Hotel.

local governments, and the contractual rights of pensioners. Credit rating agency Moody's stated in a recent report that if Detroit manages to cut its pension obligations, other struggling cities could follow suit. The Detroit bankruptcy is establishing a template for wiping out government pensions everywhere. Chicago or New York could be next.

There is also the systemic risk posed to the municipal bond system. Bryce Hoffman, writing in *The Detroit News* on July 30, warned:

"Detroit's bankruptcy threatens to change the rules of the municipal bond game and already is making it more expensive for the state's other struggling towns and school districts

to borrow money and fund big infrastructure projects.

"In fact, one bond analyst told *The Detroit News* that he has spoken to major institutional investors who have already decided to stop, for now, buying any Michigan bonds."

The real concern of bond investors, says Hoffman, is not the default of Detroit but the precedent the city is setting. General obligation municipal bonds have always been viewed as a virtually risk-free investment. They are unsecured, but bondholders have considered themselves protected because the bonds are backed by the "unlimited taxing authority" of the government that issued them. Detroit, however, has shown that the city's taxing authority is far from unlimited. It already has the highest property taxes of any major city in the country, and it is bumping up against a ceiling imposed by the state constitution. If Detroit is able to cut its bond debt in half or more by defaulting, other distressed cities are liable to look very closely at following suit. Hoffman writes:

"The bond market is warning that this will make Michigan a pariah state and raise borrowing costs – not just for Detroit and other troubled municipalities, but also for paragons of fiscal virtue such as Oakland and Livingston counties."

However, writes Hoffman: "Governor Rick Snyder dismisses that threat and says the bond market is just trying to turn Detroit away from a radical solution that could become a model for other struggling cities across America."

A safer, saner model

Interestingly, Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero, Snyder's Democratic opponent in the last gubernatorial race, proposed a solution that could have avoided either robbing the pensioners or scaring off the bondholders: a state-owned bank. If the state or the city had its own bank, it would not need to borrow from Wall Street, worry about interest rate swaps, or be beholden to the bond vigilantes. It could borrow from its own bank, which would leverage the local government's capital into credit, back that credit with the deposits created by the government's own revenues, and return the interest to the government as a dividend, following the groundbreaking model of the state-owned Bank of North Dakota.

There are other steps that need to be taken, and soon, to prevent a cascade of municipal bankruptcies. The super-priority of derivatives in bankruptcy needs to be repealed, and the protections of Glass-Steagall* need to be restored. While we are waiting on a very dilatory Congress, however, state and local governments might consider protecting themselves and their revenues by setting up their own banks.

* The Glass-Steagall Act: four provisions of the Banking Act of 1933 that limited commercial bank securities activities and affiliations between commercial banks and securities firms. globalresearch.ca ☛

Ads watchdog piles into racist van row

Paddy McGuffin

The backlash against the government's controversial immigration ad vans campaign forced an official response last week as the advertising watchdog confirmed it would investigate whether guidelines had been breached.

The "go home, or you'll be picked up and deported" ads targeting "illegal" immigrants sparked fury when they were launched by the Home Office in London last month.

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) said it launched the investigation after receiving 60 complaints expressing concerns that the ads were "reminiscent of slogans used by racist groups to attack immigrants in the past."

Some complainants also questioned whether a claim about

arrest figures in the advert were misleading. An ASA spokesman said: "I can confirm that the ASA has launched a formal investigation into the Home Office 'Go Home' ad campaign following 60 complaints.

"Complainants have expressed concerns that the ad, in particular the phrase 'go home,' is offensive and irresponsible because it is reminiscent of slogans used by racist groups to attack immigrants in the past and could incite or exacerbate racial hatred and tensions in multi-cultural communities.

"Separately, some complainants have challenged whether the claim '106 arrests last week in your area' is misleading.

"They've also challenged whether it is misleading because it implies arrest is the automatic consequence of remaining in the UK

without permission. We will publish our findings in due course."

Civil rights groups and unions welcomed the investigation.

Liberty policy officer Rachel Robinson said: "Another day, another sign that this cheap Home Office stunt has backfired. Driving National Front-style slogans around ethnically diverse areas was bound to cause deep offence. The Home Office have a duty to promote good relations and eliminate discrimination – it's time for them to think again."

