



Systemic crisis

Record profits & Growing hardship

Anna Pha

The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) has again reduced the official interest rate, a reflection of its concerns with domestic and global economic developments. The reduction to a low of 2.5 percent is aimed at generating economic activity and serves to counter the contractionary impact of cuts to government spending. Economic conditions look set to deteriorate further, in particular, with higher unemployment, suppression of wages and mining investment slowing down. Bankruptcies continue to rise as businesses are hit by a slowdown in demand and thousands more workers are being sacked. But not everyone is doing it tough. Midst all the hardship and pain, the Commonwealth Bank of Australia (CBA) has reported a record net profit (after tax) of \$7.8 billion. And, according to the bank's CEO, it's "a good thing" for all of us!

"Once you've had one record profit, the next record profit just means you've grown. And I think it's to everyone's benefit in this economy for all the major banks to be growing," CEO Ian Narev said.

"So I hope to continue to deliver record profits, because it will just mean we continue to grow. I think that's a good thing for our customers and our shareholders and our people and I think the community more broadly."

Really? A stable financial system is important. But obscene private profits, enough to fund federal budget items? The CBA's profits have risen rapidly with only a small dip of one percent in 2009 (not a loss – just a smaller profit) over the past 10 years.

The 2013 result is up 10 percent on last year, and returned shareholders a whopping 18 percent on their investment. It is not a one-off exercise in profit-gouging. In 2012, profits rose 11 percent, in 2010 by 12 percent. Ten years ago they were \$2 billion.

Who really benefits?

But where do these profits go? The CBA is distributing \$3.4 billion of these profits through dividends to shareholders, the rest it retains for further expansion and as reserves. The top shareholders are mostly financial institutions/nominee companies – HSBC Custody Nominees (Aust) Ltd, JP Morgan Nominees Aust Ltd, National Nominees Ltd, Citicorp Nominees Ltd, Cogent Nominees Pty Ltd, etc.

As nominee companies, we have no idea

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who really pockets the profits when distributed or even if they are kept in Australia. But the 216 largest shareholders pocket 47 percent. Some of this would go into superannuation funds, adding to workers' retirement savings.

As for the "mums and dads" shareholders, the bottom 582,237 shareholders own 12.3 percent of shares.

Where did CBA's profits come from? Mostly from its customers – interest margins (the difference between interest on loans and interest paid on deposits) and fees – and some from other sources such as overseas investments and currency trading.

As Narev pointed out, the CBA pays tax on its profits, \$3 billion in 2013. But, if the CBA had not been privatised, then the \$7.8 billion could also have been government revenue, or much of it. This could have really been of benefit to the people, providing the government with income for affordable public housing and low income and other families with decent accommodation.

In addition, it could have been used to increase the dole, aged pension, sickness and other benefits, restore and increase benefits to single parents, fully cover dental care under Medicare, fund mental health, speed up the introduction of the national disability insurance scheme as well as eradicate homelessness.

Perverse system

It is a perverse "logic" that profit gouging by the CBA or for that matter other big banks or mining corporations is heralded as great for everyone, but governments and media turn a blind eye, don't even question a system where people are thrown out of their homes and their electricity is cut because they are unable to pay the bill.

A system which impoverishes families through no fault of their own, and cannot provide basic social needs for the people and rejects a genuine super profits tax on the mining sector.

Housing is not the only cause of financial trauma. Privatisation and marketisation of electricity have seen electricity prices more than double in recent years.

A report released this month by the NSW Energy and Water Ombudsman found that 3.5 million low-income and low-wage families always have trouble paying their bills. The energy companies are showing less tolerance with late payers, sparking a huge rise in disconnections.

Lynne Chester from the University of Sydney estimates that the poorest 20 percent of households paid close to or more than 10 percent of their income on power bills. This is on top of massive rental payments which consume more

than 30 percent, in some instances as much as 60 percent of income. It leaves little for food, medicines, education, clothing, transport and other basics.

The Communist Party of Australia is calling for the establishment of a publicly owned People's Bank with a strong social charter.

The People's Bank would provide cheaper (for customers) services with low fixed interest rates for home loans, small businesses and family farmers. The bank would be government guaranteed and some of its deposits available for public housing and other public infrastructure.

Any profits would be returned to the government, not to private shareholders. The People's Bank would benefit everyone. Affordable housing would reduce pressure on family budgets and help stimulate the economy and generate jobs with increased demand for goods and services.

At the same time the government needs to regulate rents, interest rates and the currency and plan economic development. The "markets" have failed the people. The public sector needs to rebuild its skills base and expand to resume building and providing public housing as an alternative to home ownership and private rental. Real competition from the public sector would soon bring down the cost of rent and housing as well as wiping out the waiting lists for public housing. ★

4  Education – "united front" urgently needed

5  Coal seam gas mining and drinking water

10  Culture & Life Housing – luxurious, makeshift & haunted

12  Work without dignity

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Vote as if the future depended on it

Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Liberal leader Tony Abbott are taking every opportunity to be seen with and amongst “the people”, in the streets, with children, at community meetings or in the workplace trying their hand. Every “photo opp” is carefully orchestrated, every line is scripted, with little room for spontaneity, let alone real debate about issues of concern to people. The Greens are largely shut out of the picture, with more attention to the attacks on them by Abbott and Rudd than on airing their pro-people, pro-environment policies.

“We will build a stronger economy”, Abbott parrots at every opportunity. “We will scrap the carbon tax, the mining tax, the NBN. We will stop the boats. We will run this country, we will say who comes into this country.” On and on he repeats the same lines, regardless of the questions asked. The other Liberal Party candidates trot out the same rehearsed lines and daren’t swerve from the prescribed text.

It is hard to imagine an election campaign so lacking in policy detail. There is little or no substance in the campaigns being run by Liberal and Labor. Nor by the mass media which is happy to focus on personal trivia and run the election battle along similar line to a presidential race between two personalities. The few reporters who ask more serious and penetrating questions are unable to extract serious responses. Abbott and Rudd continue to duck giving direct answers. While the electioneering lacks substance, both parties have serious agendas that should be aired so the electorate know what lies ahead after September 7.

The Liberals have announced an audit following the elections – the same approach as used by former PM John Howard. The audit is the excuse for not announcing details of cuts in services and to social welfare, sacking thousands of public servants, wage cuts and privatisations to come. The line will be that the cupboard is barer than Labor had ever acknowledged. Likewise with the GST, “no plans” yet, but a tax review following the elections will demonstrate the need to either expand its coverage to areas presently exempt or increase the rate or possibly do both. Individual workplace contracts will be back, but using the same language and flexibility clauses of the Fair Work Act. The Libs have already announced that they will strengthen the police powers of the Australian Building and Construction Commission. What they haven’t indicated is whether it will be extended to cover other industries.

As for Labor, Rudd is persisting with outdoing the Coalition in its cruel and inhumane treatment of asylum seekers. Neither leader pays any attention to their obligations under international law. Rudd’s latest vote catcher is for the Northern Territory to become a special economic zone with lower company tax rates. No details on “the simplified investment rules and streamlined regulation” he promises. Will that involve deregulation of the labour market, lower wages, deunionisation? Labor will also be doing some cutting of its own if elected, but just how deep is being kept under wraps like the Liberal cuts.

The one voice of sanity in the election campaign, the Greens, is receiving token coverage. Much more is being said to counter the Greens, to marginalise them, and so protect the two-party system. None-the-less the Greens are running a highly principled and planned campaign around burning issues of importance to people and the planet and making good use of social media and supporters on the ground. The Coalition is preferencing the Greens last, it would prefer Labor won than risk a Green candidate being elected. Abbott is particularly concerned that Greens MP Adam Bandt might be re-elected to the Lower House. He is trying to goad Labor into distancing itself from the Greens and has thrown out a challenge to Rudd to also put the Greens last.