Unison union national officer for race equality Khadee Campbell added: "The fact that the Home Office think that this type of advertising is acceptable shows how low this government is prepared to stoop." *Morning Star* ☛

DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

Write a letter to the Editor

US goal: major economic unions without Russia and China

Yuri Skidanov

By early 2013 a long-term strategic goal of the US foreign policy became clear. The goal is to create two economic unions to confront the growing power of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) member countries and form two large markets under the control of the United States in the Atlantic and Pacific areas without the participation of China and Russia.

The Trans-Atlantic and Trans-Pacific Partnership aim at creating an “economic” NATO, Transatlantic Free Trade Area (TAFTA) between the United States and the European Union. The defence budget of its member countries amounts to approximately 58 percent of global military spending.

According to the British Prime Minister David Cameron, the effect of the new union will be expressed in the growth of the EU’s GDP by US\$157 billion, the US – US\$130 billion and the rest of the world – US\$138 billion.

The abolition of the transatlantic tariffs within five years will ensure revenue growth between the US and the EU of over US\$120 billion. In addition, the joining of the US and European markets will determine the need to introduce a new transatlantic currency, which will allow the restructuring or elimination of all debts denominated in dollars and euros to move onto a new stage of economic and monetary expansion.

The outline of the economic agreement in the Pacific version with the participation of traditionally inflexible Japan is not clearly defined, but given the enormous influence of the US in the largest countries of the

region and surrounding areas such as Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and others, it is safe to assume that the degree of integration will be at least as high as TAFTA.

As a result, the World Trade Organisation where liberal economists dragged the Russian government, threatening the collapse of many domestic industries and agriculture, will lose the ability to influence and regulate the global financial community.

The US and its formal and informal allies will gain a tangible profit. The fading US economy will get a boost from the development, opening up new markets in Europe and Asia. In the event of adoption of the new currency, the US has a real chance to get rid of heavy debts whose value exceeds the annual GDP. Those not satisfied with this order will face convincing explanations from the Navy, Air Force and the US Army as well as the allies.

China and BRICS locked in the system of their own markets will lose. In the end, Obama will provide stability to the faltering US global domination, and with the military and economic potential of the Atlantic and Pacific allies will build, at least by the 22nd century, a new geopolitical world model, in which, figuratively speaking, the movement of the sun will be controlled by Washington.

Everything was going fine. The concept of Trans-Atlantic space was supported by British Prime Minister Cameron, German Chancellor Merkel, European Commission President Barroso, and French President Hollande.

Everything was fine until idealist Snowden, who, explaining what



BRICS leaders meet.

prompted him to make public the facts of the crimes committed by the US authorities, said that since childhood he was raised to be fair, just and respectful of people’s rights. This classic set frequently used in the description of the US government, has delivered a serious blow to this country.

It turned out, for example, that the level of espionage intelligence on the territory of West Germany, the largest European power and ally of the United States, is only slightly inferior to the scale of spying on Iran, Pakistan or Afghanistan. A representative of the European Union in New York and its embassy in Washington are also entangled in a dense network of espionage.

All European countries are covered by the National Security Agency’s wiretaps, the largest of the

classified US intelligence services. Japan also requested clarification about the wiretapping of its embassy in Washington. The presidents and leaders of the European Union who a couple of months ago applauded the prospects for transatlantic integration (excluding the UK premier) harshly condemned the US and demanded an explanation from the Obama administration.

It is unlikely that these leaders and common voters in Europe were satisfied with the excuse of the fight against terrorism offered by a high-ranking CIA official Vincent Cannistraro. No other explanation was provided by the Americans. Secretary of State Kerry frankly stated that the search of the US secret services (i.e., espionage) for data on other countries is normal, and this practice is not unusual.

The Americans are dragging out

time, and it is certainly a winning tactic, but only if the flow of revelations from Snowden, who confirmed that he had thousands of incriminating documents, can be stopped. This is why the Sheremetyevo airport area is infested by security, and not only Russian.

In any case, Snowden’s revelations led to the fact that the plan to create a Trans-Atlantic area, not to mention the Pacific, is under threat of a total collapse, or at least suspension. It is unlikely that even pro-American politicians in Europe will risk being proactive in this area. An indefinite delay in the creation of a new economic zone under the control of the United States provides an opportunity to increase the economic potential of the BRICS countries, primarily China and Russia.

Pravda.Ru ☼

Communist peasant organisers murdered in Mexico

Emile Schepers

On August 5 an important peasant leader in Mexico’s southern state of Guerrero, Raymundo Velazquez Flores, was murdered along with two companions. Velazquez had been an important leader of peasant struggles for justice since the early 1960s. At the time of his death he headed the Emiliano Zapata Revolutionary Agrarian League of the South (Liga Agraria Revolucionaria del Sur Emiliano Zapata or LARSEZ) and was also an important figure in the Communist Party of Mexico (PCM), one of several Marxist-Leninist groups in the country. He was, in addition, an announcer in the Mixtec Indigenous language for the radio station “Voice of the Mountains” (Voz de la Montaña). In this case “Montaña” refers to the mountainous region of northeast Guerrero which borders on Oaxaca.

In addition, another PCM and

LARSEZ activist, Samuel Vargas Ramirez, was found murdered, along with a third person whose full name has not been released. The three were travelling together from Cuernavaca in the state of Morelos toward the town of Coyuca de Benitez. It seems they were to stop off in Guerrero’s capital, Chilpancingo, for a meeting, but were intercepted, tied up and murdered by shots to the head on the way, on a riverbank near Coyuca. They had been tortured. The act seems clearly political; had they been kidnapped by ordinary bandits or drug gangs, they would have been held for ransom.

Velazquez, who was 57 years old, came from the village of Tilapa, Guerrero, from a poor peasant family. Tilapa is located in the “Municipio” (approximately, county) of Malinaltepec, in Guerrero’s Montaña region. After having moved to the more inland city of Iguala for a while, he returned to his native town

and region and became involved, from the early 1980s, in various political and social activist organisations on the left, including peasant organisations and the old Mexican Communist Party (Partido Comunista Mexicano), which dissolved itself in the 1980s, many of its leading cadres ending up in the Revolutionary Democratic Party, PRD.

His efforts enraged the political and economic elites of that time, the more so because he managed to do them without subordinating himself or his organisation to the official government-recognised peasant organisation, the National Peasant Confederation (Confederación Nacional Campesina).

Demands coming out of the activities of Velazquez and his comrades took concrete form in the Declaration of Acapulco in 1995, which responded to the abuses of repressive governor Ruben Figueroa (PRI). The declaration called for Figueroa to be deposed

and punished along with the people who carried out the Aguas Blancas massacre, and for democratic and political reform with full participation of the people of Guerrero, as well as economic justice.

Guerrero is a poor state and home to many indigenous ethnic groups as well as a large proportion of the Afro-Mexican population. Peasants and workers are in almost constant conflict with landowners, mine operators (often foreign), “caciques” (rural political bosses who maintain power, often, by violence), and government authorities at the federal, state and local level. Armed struggle has broken out periodically, for example in Genaro Vazquez’s rebellion in the late 1960s, another led by Lucio Cabañas in the beginning of the 1970s, and again after the Aguas Blancas massacre of June 28, 1995, when 17 farmers on their way to a protest were ambushed and murdered by police.

The Communist Party of

Mexico issued a statement denouncing the murders, pointing out that they are nothing new but part of a long series of such atrocities:

“The Communist Party of Mexico, via its Political Bureau, holds responsible the federal government of Enrique Peña Nieto, state governor Angel Aguirre Rivero of the PRD, and the municipal government of Ramiro Avila Morales for the murder of our comrades. As we know, in Guerrero there are no [legal] protections for the political actions of communists, revolutionaries and social [justice] fighters. This is a direct attack by all three levels of government against the Communist Party of Mexico....

“Our comrades, simple communists, without pretensions, always had in mind the idea of socialist revolution... The struggle goes on and with their example, gets stronger.”

People’s World ☼

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Christian response to refugee policy

Three cheers for Anglican Bishops Driver (Adelaide) and Harrower (Tasmania). Their strong opposition to the cruel and inhumane refugee policies of both the major parties should inspire all Christians to ask what their Christianity really means.

The much paraded Christianity of Tony Abbot and Kevin Rudd does not square up with the Christianity I learnt in my youth. What about the good Samaritan? What about "Love one another, as I have loved you."? What about "... as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."?

Abbot and Rudd would not only walk by on the other side of the road, but organise the armed forces and street-cleaners to get rid of the embarrassing person in need, and make sure that no others had the bad judgement to fall over there in future.