The Communist Party of Australia is advocating support for the Greens in the Senate to prevent the Coalition from gaining an absolute majority in that House. In the Lower House it is urging support for left and progressive candidates, including Greens and independents.

PRESS FUND

Last Thursday ABC TV’s *Catalyst* program examined the operations of a Canberra Defence laboratory which tests the suitability of Australian military uniforms. As the tour guide proudly explained, the lab can reproduce the climatic conditions of any spot on Earth.

Question: given that Australia has a much more limited climate range, why would we need such a facility?

Answer: to be ready and able to send our troops anywhere on Earth, serving the interests of the United State as deputy sheriff!

The *Guardian* needs your support in order to provide answers to questions regarding the struggle for peace and other vital issues, so please send us a contribution for the next edition if you possibly can. We offer our thanks to his week’s supporters, as follows:

June Ayres \$50, Mark Mannion \$5, “Round Figure” \$15

This week’s total: \$70 Progressive total: \$5,510

CPA 12th National Congress

From October 4-7 this year, elected delegates representing Communist Party organisations from all over Australia will gather in Sydney for the 12th National Congress of the Party. There will be an opening on the Friday night to which all *Guardian* readers, their families and friends are invited. (Details will be provided in a future issue of the *Guardian*.)

Over the following three days, delegates will discuss the work of the Party, make any final amendments to and adopt a Political Resolution. In the lead-up to the Congress, Party members have been discussing and submitting amendments to the Political Resolution. Once adopted, the Political Resolution becomes the main political statement of the Party, and along with its Program, binding on all members for the coming period.

Congress will elect a new Central Committee to lead the work of the Party over the next four years until the 13th National Congress. As the highest body of the Party, it can also amend the Constitution and Program, and adopt other resolutions as its delegates may determine.

By the time of Congress the elections will be over and we will have a new government, and regardless of which party wins, the working class of Australia will be hit by an even larger dose of neo-liberal budget cutting and full on assault by employers on trade unions and wages and working conditions.

Pressing environmental issues, including climate change, will continue to be ignored. Unless serious measures are taken immediately to create jobs and an expansionary economic program developed, the economy is heading into recession. Unemployment is on the rise and social security recipients are set to face further hardship.

The need for real change, for alternative pro-people policies has never been greater. One of the major questions being considered in the Political Resolution is the development of unity and alliances to win real change.

“Today’s conditions are ripe for the building of democratic, anti-monopoly and anti-imperialist alliances which aim to challenge and ultimately defeat capitalism and imperialism and to

fundamentally transform society,” the draft Resolution says.

“Such alliances are crucial if real change is to be achieved in Australia.”

We need your support to build the Party and the forces capable of uniting to bring about real change in Australia.

In this issue of the *Guardian* we are launching a Special Appeal to help defray the considerable cost for transport of delegates and accommodation during the Congress. Delegates will be coming from as far away as Perth.

We are appealing to Party members and organisations and all friends and supporters of the Party and *Guardian* readers to help fulfil our \$10,000 target as soon as possible.

To contribute, please fill in the form below or write your details on a separate piece of paper to send with your contribution. Payment by credit card can also be phoned in on 02 9699 8844.

All contributions will be acknowledged in the *Guardian*, with the names of contributors unless otherwise requested. We look forward to your support for this important occasion. ☘



12th CPA Congress \$10,000 Financial Appeal

I, (Name)

Address.....

wish to contribute \$..... to the above Appeal.

I enclose a Cheque/Money Order/Cash for that amount (made out to “CPA”).

Payment may also be made by Credit Card by filling the information below:

Credit Card minimum \$20 Visa Mastercard

Name on the card Signature:

Card Number _____ Expiry Date ____/____

I agree/disagree to having my name published in *The Guardian* in acknowledgement of my contribution.

Send to 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010 or phone them through on 02 9699 8844

Government urged to adopt tobacco tax increase

Health leaders have urged the Australian government to help prevent tobacco deaths and diseases by increasing the excise duty on all tobacco products.

The government last raised the tobacco excise by 25 percent in April 2010, adding about \$2 to the cost of a pack of 30 cigarettes.

The Heart Foundation and Action on Smoking and Health Australia have welcomed Prime Minister Rudd’s commitment to “get serious” about reducing tobacco’s costs to the Australian community.

“Increasing the tax on tobacco to world best-practice level would be a ‘win-win’ for Australia: it would raise revenue while driving down smoking rates and the

uptake of smoking by children,” said Anne Jones, CEO of ASH Australia.

“When the government last raised the tax by 25 percent in 2010, it was a catch-up increase – there had been no real increase for a decade. This rise delivered huge health benefits – it resulted in an 11 percent fall in tobacco consumption”, said Maurice Swanson, tobacco spokesperson for the Heart Foundation.

“We still have over 100,000 children who are weekly smokers, and we now need a second increase to bring tobacco excise into line with world best practice.

“It’s a myth that poor smokers will be disadvantaged by a tobacco tax rise. They’re the ones who

are suffering most from tobacco, dying at higher rates and spending more on tobacco and related health costs. And people on lower incomes are more price-sensitive and will quit in greater numbers because of a tax increase.”

Anne Jones also called upon the government to protect its health policies and great record on tobacco control by doing more to prevent tobacco industry interference in health policies.

“The government can do this by banning political donations from tobacco companies and adopting a whole-of-government policy that excludes investment in tobacco companies by any government agency”, she said. ☘

Aboriginal, African kids united in song

Rudi Maxwell

Aboriginal children from across Victoria travelled to Melbourne to join the African Children's Choir from Uganda in song the week before last at Wilan Garden at the Victorian College of the Arts, under the direction of Yorta Yorta soprano Deborah Cheetham.

The Victorian College of the Arts' Dhungala Choral Connection features primary school-aged Indigenous singers from Shepparton, Heywood, Healsville, Portland, Mildura, Wangaratta and Worowa.

The African Children's Choir is composed of children aged seven to ten who have lost one or both parents through war, famine and disease. "These children live as a choir and have come from terrible backgrounds of war. Many of their parents lived under (Ugandan dictator) Idi Amin, or have died from AIDS, and this organisation takes kids in. They live in a boarding school and take care of the children right the way through until they graduate from uni," Ms Cheetham said.

The Dhungala Choral Connection sang three songs.

"They were beautiful. They got a standing ovation. It was something else," Ms Cheetham said.

"The first song was the traditional Yorta Yorta *Ngarra Burra Ferra*, as sung in *The Sapphires*. This song is not only important to Yorta Yorta people but to Aboriginal people in general, because it's sung in language.

"Even though there were harsh punishments for speaking our own language, by translating hymns brought by the colonisers we were able to keep practising our language."

The second song by the Dhungala choir was written by the children of Shepparton.

"It features really powerful lyrics. It asks 'Do you know me?' Asks the question Aboriginal children must be asking all the time," Ms Cheetham said.

"We, as Aboriginal people, are expected to know everything about

the Western world, but what does the rest of Australia know about us? This song says 'I know you but do you know me?'

"After they sang it, there was hardly a dry eye in the house. It was powerful."

Ms Cheetham wrote the music and said it was a song the children wanted to share with all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and that they hope to soon record.

"It's a song of empowerment, something children will be able to sing when they're asked at the last minute to do something at NAIDOC Week. It asks, 'What do think when you hear the word Aboriginal?'" she said.

As well as working with the Dhungala Choral Connection, Ms Cheetham's Short Black Opera Company mentors young Indigenous people who want to make a career in classical music, including 19-year-old Chanoa Cooper.

Ms Cooper was a member of the first Dhungala Choral Connection and the children's chorus of *Pecan Summer*, the opera written by Ms Cheetham about Yorta Yorta history and dispossession.

"A lot of the kids didn't know each other. It was a great way of bonding together. It became like family, the choral connect family. It feels like we created own community," Ms Cooper said.