Jesus' promised end for the "goats" who did not feed, clothe and assist those in need, perhaps should not appear in a family paper. Read Matthew 25: 32 – 46 for guidance.

Anne McMenamin
SA

Re-writing history on a postage stamp – open letter to Ahmed Fahour, CEO Australia Post

It has come to our notice that Australia Post has released a joint stamp with Israel to commemorate the Battle of Beersheba in 1917 in which Australian troops fought the Turks and turned the tide leading to the subsequent end of Ottoman rule in Palestine.

According to Australia Post stamp policy, two or more countries can collaborate to produce stamps that "commemorate a significant event or subject that they have in common". Since Israel did not exist at the time of this major Palestinian campaign – and would not exist until several decades later – it is impossible to fathom how Australia Post could agree to re-write history on a postage stamp.

Quite simply, this release is outrageous and insulting to the thousands of Palestinians who took part in that campaign on the British promise of

freedom and independence for the Arab people from Ottoman imperial rule. British betrayal immediately after victory, with the Balfour Declaration offering the Jews of Europe a homeland in Palestine, is well documented and the direct cause of the highly inflammatory situation we are seeing in the Middle East region today.

None have endured the catastrophic consequences of that decision as much as the Palestinians who continue to see their land, their culture, their history and their very existence being swallowed up by the usurping State of Israel. This has only been possible because Western nations continue to whitewash Israel at the expense of Palestinian dispossession, oppression and denial of their basic human rights.

It is one thing to fawn and pretend that Israel's existence has validity; it is another to falsify history. Australia Post ought to be thoroughly ashamed for having acquiesced in this blatant attempt to expunge all mention of the Palestinians in Beersheba. Just to be clear, it was the Palestinians whom fought valiantly alongside the ANZACs and it was a Palestinian who led the attack on the city from the east that helped bring the allied forces victory. He was awarded an MBE for his service.

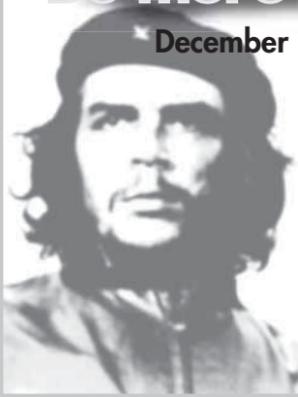
Three decades later, the 4,000 Palestinians of Beersheba were terrorised into leaving their city when

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the newly created Israel captured it in 1948. They have never been allowed to return to their homes.

Simply, this commemorative stamp issue must be withdrawn if Australia Post is to be on the right side of history.

Yours sincerely

Sonja Karkar
Co-founder and co-convenor
Australians for Palestine

Note from Australians for Palestine: There has been so much outrage since we sent out the notice of Australia Post's stamp issue with Israel. That

outrage needs to be directed to where it might have some outcome, namely the CEO of Australia Post. We encourage all supporters to write a letter in a similar vein to the above asking for the stamps to be withdrawn. You should also make a complaint via Australia Post's Contact form tinyurl.com/australiapost-com and write a letter to the Postal Industry Ombudsman, GPO Box 442, Canberra ACT 2601 or fax him on (02) 6249 7829. ☘

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Propaganda and class interests

Anti-Communist propaganda these days is very sophisticated, the product of highly intelligent college graduates who are selectively recruited by agencies like the CIA even before they graduate. They are given a stirring patriotic spiel about serving freedom and stopping Red dictatorship, defending democracy and free speech – and these days human rights – and then turned loose to wage a war of lies against the USA's enemies.

It used to be cruder, and was often spouted by the oddest people. In the days before television, the most effective outlets for anti-working class propaganda in the US were the popular magazines and the mass circulation newspapers of reactionary press barons like Hearst and McCormick.

Always supportive of the wishes and preferences of their advertisers, the great US magazines functioned as policy instruments – or certainly mouthpieces – of big business lobby groups such as the National Association of Manufacturers. In the years before WW2, the link between big business and the global drive towards fascism became very evident in the pages of these same popular weekly magazines.

They worked hand in glove with known Nazis, pro-fascist writers and undercover German agents. The well-known US anti-fascist journalist George Seldes has said of this period: "The Nazis never missed an opportunity to use undemocratic and pro-fascist publications for their propaganda machine. They filled the airwaves with extracts from Hearst's *Cosmopolitan*, Lawrence Spivak and Eugene Lyons' *American Mercury*, the *Reader's Digest*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*."

The *Reader's Digest* ran rabidly anti-Soviet articles right through the Second World War. Even when the USA's ally was fighting a colossal life-and-death struggle with Hitler's forces in the suburbs of Stalingrad, the *Reader's Digest* did not pause in its anti-Soviet propaganda. As for the *Saturday Evening Post*, in his book *1,000 Americans*, George Seldes wrote: "The *Saturday Evening Post*'s service to reaction began just after the First World War, when Kenneth Roberts, Isaac L. Marcossan, and several other nationally known writers were hired to sing the praises of reactionary dictators, the greatest swindlers of the era, and tycoons such as Sir Henry Deterding [head of Royal Dutch Shell], who financed a war in Baku to save his oil, and told the *Saturday Evening Post* that he favoured the murder of all workers who refused to work – on his terms."

In 1940, while the US was still technically neutral, Gestapo agents visited *Saturday Evening Post* correspondent Demaree Bess at a Paris Hotel and offered to help him to go wherever he wanted to in occupied Europe, to see whatever he wanted to see, and to write whatever he wanted to write. This was unique: Seldes quotes Richard Boyer writing in *PM*: "American correspondents were not permitted to see anything for themselves, they were watched, 'supervised', treated like prisoners." But not Bess.

And the articles he wrote would not have disappointed his new friends. In January of 1941, he wrote what Seldes calls "a tremendous whitewash of the German occupation of Norway, and of Quisling". Quisling was the Norwegian traitor who welcomed the Nazis to his country and became their puppet "ruler" of Norway. He gave his name to all such traitors in WW2.

The next month Bess wrote a piece purporting to lament the fate of Holland, but in reality, as Seldes says, "it is written to try to show that it does not pay a nation to resist Hitler, because it will suffer terrible consequences if it does not surrender. Pro-Nazis are quoted with great effect, especially bankers, who want a Dutch-Nazi alliance".

Other gems of anti-Communist, anti-worker propaganda that appeared in the hey-day of the popular weeklies include this piece from the once-popular (though not in progressive circles) magazine *Liberty*: "Bolshevism is knocking at our gates. We can't afford to let it in. We have got to organise ourselves against it, and put our shoulders together and hold fast. We must keep America whole and safe and unspoiled. We must keep the worker away from red literature and red ruses; we must see that his mind remains healthy."

And who was it who said that? That quintessential US businessman Al Capone!

NAMELESS, SHAMELESS WOMAN!

TRAINED IN AN ART AS OLD AS TIME! She served a mob of terror and violence whose one mission is to destroy! Trading her love... yielding kisses that invite disaster, destroy... then - KILL!

I MARRIED a Communist

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with THOMAS GOMEZ · JANIS CARTER

Executive Producer SID ROGELL

Produced by JACK J. GROSS · Directed by ROBERT STEVENSON

Screen Play by CHARLES GRAYSON and ROBERT HARDY ANDREWS

And why not? Organised crime is a logical concomitant of capitalist business methods. Look at the corruption among Australian trade union leaders. Look at the way so many politicians elected to represent the workers have been seduced by big money to abandon their principles and opportunistically pursue their own personal interests once in office.

Meanwhile, anti-working class propaganda continues unabated, in mass-circulation newspapers and magazines and of course now – especially now – on television. With the added feature that TV news or propaganda pieces appear to be actuality footage, so they must be true because they are "real". But with only a

few competing news channels, and all of them sourcing their "news" from the same agencies, there is less space for alternative or truthful news than there ever was before.

The old-time media barons Hearst and McCormick would never credit the kind of monopoly of information that modern media magnate Murdoch enjoys today. And if they could get away with murder in the days when there were numerous papers and magazines where stories could be compared, consider what the few who remain can get away with today, when there are virtually no checks and balances against their abuse of the information system for their own class interests. ☘



Sunday August 18 –
Saturday August 24

Grand Designs Revisited (ABC1 Sunday August 18 at 7.40pm) this week returns to a project started in 2009 by husband and wife artists Freddie Robbins (textiles and design) and Ben Coode-Adams (very large outdoor metal sculptures). They left their two-bedroom flat in London and took on the conversion and restoration of a massive 16th century barn in Essex. The barn is as big as seven average three-bedroom houses.