"I stopped music for couple of years, then I realised something was missing and it inspired me to keep going with music. It's my passion."

Ms Cheetham's passion is reaching out to young people through music.

"Important time"

"It's the future, we have a generation of Aboriginal children like Chanoa who have graduated from high school, done well at school, and are looking at options at uni, so now is such an important time to remind Aboriginal people they are hard-wired to learn visually, musically and artistically," she said. "It's a way of



Members of Dhungala Choral Connection in a scene from *Pecan Summer*, from left, Zoe Roberts, Lillie Walker, Kiara Atkinson and Louise Walker. Ebbie Scott is behind at left.

Photo: Koori Mail

knowledge that empowers Aboriginal people, and we need to reach as many Aboriginal children as possible and see them succeed in studies in the arts and studying at uni.

"It's irresistible. We get together with family, and there's music and singing, someone playing a guitar. It's a part of who we are, a part of what we do.

"Kids are taken by surprise when they learn they can make a career out of music, when it's a natural part of who they are."

Ms Cheetham and Ms Cooper are bringing the Short Black Opera experience to northern NSW next month, doing workshops with children in Grafton and Gunnedah, culminating in performances on September 6 and 20, respectively.

The event with the African Children's Choir was part of the University of Melbourne's Wilin Centre for Indigenous Development Regional Engagement Choral Program.

Koori Mail ✪

Pete's Corner



Sydney

The Other September 11 Chile 1973

2013 marks the 40th anniversary of the coup in Chile which inaugurated a reign of terror in which tens of thousands of opponents of the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet were imprisoned, tortured, exiled, disappeared and murdered.

The world was justifiably outraged by the terrorist attack upon the United States in New York and Washington on September 11 2001. However, 30 years earlier the democratically elected socialist government of Dr Salvador Allende was overthrown by a United States supported military coup.

A broad coalition of community, trade union, church and Latin American Solidarity Groups are organising commemorative activities for Sept 11.

Wednesday September 11

11:00am Commemoration - Salvador Allende Monument Fairfield Park

5:00pm Rally and Vigil - Martin Place

6:30pm The Shock Doctrine - The Rise of Disaster Capitalism by Naomi Klein

Food and Refreshments Provided Parliament House Theatre, Macquarie St Sydney - \$20 (\$15 concession)

Friday September 13

5:00pm Exhibition - The Villa Grimaldi Torture Centre Casa Latinoamericana, 142 Addison Road Marrickville

Saturday September 14

7:00pm Justice for Victor Jara Concert Casa Latinoamericana, 142 Addison Road Marrickville



Authorised by Rita Mallia President NSW branch Construction Forestry Mining Energy Union www.dhrturner.org.au For more information contact Elizabeth Rivers on elizabeth29@hotmail.com or 0432 608 265 Printed by Print & Mail Pty Ltd, Marrickville 2204

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DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Education - "united front" urgently needed

Bob Briton

The election campaign is entering its third week with media attention still locked onto contentious policy costings and every move made by the leaders of the big two parties as they take their "show" on the road. Hardly mentioned is the issue of education. Tony Abbott sought to blur the differences between the Coalition and the ALP on the eve of the campaign. He claimed to have made a U-turn on "Gonski" school funding, saying there is now a united front between the government and the opposition. The Australian Education Union sounded the warning bell. "Overall, the Coalition plan for extra schools funding comes up \$7 billion short. Their proposal would deliver just one third of that committed by the Labor government," AEU federal president Angelo Gavrielatos said.

It was natural that Mr Abbott would want to go "small target" on school funding. The public system is starved for funding and parents are worried for the future of their kids in a tightening job market. The days of generous school hall stimulus spending are over while the reality of a drift away from public education has remained. "Gonski" dollars will be welcome and Labor has made the biggest commitment to deliver them but on fundamental issues there is, indeed, a united front between the big parties of capitalism.

Both the ALP and the Coalition are committed to greater school "autonomy" as a step to the

un-publicised goal of the privatisation of public education. States have travelled along this path at various speeds with Victoria leading the charge during Kennett's budget slashing years in office and NSW bringing up the rear. Both major parties claim the "experts" agree there is a direct link between school autonomy and student performance. When the claim is scratched, however, the "experts" are mostly from the US where private operators are making tidy profits from running formerly public schools. Private profits and honesty don't sit well together.

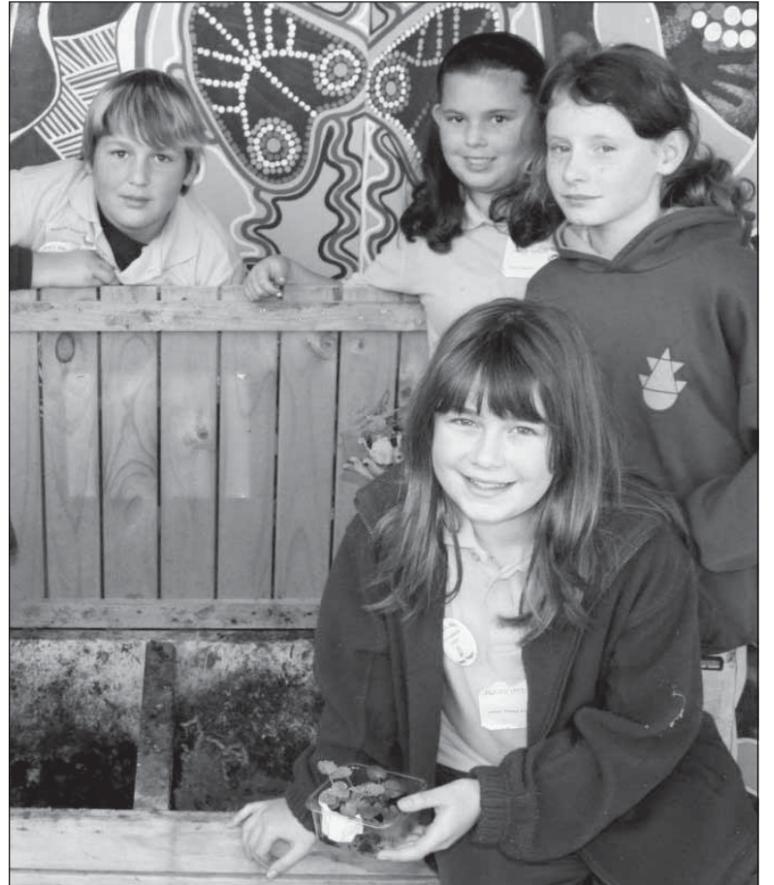
The experience in New Zealand and the UK is less hyped and the conclusions are not so flattering for "charter" or "partnership" schools. Collaboration between schools has evaporated as they compete for enrolments. In Australia the difference in student NAPLAN scores between Victoria and NSW - the fastest and slowest states to have applied school autonomy - are negligible. Australia has yet to take the leap into "charters schools" or a voucher system for people to shop around in an overwhelmingly private "market" for their children's education. Some mechanisms have been put in place, such as NAPLAN testing and the MySchool website, but both sides are coy about the next logical steps.

Labor draws attention to the Liberals' "Our Plan - Real Solutions for all Australians" document, which says an Abbott government will "work with the states and territories to encourage state schools to choose to become independent schools." The Coalition insists the wording simply

means allowing school principals to have more power over staffing, courses and managing budgets in return for more funding and professional development, i.e. the same policy pushed by Labor for several years now. It is contained in their *Better Schools* plan and was central to the Gonski reforms it was based on.

Labor notes the term "independent school" means something specific in the Australian context - a not-for-profit, privately owned and run school, usually with a religious affiliation, which receives state and Commonwealth funding. The "not-for-profit" tag is not a big issue in Australia where public education is hanging on but it is ground for a major controversy in Chile where the neo-liberal project in education has gone furthest in the years of the Pinochet dictatorship and after. Students have been protesting vigorously for years for the private operators to open their books to show the true cost and true beneficiaries of neo-liberal education. Their demands are clear - free, secular, public education of high quality for all!