They wanted to make it their home and also to provide a separate professional workshop for each of them and display space for their huge collection of toys, knick-knacks and ephemera.

The result, seen today, certainly has space, but the living space looks like any Australian country property where the family is living in the shed "while the house is being built". And their collection of odds and sods proved too big even for their gigantic barn: much of it is still in boxes. But I must say I am dead envious of the amount of space they've got to play with.

I have not seen the award-winning Palestinian documentary **5 Broken Cameras** (ABC2 Sunday August 18 at 8.30pm) by Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi, about Palestinian villagers resisting the building of an Israeli wall that will consume their farmlands, but it sounds important.

Trevor Graham's 1997 Film Australia production about Land Rights champion Eddie Mabo, **Mabo – Life Of An Island Man** gets a well-deserved re-run this week (SBS NITV Wednesday August 21 at 9.30pm). Written, directed and narrated by Graham, the film tells the story of Eddie "Koiki" Mabo's long fight to gain recognition of the Murray Island people's right to their traditional land. On June 3, 1992, six months after Eddie's tragic death, the High Court upheld his claim that Murray Islanders held native title to land in the Torres Strait. The legal fiction that Australia was empty when first occupied by white people had been laid to rest.

Mabo-Life of an Island Man tells the private and public stories of a man so passionate about family and home that he fought an entire nation and its legal system. Though his greatest victory was won only after his death, it has forever ensured his place – on and in Australian history.

Made in 2012 by Magnus Gerten, **Harbour Of Hope** (SBS2 Friday August 23 at 9.40pm) is a co-production of Sweden/Norway/Poland/Denmark/Germany. It tells of events in Sweden in 1945 when the citizens of the peaceful harbour town of Malmö welcomed into their midst nearly 30,000 survivors freed from German concentration camps.

In unique archive footage we see 10 year-old Irene at the wharf taking her first shaky steps in freedom. We see newborn Ewa carried from the boat by her mother. And we meet Joe, who arrived as a lonely child without his family. The filmmakers describe it as "a film about dealing with war memories, the importance of a helping hand and finding a 'harbour of hope'."

They also emphasise the film's timeliness. "We are telling the story of how important it is for war refugees to receive help and support. The story has a historical setting but still carries a huge impact in our contemporary time." During WW2 it was Jews and political prisoners, survivors coming from concentration camps. Today we



Harbour Of Hope (SBS2 Friday August 23 at 9.40pm).

see refugees fleeing war, dictatorships and famine.

The original archive material, which **Harbour Of Hope** is based on, was mainly shot on April 28, 1945 the day several hundred concentration camp survivors arrived by ship from Copenhagen. Many of them came from the Ravensbrück camp, but also from other camps.

Native American filmmaker Chris Eyre's **Edge Of America** (SBS NITV Saturday August 24 at 9.30pm) was the 2004 Sundance Film Festival "opening night" film. **Edge Of America** is loosely based on the true story of a black English teacher who goes to the Three Nations Reservation to teach, but ends up coaching the very underachieving girls' basketball team and takes them all the way to the state finals. In the process, he learns as much about their culture and race relations in America as they learn about winning and self-esteem.

In 2006, Eyre won the Directors' Guild of America's award for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Children's Programs for **Edge Of America**, becoming the first Native American to win the award.

Joan Rivers is – as Bob Hope used to be – an American institution. Still performing at 78, she is surrounded by fans who unashamedly gush over her – "We love you, Joanie". It reminded me of those unfortunate people who used to ring up John Laws during his radio rants for the sole purpose of saying on air "We think you're wonderful, John".

Joan Rivers: Don't Start With Me on Funny As this week (ABC2 Saturday August 24 at 9.30pm) starts with cringe-making facetiousness and nauseating crawling to (and by) Ms Rivers, who clearly believes her own publicity. She has all her jokes written out on large cue cards that are taped to the floor and other strategically-placed surfaces around

the stage so that she can give an apparently flawless routine. It's a technique made famous in the 1930s by John Barrymore, who couldn't be bothered learning "all that shit". In his turn, Bob Hope upgraded to using auto-cue monitors in his stage and TV shows for the same purpose.

The problem with Joan Rivers is that she is only fitfully funny. She is also coarse and vulgar (which seems to shock Americans but is really old hat out here) but one could easily overlook that if she were really witty. Proclaiming that Mexicans are really ugly is not witty. Asking the audience "when was the last time a blind person complimented you on your appearance?" has a certain existential appeal, but stringing together a number of bad taste remarks about disabled people is calculated to shock rather than actually amuse an audience.

I have never been a Joan Rivers fan, and this unfunny TV special is not going to change that. ★



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Big prison, little prison

Stories from Papua's political prisoners show life at the edge of freedom

Ap Inyerop

Otto is sitting in his cell in Abepura prison. It is early evening, and he is drinking coffee and discussing politics with his cellmates. None of them have much energy as the prison diet of low-grade rice and stewed leaves is poor. Otto is reading a book about social change, which has been smuggled in by friends. Books are treated with great suspicion by prison authorities and are hard to come by inside, so this one is cherished. He is beginning it for the third time, hoping to find some hint of a way out, not just of the "little prison" in which he finds himself, but also of the "big prison", which is how many Papuans now view their homeland. Otto and his friends are not robbers or murderers; they are political leaders who have peacefully challenged the Indonesian government.

Despite being imprisoned, beaten and sometimes subject to solitary confinement, they are among the lucky ones. During the last year, other political detainees in Papua have been blindfolded, beaten, gagged, threatened with death and subjected to electric shocks.

Papua's political prisoners have lost teeth, eyes, limbs and lives to Indonesian law enforcers, to say nothing of their rights, their dignity, and sometimes their sanity. While Papua's political prisoners share many common experiences, they are individuals from different backgrounds, each with their own story. It is through these stories that we can start to understand what Papua's political prisoners mean when they talk about the "big prison" and "little prison" – and the bitter irony that, in Papua, by asking for freedom, you lose it.

A piece of cloth

Many of Papua's political prisoners have been arrested for raising, carrying or displaying the Morning Star flag. This cheerful piece of cloth with its bright blue, white and red colours is a symbol of Papuan identity. It is raised by Papuans as an affirmation of their identity and a rejection of Indonesia – both its presence in Papua, and the violent way it has controlled the territory.

While the symbolic significance of the flag is clear, its legal status is more ambiguous. Although the symbol is allowed under Papua's Special Autonomy laws, it is forbidden under Government Regulation No. 77/2007, which prohibits the display of the Morning Star symbol in Papua, the South Maluku Republic flag in Ambon and the Crescent Moon flag in Aceh.

Local police and prosecutors are not interested in untangling the nuances in these regulations. For them, displaying the Morning Star symbol on a flag, t-shirt, bag, mobile phone case or even a cake is an act of treason, making the person in

possession liable to arrest and – if the crime of treason is proved – imprisonment for up to 15 years.

The revolving door

Yusak is a "revolving door" political prisoner. He has been arrested on political charges several times. First convicted for raising the Morning Star flag almost ten years ago, Yusak found imprisonment an intensely isolating experience. Human rights workers and lawyers say that the years in prison took a toll on his mental health. When he was offered clemency after a number of years, the other prisoners advised him to accept it. It was a difficult decision, as it meant signing loyalty statements which went against his deepest values, but he did so and was released.

But Yusak still did not feel free. Like many other former prisoners, he reported being watched and followed by intelligence agents. The years in prison have also made him hesitant to put his freedom on the line again. In turn this led to isolation from his own community. As he explained in an interview: "The community want me to step forward and they're angry that I won't."

Yusak has instead concentrated on humanitarian activities. It was at a street action to collect money for sick political prisoners in July last year that he came in contact with the criminal justice system again. Yusak and 14 others were arrested by the police who claimed they did not have the necessary permits for their activities. That time he was released without charges, but not long after he was arrested once again at the trial of Buchtar Tabuni, another political prisoner.

Like many political trials, Tabuni's trial was based on contentious charges. He was ostensibly arrested in connection with serious violent crimes, but was then charged for his alleged role in a prison riot which had occurred several years earlier. Becoming annoyed during Tabuni's trial, Yusak kicked a bin and caused betel nut juice to spill onto the clothes of a court official. Having searched him and discovered a penknife in his pocket, police charged him with possession of a weapon. This new "crime" attracted another seven-month sentence.