Chile's dismal reality may well be a glimpse into our future. Australia's own zealots for privatisation will continue to point to "success stories" for their plans and the "reforms" required to achieve them. Students won't benefit from the chaos the changes will generate but the anti-people cause of privatisation certainly will. Students, unions and communities need to form their own "united front" to defend public education because it is clear the major parties won't. ✪



Patients before profits

NSW Nurses and Midwives Association general secretary Brett Holmes said public hospital privatisation is again an emerging issue in NSW, with the state Liberals and Nationals resurrecting the failed Greiner-Fahey government policy of asking private companies to run public hospitals.

"They have started with the new Northern Beaches hospital, which will largely replace the Manly and Mona Vale public hospitals. The state government appears to be hoping no one else around the state will notice what they have done, but they have.

"The same applies to the federal Liberals and Nationals, who are also trying to hide their support for this dangerous policy. In fact, they have been so successful at hiding this policy to date that ... public affairs commentators such as 2UE's Paul Murray and 2GB's Steve Price were not fully aware of it until last week. So what chance did the general public have until the NSWNMA launched its anti-privatisation Patients before Profits campaign last week."

As part of the Patients before Profits campaign, the NSWNMA is currently running television advertisements on the issue and has also started holding public information meetings and speaking at conferences.

"The fact is, the decision to privatise the new Northern Beaches hospital is just the first step down the road of privatisation of our public hospital and community healthcare system. Words like

'contestability' and 'outsourcing' don't fool anyone."

Mr Holmes said the idea that it is only new hospitals being privatised doesn't fool anyone either. "We all know how this works. They start off slowly to get the idea established, and once they have a few hospitals privatised they then start running arguments about how it is now silly to keep all the rest in government hands. We've seen it all before, in other privatisation experiments.

"And having both a state and federal government in power that support the idea will undoubtedly see the rate of hospital privatisation accelerate. That would be a disaster for patients and hospital staff as private companies and NGOs either cut back services, pay and staffing levels to run a profit or eventually start demanding the right to charge hospital fees.

"Federal Coalition health spokesperson, Peter Dutton, is on the public record supporting the policy and the federal government holds a lot of power over the states in terms of health funding and health policy, through such things as the COAG process and the Australian Healthcare Agreements.

"Our parents and grandparents worked hard, against powerful private and medical vested interests, to build us a good-quality, free public hospital system and an affordable overall health system. Will we leave our children and grandchildren the same or will we leave them a costly privatised mess?" Mr Holmes said. ✪

Shameful attack on asylum seekers

The Coalition's announcement that they will introduce temporary protection visas, remove appeal rights and fast-track deportations is just the latest round of the shameful Dutch auction of asylum seekers' rights, says the Refugee Action Coalition.

"Labor and the Coalition are falling over themselves to announce ever-harsher anti-refugee policies. Scott Morrison's announcement fails the commonsense test and he has outed himself as a hypocrite. On the one hand he wants to deny appeal rights and quickly deport 'failed' asylum seekers in the name of certainty. On the other, he will deny certainty to those who are found to be refugees," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"He wants to give recognised refugees temporary protection visas, rather than permanent protection. But is Afghanistan or Pakistan about to become safer, with the Taliban set to become part of the Afghan government?"

"Kevin Rudd set off the latest downward spiral with his PNG solution. Scott Morrison is determined to go one worse. It's time Australian politics got off this toxic merry-go-around."

Rintoul noted that there are

thousands of people who will be found to be refugees who are now living in the community without the right to work and without adequate resources. These people need certainty and support.

"Both political parties are willing to spend billions of dollars expanding detention centres and sending asylum seekers off-shore. Those billions could be used to provide resources and raise living standards in Australia rather than trash the rights of asylum seekers.

"Both political parties can fill the black hole at the middle of their refugee policies and the black hole of the economic policies by ending the scapegoating of refugees and using the billions now used for detention for community services and resettlement."

Meanwhile, the Refugee Action Coalition says all Nauru asylum seekers should be evacuated to Australia. "The fire at the Nauruan hospital is the last straw," said Ian Rintoul. "The unsanitary conditions of the tent city camp have already created a humanitarian crisis among the asylum seekers. Over 100 asylum seekers have been struck down with an epidemic of gastroenteritis that has made conditions in the camp unbearable.

"There are only six portable

toilets for over 400 asylum seekers. And there is no running water for washing. Up to 17 asylum seekers are living in one tent. The camp conditions are shocking. It is now urgent for asylum seekers to be brought to Australia before the emergency situation deteriorates any further."

He said that there have never been adequate facilities to care for the asylum seekers or the Nauruan people. Asylum seekers are routinely medi-vacced to Australia, because the facilities on the island cannot cope. Australia should be assisting Nauru to improve the medical facilities there, not wasting millions expanding detention centres.

"It is now also certain that there are recognised refugees being kept in the Nauruan hell-hole, but the government has done nothing to ensure they are released.

"The failure of lawyers to show up was one of the things that triggered the riot at the detention centre on July 19.

"The government has been twiddling its thumbs while Nauru burns. The asylum seekers on Nauru were sent before the PNG solution and were never going to be resettled on the island. There are being kept in inhumane conditions, held hostages to Labor's election campaign." ✪

Coal seam gas mining and drinking water

Are you a Sydney Water customer? If so, the water that comes out of your tap comes from land managed by the Sydney Catchment Authority. This land includes five catchments – Warragamba, Woronora, Upper Nepean, Blue Mountains and Shoalhaven – covering less than two percent of the land in NSW. It supplies drinking water for 60 percent of the state's population.

This largely unspoilt, native bushland captures and filters our drinking water. It is strictly managed to protect drinking water quality; unauthorised or illegal access attracts fines of up to \$44,000. Yet coal seam gas (CSG) licences and wells have been approved in our drinking water catchments, and the current legislation does not stop CSG mining or exploration there.



A CSG well has been drilled in the Warragamba catchment.

The simple facts

Our water catchments are protected, by law, by the Sydney Catchment Authority (SCA) – whose primary mandate is the protection of our drinking water for the purpose of public health.

The public must keep out by law or run the risk of a \$44,000 fine – just for setting foot in the “Schedule One Special Areas” within our water catchments, so precious are they to the integrity of our drinking water supply.

In December 2012 the NSW Minister for Primary Industries replaced the entire Board of the SCA. The new chairperson is a former director of two of Australia's largest mining companies, and for the first time in its history there is no public health expert on the SCA Board.

A CSG well has been drilled in the Warragamba catchment and the Department of Planning and Infrastructure has recommended approval for Apex Energy to proceed with a 16-CSG well project in and around the Woronora and Upper Nepean catchments (though, thankfully, in July 2013 the Planning Assessment Commission rejected

a time extension that would have allowed the project to proceed at this time). The production plan is for hundreds of CSG wells there.

NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell made a clear promise to protect our water catchments from the risks of coal seam gas mining, a promise he has broken.

Contamination

CSG is trapped underground by water pressure. To mine the gas, this water must be drawn out of the coal seam to the surface. It is high in salt and methane, and can contain naturally occurring toxic and radioactive compounds and heavy metals.

Soil testing around CSG wells and wastewater ponds in the Pilliga forest in NSW in 2012 found arsenic, lead, chromium, salts and petrochemicals – only made public after local residents tipped off the EPA.

Desalinated CSG waste water released into the Condamine River contained boron, silver, chlorine, copper, cadmium cyanide, zinc and other toxic chemicals.

The NSW government wants to bring the CSG industry into these

protected areas, while keeping the public out with a \$44,000 fine for trespassing.

Hydraulic fracturing (fracking)

When using fracking – a CSG extraction method that involves pumping water, sand and chemicals into the ground to fracture coal and increase the flow of gas out of the well – contaminants escape into the surrounding environment. Only 20 percent to 80 percent of fracking fluids are recovered.

In May 2011, a fracking blow out occurred at AGL's CSG well head at Camden North in NSW during routine maintenance. This incident released plumes of contaminated water and methane into the air in the vicinity of housing and a water catchment feeder stream. AGL failed to report the incident for two days until the leakage was shown on TV. In June 2011, there was a similar blow out at an Arrow Energy CSG well head near Dalby in Queensland. Methane and water spewed up to 90 metres in the air for two days before being capped.

Well failure

CSG wells connect the surface to coal seams, and pass through any aquifers present. About 6-7 percent of unconventional gas wells fail and leak within a year of construction, and about 50 percent fail before being shut down. When a CSG project ends, the wells – built and plugged with concrete and steel that degrade – must last forever.

If CSG mining is allowed in our water catchments it will forever link toxic coal seams with the surface where our drinking water is collected. CSG well integrity relies on concrete and steel lining; materials that degrade over time.

Aquifer depletion

The federal government's Water Group estimates the industry will draw at least 666 and up to 5,400 gigalitres of water out of the ground each year. For comparison, Australian households use a total 1,872 gigalitres per year.

A 2009 NSW Office of Water report into drinking water catchment health said: “Groundwater is a significant resource in most catchments ... As well as being extracted for town supply, stock and domestic use, and irrigation and industrial use, groundwater is a major contributor to base flow in rivers and streams in dry periods, and in maintaining wetlands and other groundwater dependent ecosystems. Excessive extraction for human use can decrease the amount of groundwater available for maintaining surface aquatic ecosystems, and can also lead to salinisation of the resource.”

Leaking methane

CSG mining results in fugitive methane emissions – a highly flammable and potent greenhouse gas. These emissions come from leaking pipelines, wells and processing plants, methane in produced water, and methane escaping through underground systems.

Researchers from the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said air sampling of unconventional gas fields in Colorado showed leakage rates of 4 percent on average, and up to 7.7 percent.

This leaking methane can easily be ignited by sparks or cinders, and lead to fires that threaten water quality. The NSW Office of Water report said: “Bushfires can have devastating effects on catchment health, destroying native vegetation, farmland and infrastructure. Areas burnt by

bushfires are prone to accelerated soil erosion, resulting in enhanced sediment and nutrient export to the surface water bodies downstream. Removal of vegetation by fire also reduces the ability of catchment areas to retain rainfall.”

Industrial footprint

CSG exploration and mining requires a well every 300 to 900 metres, connected to roads and pipelines, pumps, generators, compressors, ponds or tanks and storage facilities. Contrary to industry advertising that depicts CSG wells as a minor feature on the landscape, CSG fields have a big industrial footprint. This requires clearing and degradation of large areas of land.

But plants along rivers and streams, native vegetation and wetlands are vital to catchment health. Plants stabilise river and stream banks, and reduce erosion and flooding. Native vegetation in catchments retains rainfall and lowers the risk of excess runoff and flash flooding. It reduces soil and groundwater acidity and salinity, and lowers soil and nutrient loss into waterways. Likewise, wetlands store runoff, sediments, nutrients and other pollutants and reduce flooding.

It's astonishing that this industry is being encouraged to proceed, with no scientific studies conducted into the impact of production CSG mining in our water catchments, or into the combined impacts of CSG and other mining activities (such as long wall mining) – a significant factor considering damage already in evidence.

What you can do

Please don't underestimate your contribution – make a difference ... Get involved!

It's not too late to stop this. The campaign for a ban on CSG mining and exploration in NSW catchments has so far stopped approved drilling in the Woronora and Upper Nepean catchments going ahead. It has also forced a change in NSW government rhetoric – though not action. It has not yet won a ban.

The gains so far have been made by community members finding out what's going on, doing what we can, and standing together to stop it.

Connect, stay informed, get involved!

More people need to get involved for this campaign to protect our water and win a ban. It can't be up to “someone else.”

stopcsg.org/ourwater ☎

Great Barrier Reef turtles threatened

The Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) and Turtle Island Restoration Network program director Teri Shore have warned the massive port projects and other industrial activity planned for the Great Barrier Reef will push globally significant species of turtles closer to the brink of extinction.

The industrialisation of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area will destroy and degrade critical nesting, feeding or migration habitat for six marine turtle species of international value.

Ms Shore said marine turtles and their habitat are threatened by both direct and indirect impacts of industrialisation, such as dredging, drilling, vessel strikes, fuel and oil spills and water pollution.

“The Great Barrier Reef is home to some of the most amazing turtle species in the world who rely on a healthy reef for their future,” Ms Shore said.

“The Australian Flatback live entirely in waters close to shore and sandy beaches, making them highly vulnerable to coastal port developments and shipping. Alternatively, Leatherbacks live more in the open ocean where increased ship movements will take their toll through greater injury and death.

“Ship strikes alone have killed 45 turtles in Gladstone Harbour after the Curtis Island LNG project began, compared with an average of two a year in the past decade.

“I've just visited Gladstone Harbour this week and I'm concerned the impacts on turtles that we're seeing there could happen in waters up and down the Barrier Reef coast,” she said.

AMCS Great Barrier Reef campaign director Felicity Wishart said the cumulative impacts of industrial development on the Reef's wildlife and coral had not been considered or evaluated.

“The federal government's dredging report released showed the impact of dredging and dumping in the Reef's waters is much worse than industry and government thought,” Ms Wishart said.

“Tourists come from around the world to experience and photograph wildlife like turtles and colourful reef fish, not port developments and dredge plumes.

“This week Environment Minister Mark Butler is expected to make a decision on the TO terminal, a further expansion of the Abbot Point port development, alongside important nesting habitat for the Flatback turtle. We urge him to consider the considerable impacts on the Reef, its wildlife and local tourism and reject the proposal,” she said. The Turtle Island Restoration Network is a US-based, non-profit conservation organisation. www.SeaTurtles.org ☎

The Obama regime's fabricated "Terror Conspiracy"

James Petra

A bogus fabrication is evident in the Obama regime's current announcements of an imminent global "terrorist threat" in the face of multiple crises, policy failures and defeats throughout the Middle East, North Africa and Southwest Asia.

The entire terror conspiracy propaganda blitz, launched by the Obama regime and propagated by the mass media, is based on the flimsiest sources imaginable, the most laughable pretext. According to White House sources, the National Security Agency, the CIA and other spy agencies claimed to have monitored and intercepted unspecified Al-Qaeda threats, conversations by two Al-Qaeda figures including Ayman al Zawahiri.

Most damaging, the Obama regime's claim of a global threat by Al-Qaeda, necessitating the shutdown of 19 embassies and consuls and a world-wide travellers alert, flies in the face of repeated public assertions over the past five years that Washington has dealt "mortal blows" to the terrorist organisation crippling its operative capacity and citing the US "military successes" in Afghanistan and Iraq, its assassination of Bin Laden, the drone attacks in Yemen, Pakistan, Somalia and the US-backed invasion of Libya. Either the Obama regime was lying in the past or its current terror alert is a fabrication. If, as Obama and the NSA currently claim, Al-Qaeda has re-emerged as a global terrorist threat, then 12 years of warfare in Afghanistan and 11 years of war in Iraq, the spending of US\$1.46 trillion dollars, the loss of over 7,000 US soldiers and the physical and psychological maiming of over a hundred thousand US combatants has been a total and unmitigated disaster and the so-called war on terror is a failure.

The claim of a global terror threat, based on NSA surveillance of two Yemen-based Al-Qaeda leaders, is as shallow as it is implausible. Every day throughout cyberspace one or another Islamist terrorist group or individual discuss terror plots, fantasies and plans of no great consequence.