For Yusak, the message from the dizzying range of intelligence agencies, security forces and government authorities in Papua is clear. Whichever side of the prison bars he is on, he is not free.

A bitter lesson

The events leading to Meki's imprisonment also began with a Morning Star flag. In 2010, Meki and his friends were on their way to a funeral in Yalengga in Papua's central highlands. The group were not activists, but subsistence farmers, who had been asked to bring the flag so it could be buried beside their deceased relative in accordance with his political beliefs.



A group of soldiers who were passing through the area saw the farmers and stopped them, forcing them to undress and lie face down. They were then tortured for several hours, before being delivered to a police station. At trial the men were defended by a government lawyer with the assistance of a trainee human rights lawyer.

They both had to be flown in from the provincial capital at great expense because there are no lawyers in Wamena. But even with this representation the men were sentenced to eight years' imprisonment for carrying the flag. They had no money to pay for an appeal within the two-week application period, and their subsequent requests for clemency have been ignored.

Political cases represented by government lawyers are punished harshly, with the involvement of qualified human rights lawyers being essential for any hope of a lighter sentence or acquittal. But to involve human rights lawyers in cases outside the provincial capital of Jayapura involves huge sums for flights and accommodation. These sums are sometimes scraped together by the family, community and from the lawyers' own pockets. But more often than not the money cannot be found. Some prisoners do not even receive a government lawyer, and are left to defend the case themselves.

Some of the men arrested alongside Meki have since escaped. But four remain in Wamena prison. As they did not consider themselves to be political activists – and were not recognised as such within the West Papuan community – few people have heard of their arrest. While sympathisers often supplement the meagre official food allowance received by political activists, Meki and his friends receive no support, and don't know whether they will eat from one

day to the next. Their families are poor and live far away in the mountains, so are seldom able to visit. One of the men has been abandoned by his wife, and the others worry about the fate of their young children.

The men may not have been politicised before their arrest, but the years in jail are teaching them a bitter lesson about the justice they can expect under Indonesian rule.

Cat and mouse

Unlike Meki and his friends, Ismael received a good education and is highly politicised. In 2008, he was involved in the early days of the West Papua National Committee (KNPB), a youth movement pushing for a referendum on Papua's political status. Arrested for his involvement in a peaceful demonstration, he was convicted of incitement to violence and sentenced to two years' imprisonment. After only one year in jail, an administrative oversight by prison authorities meant his detention was no longer authorised and Ismael had to be released. But when he tried to leave Papua to attend human rights training overseas, he was arrested again and imprisoned to serve the remainder of his sentence.

This is typical of the cat and mouse game which police often play with Papuan activists.

Ismael's experiences with the law only made him more determined to continue his activities. "We can't give up, we're committed," he says. He believes that education is the first line of defence for Papuans in the struggle against Indonesian injustice, and the difference between his relatively light two-year punishment and the eight-year sentence handed down to Meki and friends supports this.

"We've been forced to learn international law in order to protect ourselves," he reflects. "People say we're stupid, poor and backwards,

but I don't think so. We just didn't get the education. Those who don't understand the law don't know how to defend themselves."

The price of freedom

Papuan prisons are monotonous, depressing, and dangerous places. Beaten, tortured and isolated, the plight of Papuan political prisoners generates sympathy both at home and abroad. Imprisoned by the state for peaceful free expression, they gain instant moral high ground.

Prisoners use this leverage effectively to attract local, national and international support. While the government is afraid to lift the lid on free expression for fear of the outcome, the mere existence of political prisoners in Papua challenges Indonesia's international credibility.

As the night draws on and the mosquitoes buzz incessantly through the cells, Otto is spending another night behind bars. But despite the boredom and years of lost liberty, he is full of hope. He fills the hours by reading his book, furiously writing reports, checking on new inmates, smoking and eating betel nut.

Inspired by former prisoners like Nelson Mandela and Xanana Gusmão, he is not concerned with personal liberty and has decided to reject parole, as it would involve acknowledging that he had committed a "crime" and promising not to repeat it. This is a promise he cannot make, because with every hour that goes by he is acutely aware of the lack of freedom experienced by all Papuans.

Ap Inyerop (ap.inyerop@gmail.com) is a contributor to Papuans Behind Bars, an online resource about political prisoners in Papua www.papuansbehindbars.org. Some names have been changed to protect identities. *Inside Indonesia* ✪



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