The Obama regime fails to explain why, out of thousands of daily internet "conversations", this particular one, at this particular moment, represents an ongoing viable terrorist operation. One does not need a million spies to pick up jihadist chatter about "attacking Satan".

For over a decade, Al-Qaeda operatives in Yemen have been engaging in a proxy war with Washington-backed regimes and over the same time the Obama regime has been engaged in drone and Special Forces assassination mission against Yemeni militants and opposition figures. In other words, the Obama regime has magnified commonplace events, related to an ongoing conflict known to the public, into a new global terrorist threat as revealed by his spymasters because of their high powered espionage prowess!

It is more than obvious that the Obama regime is engaged in a global fabrication designed to distract world public opinion and, in particular, the majority of US citizens, from police state spying and violations of basic constitutional freedoms.

By evoking a phoney "terrorist threat" and its detection by the NSA, Obama hopes to re-legitimize his discredited police state apparatus.

The Obama regime is trying to discredit Bradley Manning's heroic revelations of documented US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan by focusing on nebulous Al-Qaeda terror threats over the internet!

More important, by raising the spectre of a global terrorist threat, the Obama regime seeks to cover-up the most disreputable policies, despicable "show trials" and harsh imprisonment of government whistleblowers and political, diplomatic and military defeats and failures which have befallen the empire in the present period.

Fabrication of threat

In recent years the US public has grown weary of the cost and inconclusive nature of the "global war on terror", or GWOT. Public opinion polls support the withdrawal of troops from overseas wars and back domestic social programs over military spending and new invasions. Yet the Obama regime, aided and abetted by the pro-Israel power configuration, in and out of the government, engages in constant pursuit of war policies aimed at Iran, Syria, Lebanon and any other Muslim country opposed to Israel's erasure of Arab Palestine. The "brilliant" pro-war strategists and advisers in the Obama regime have pursued military and diplomatic policies which have led to political disasters, monstrous human rights violations and the gutting of US constitutional protections guaranteed to its citizens. To continue the pursuit of repeated failed policies, a gargantuan police state has been erected to spy, control and repress US citizens and overseas countries, allies and adversaries.

The "terror threat" fabrication occurs at a time and in response to the deepening international crisis and the political impasse facing the Obama regime – a time of deepening disenchantment among domestic and overseas public opinion and increasing pressure from Israel to continue to press forward with the military agenda.

The single most devastating blow to the police state build-up are the documents made public by the NSA contractor, Edward Snowden, which revealed the vast worldwide network of NSA spying in violation of US constitutional freedoms and the sovereignty of countries. The revelations have discredited the Obama regime, provoked conflicts within and between allies, and strengthened the position of adversaries and critics of the US Empire.

Leading regional organisations, like MERCOSUR in Latin America, have attacked "cyber-imperialism"; the EU countries have questioned the notion of "intelligence cooperation". Even dozens of US Congress people have called for reform and cutbacks in NSA funding.

Snowden and Manning

The "terror threats" are timed by Obama to neutralise the Snowden revelations and justify the spy agency and its vast operations.

The Bradley Manning "show trial", in which a soldier is tortured, often with forced nudity, in solitary confinement for almost a year, imprisoned for three years before his trial and publicly prejudged by President Obama, numerous legislators and mass media (precluding any semblance of "fairness"), for revealing US war crimes against Iraqi and Afghan civilians, evoked mass protests the world over.

Obama's "terror threat" is trotted out to coincide with the pre-determined conviction of Manning in this discredited judicial farce and to buttress the argument that his exposure of gross US war crimes "served the enemy" (rather than the American public who Manning repeatedly



has said deserve to know about the atrocities committed in its name). By re-launching the "war on terror" and intimidating the US public, the Obama regime is trying to discredit Bradley Manning's heroic revelations of documented US war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan by focusing on nebulous Al-Qaeda terror threats over the internet!

In the international political arena, Obama has suffered a series of repeated political and diplomatic defeats with far-reaching implications for his fanatical empire building project. The Obama-backed and Al-Qaeda-led Islamist mercenary invasion of the sovereign nation of Syria has suffered a series of military defeats and his proxy jihadist "freedom-fighters" have been denounced by most prestigious human rights groups for their massacres and ethnic cleansing of civilian populations in Syria (especially Christians, Kurds, Alevis and secular Syrians). Obama's Syrian "adventure" has backfired, and is clearly unleashing a new generation of Islamist terrorists, armed by the Gulf States – especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar, trained by Turkish and NATO Special Forces and now available for global terrorist "assignments" against US client states, Europe and the US itself.

Turkey

In turn the Syrian debacle has had a major impact on Obama's NATO ally, Turkey, where mass protests are challenging Prime Minister Erdogan's military support for Islamist mercenaries, based along the Turkish border with Syria. Erdogan's savage repression of hundreds of thousands of peaceful protestors, the arbitrary arrest of thousands of pro-democracy activists and his own "show trials" of hundreds of journalists, military officials, students, intellectuals and trade unionists, has certainly discredited Obama's main "democratic Islamist" ally and undermined Washington's attempt to anchor its dominance via a triangular alliance of Israel, Turkey and the Gulf monarchies.

Further discredit of Obama's foreign policy of co-opting Islamist "electoral regimes" has occurred in Egypt and is pending in Tunisia. Obama's post-Mubarak policy in Egypt looked to a "power sharing" arrangement between the democratically elected President Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Mubarak-era military and neo-liberal politicians, like Mohamed El Baradei. Instead, General Sistani grabbed power via the army, overthrowing and jailing the civilian President Morsi. The Egyptian army under Sistani has massacred peaceful pro-democracy Muslim protestors and purged the parliament, spied and independent voices.

Forced to choose between the military

dictatorship composed of the henchman of the former Mubarak dictatorship and the mass-based Muslim Brotherhood, US Secretary of State John Kerry backed the military take-over as a "transition to democracy" (steadfastly refusing to use the term "coup d'état"). This has opened wide the door to a period of mass repression and resistance in Egypt and severely weakened a key link in the "axis of reaction" in North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt).

Obama's incapacity to deal with the new peace overtures by the recently elected President Rouhani in Iran was evident in the Administrations capitulation to a Congressional vote (420-20) in favour of further and more severe sanctions designed, according to the bill's AIPAC authors, to "strangle the Iranian oil economy". Secretary of State Kerry's offer to "negotiate" with Iran, under a US-imposed blockade and economic sanctions, was seen in Teheran, and by most independent observers, as an empty theatrical gesture, of little consequence. Obama's failure to check the Israeli-Zionist stranglehold on US foreign policy toward Iran and to strike a deal ensuring a nuclear-weapon-free Iran ensures that the region will continue to be a political and military powder keg.

The Obama regime's Israeli-Palestine peace negotiations are seen by most observers as the most distorted and bizarre efforts to date in that cruel farce. Washington has purchased the leaders of the Palestinian "Authority" with multi-million dollar handouts and gave way to Israel's accelerated land grabbing in the occupied West Bank and "Jews only" settlement construction, as well as the mass eviction of 40,000 Bedouins within Israel itself.

To ensure the desired result – a total fiasco – Obama appointed one of the most fanatical of pro-Israeli zealots in Washington as its "mediator", the tri-national Martin Indyk, known in diplomatic circles as "Israel's lawyer" (and the first US Ambassador to be stripped of security clearance for mishandling documents.)

The breakdown of the negotiations is foretold. Obama, caught in the web of his own long-term reactionary alliances and loyalties and obsessed with military solutions, has developed a knack for engaging in prolonged losing wars, multiplying enemies and alienating allies.

Conclusion

The result of prolonged unpopular wars of aggression has been the massive built-up of a monstrous domestic police state, pervasive spying around the world and the commission of egregious violations of the US Constitution. This, in turn, has led to crudely concocted "terror plots" to cover-up the repeated foreign

BRICS birth a new South-South revolution in Durban

Manish Chand

In the balmy coastal city of Durban which birthed the Gandhi revolution over a hundred years ago, the seeds of a new rejuvenated South-South movement have been sown, with the BRICS leaders launching a path-breaking Development Bank that seeks to uplift over three billion people in the developing and emerging world.

The two-day summit culminated with a unanimous decision by the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa to set up a BRICS-led Development Bank that will finance development and infrastructure development not just in emerging economies, but also in the larger Global South.

In another important step to cement the intra-BRICS economic architecture, the leaders of the five emerging economies, which account for over a quarter of global GDP, also endorsed a US\$100-billion contingency reserve arrangement that will be deployed as a last resort in case of a serious crisis afflicting a BRICS country.

"We have decided to enter formal negotiations to establish a BRICS-led new Development Bank based on our own considerable infrastructure needs, which amounts to around US\$4.5 trillion over the next five years, but also to cooperate with other emerging markets and developing countries in future," said South African President Jacob Zuma, the host of the 5th BRICS summit.

"Our resolve extends further to also establish a BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement. We are working towards related initiatives in our economic deliberations to further strengthen our intra-BRICS cooperation," he said.

The 5th BRICS summit has proved to be the most substantive one, with important headline-hogging outcomes that have the potential to create a new dialectics of development and geopolitics in the mutating international order.

Besides the bank and the contingency reserve arrangement, the summit also saw important steps in deepening the framework of intra-BRICS cooperation. These pivotal steps included the setting up of a 25-member BRICS Business Council and the BRICS Think Tanks Council that seeks to create new pathways of South-South economic cooperation.

For India, which took the lead in shaping the Development Bank, the fruition of the key ideas that flowed from the 2012 New Delhi summit was a moment of special pride and resonance.

"It gives me great satisfaction to note that one of the ideas that we first discussed at

New Delhi, that of instituting a mechanism to recycle surplus savings into infrastructure investments in developing countries, has been given a concrete shape during the Durban Summit," said Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. "Our Finance Ministers will now work to develop the details of this project," he said.

The Indian prime minister underlined that the discussions at the Durban summit "demonstrated the similarity of our perspectives on many global issues, such as the situation in West Asia and efforts to rekindle global economic growth".

Talking to Indian journalists, India's Finance Minister P Chidambaram explained key features of the Development Bank. "We [the finance ministers of the five countries] gave a big idea and that idea has now become a reality – that is the BRICS Development Bank," he said soon after the conclusion of the plenary session on the second day of the two-day summit.

He added that the finance ministers and officials of the five countries have been given a 12-month time-frame to work out modalities like the capital of the proposed bank, its domicile and the governance structure.

"We should have a nearly complete document when the leaders meet again in Brazil next March," he added.

Delineating contours of the contingency reserve arrangement, Chidambaram said the bulk of the money, that is US\$41 billion, will be pledged by China, US\$18 billion each will come from India, Brazil and Russia, while South Africa has agreed to US\$5 billion.

Russian President Vladimir Putin welcomed the decision to launch the Development Bank and made a robust pitch for accelerating multi-polarity in international relations.

Syria and Iran

The Durban summit ended on a high note, with all the leaders of the emerging economies reaffirming their political will to take intra-BRICS cooperation to new heights and to transform the grouping into a powerful platform for a counter-narrative on key international issues.

This was reflected in the BRICS' strong position on Syria and the warning to the West against military adventurism in Iran.

"We express our deep concern with the deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in Syria and condemn the increasing violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law as a result of continued violence," said the *eThekwin Declaration* that was issued at the end of the first BRICS summit held on African soil.

"We believe that the Joint Communiqué of the Geneva Action Group provides a basis for resolution of the Syrian crisis and reaffirm our opposition to any further militarisation of the conflict," the declaration said. "In view of the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria, we call upon all parties to allow and facilitate immediate, safe, full and unimpeded access to humanitarian organisations to all in need of assistance. We urge all parties to ensure the safety of humanitarian workers."

Against the backdrop of the West-driven agenda of regime change in Syria, the BRICS leaders positioned the grouping as the voice of moderation and consensus-building.

"A Syrian-led political process leading to a transition can be achieved only through broad national dialogue that meets the legitimate aspirations of all sections of Syrian society and respect for Syrian independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty as expressed by the Geneva Joint Communiqué and appropriate UNSC [United Nations Security Council] resolutions," said the declaration.

"We support the efforts of the UN-League of Arab States Joint Special Representative," said the declaration.

In a clear warning to the West, the BRICS leaders also voiced their opposition to threat of military action against Tehran, amid ominous noises emanating from the US and Israel that they will not tolerate a nuclear-armed Iran.

"We are concerned about threats of military action as well as unilateral sanctions. We note the recent talks held in Almaty and hope that all outstanding issues relating to Iran's nuclear programme will be resolved through discussions and diplomatic means," said the declaration.

The sharp stand taken by the BRICS on the situation in Syria and the Iranian nuclear program underlines the transformation of a grouping that started off as a forum focused on mitigating the global financial slowdown, but has emerged as a powerful pressure group in international politics that advocates multi-polarity in international relations and multilateralism in resolving global peace and security issues.

The Durban summit will go down in history as a defining moment in the trajectory of South-South cooperation and marked the maturation of a grouping that started off as a forum focused on global economic governance issues, but has widened its horizon to include an ambitious all-encompassing global agenda to rekindle development in the emerging world and reclaim the weight of the Global South in the international arena.

Third World Resurgence ✪



policy failures and to slander and persecute courageous whistleblowers and threaten other decent American patriots.

The recent declaration of another vast "terror plot", which served to justify the illegal activities of US spy agencies and "unify Congress", produced hysteria lasting less than a week. Subsequently, reports began to trickle in, even in the obedient US mass media, discrediting the basis of the alleged global terror conspiracy. According to one report, the much-ballyhooed "Al-Qaeda plot" turned out to be a failed effort to blow-up an oil terminal and oil pipeline in Yemen. According to regional observers: "Pipelines are attacked nearly weekly in Yemen". And so an unsuccessful jihadist attack against a pipeline in a marginal part of the poorest Arab state morphed into President Obama's breathless announcement of a global terrorist threat!

An outrageous joke has been played on the President, his Administration and his Congressional followers. But during this great orchestrated "joke", Obama unleashed a dozen drone assassination attacks against human targets of his own choosing, killing dozens of Yemeni citizens, including many innocent bystanders.

What is even less jocular is that Obama, the Master of Deceit, just moves on. His proposed "reforms" are aimed to retrench NSA activities; he insists on continuing the "bulk collection" (hundreds of millions) of US citizens' telephone communications. He retains intact the massive police state spy apparatus, keeps his pro-Israel policymakers in strategic positions, reaffirms his policy of confrontation with Iran and escalates tensions with Russia, China and Venezuela. Obama embraces a new wave of military dictatorships, starting, but not ending, with Egypt.

In the face of diminishing support at home and abroad and the declining credibility of his crude "terror" threats, one wonders if the ever-active clandestine apparatus would actually stage its own real-life bloody act of terror, a secret state supported 'false-flag' bombing, to convince an increasingly disenchanted and sceptical public? Such would be a desperate act for the State, but these are desperate times facing a failed Administration, pursuing losing wars in which the Masters of Deceit can now only rely on the Masters of Deceit.

The Obama regime is infested with the "toxic politics of terrorism" and this addiction has driven him to persecute, torture and imprison truth seekers, whistleblowers and true patriots who strive (and will continue to strive) to awaken the sleeping giant, in hopes that the people of America will arise again.

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Depleted uranium contamination still blights Iraq

A decade may have elapsed since the US invasion of Iraq but the depleted uranium it left behind continues to take its toll.

To mark the 10th anniversary of the 2003 invasion, a new report has highlighted continuing uncertainties over the impact and legacy of the use of 400 tonnes of depleted uranium (DU) weapons in Iraq. The report reveals the extent of DU's use in civilian areas for the first time.

"In a State of Uncertainty" published by Dutch peace organisation IKV Pax Christi, has sought to do what the US has so far refused to do - reveal how widely the weapons were used in Iraq, and in what circumstances. It also analyses the costs and technical burdens associated with DU use, arguing that a decade on, many contamination problems remain unresolved - leaving civilians at risk of chronic DU exposure.

States argue that the use of controversial DU munitions is justified against armoured vehicles, yet "In a State of Uncertainty" documents their use against a wider range of targets in 2003, with attacks often taking place within civilian areas, leaving residents at risk from contamination. This resulted from both the US' use of DU in medium calibre ammunition for aircraft and armoured fighting vehicles, and the frequency of urban combat operations in 2003.

The report also finds that the Iraqi

government has struggled with the cost and technical challenges posed by the legacy of contamination, a situation compounded by the US' refusal to release targeting data. The Iraqi government acknowledges that there are more than 300 sites with known contamination, based on the limited data available, with new sites regularly discovered. Clean-up of sites typically costs around US\$150,000, but varies considerably depending on the setting, extent and level of contamination.

"The 300 or so known sites may be the tip of the iceberg," said a spokesperson for the International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons (ICBUW). "While it is obviously difficult to extrapolate directly from other conflicts, in the Balkans, where 1/60th of the quantity of DU was used, we saw somewhat over 100 contaminated sites; we would therefore expect the total number of contaminated sites in Iraq to be far higher than the 300 identified by the Iraqi authorities."

Health concerns

Reports collected by the International Committee of the Red Cross reveal that tribal leaders in southern Iraq highlighted DU contamination as a primary health concern, with fear of DU exposure widespread in Iraq. Iraqis commonly associate increased incidence rates of cancers,

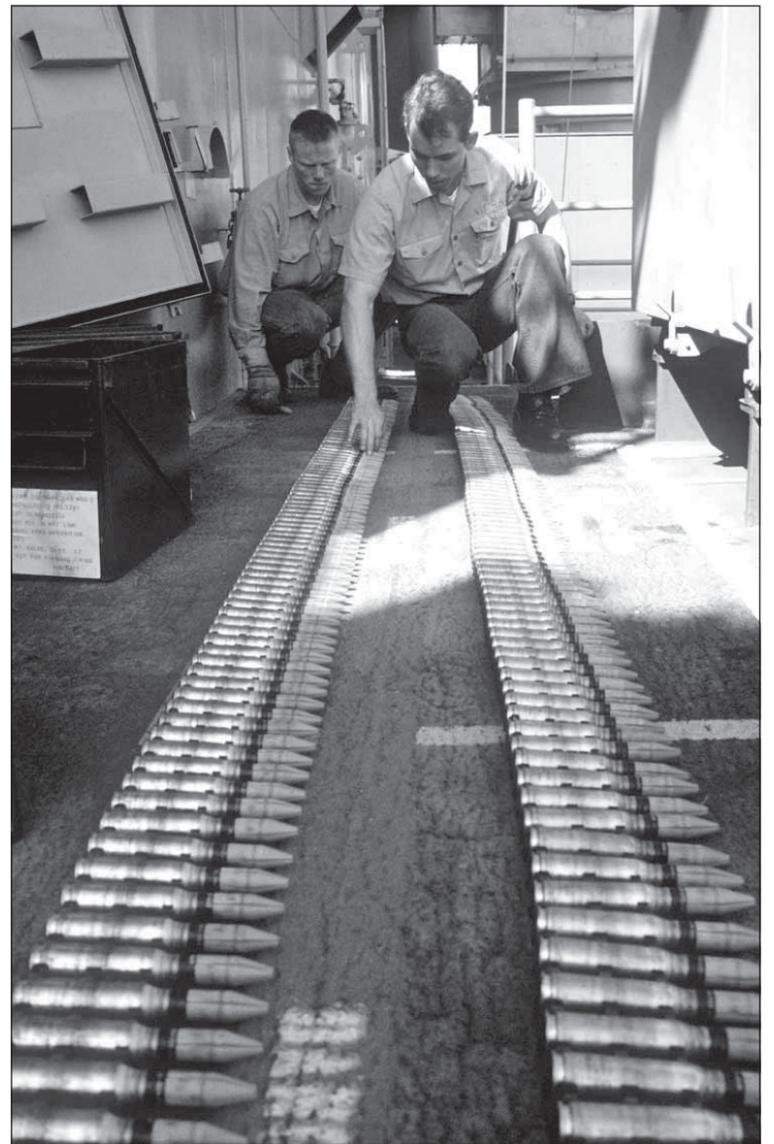
congenital birth malformations and other diseases with DU, resulting in significant levels of anxiety. Prompted by numerous media reports of a health crisis in Fallujah, linked by researchers to the toxic legacy of military activities, a major review of birth defect rates in six Iraqi provinces by the World Health Organisation and Iraqi Ministry of Health is to be published soon.

"In a State of Uncertainty" documents the enormous problem still posed by the poorly regulated storage and trade in military scrap metal. Deregulation of the scrap trade under the Coalition Provisional Authority resulted in casual scrap metal collectors being needlessly exposed to DU and in the export of contaminated scrap to neighbouring countries. Scrap metal collectors continue to remain at risk of exposure, as do those who live near dozens of uncontrolled scrap sites. The Iraqi government has requested international assistance in analysing and managing contaminated military scrap.

"Because states are under no obligation to share targeting data, even when deploying toxic and radioactive munitions, it is unclear exactly how many locations may still be contaminated, or the extent of the risks that civilians face," said the report's author Wim Zwijnenburg.

"DU's apparent use in built-up areas against a range of targets in 2003 increased these risks, running counter to efforts to increase protection for civilians during armed conflict and further undermining DU's legitimacy. This uncertainty means that fear of DU among Iraqi civilians is widespread yet effectively managing DU's legacy will require international assistance."

The United Nations General Assembly has twice called for greater



Depleted uranium ammunition aboard *USS Missouri*.

transparency over DU weapons use, most recently in December 2012, where 155 states voted in favour. The US, the UK, France and Israel were the only four states which opposed the text, which also accepted the potential risks from DU use and called for a precautionary approach to their post-conflict management.

Throughout, it is clear that for states recovering from conflict, effectively managing DU contamination to standards even approaching those in the states that employ the weapons poses significant challenges. IKV Pax Christi argues that the implications for the wider acceptability of DU munitions are clear.

"Even now, 10 years after the

2003 conflict, the true extent of the risks posed to civilians from DU in Iraq is unclear," said an ICBUW spokesperson. "As the US seems reluctant to share targeting data and any records of any clean-up work it may have undertaken during the 2003-05 period, it is unclear how this situation might be resolved. Greater transparency on usage would of course be extremely helpful in determining the extent of DU's use in civilian areas." International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons (www.bandeduranium.org) The report "In a State of Uncertainty" can be downloaded from: www.ikvpaxchristi.nl

Third World Resurgence ☪

"Even now, 10 years after the 2003 conflict, the true extent of the risks posed to civilians from DU in Iraq is unclear."

Egyptian unions in throes of democracy fight

SUEZ, Egypt – PAI*: The Egyptian army arrested and temporarily detained two Egyptian steel union leaders in Suez, Egypt, two days before its violent crackdown on supporters of ousted Islamist President Mohammed Morsi, seven Egyptian unions and a human rights centre reported.

Though Amr Yousef and Abdel-Raouf Abdel-Khaleq were released on August 13, two supporters of their union, which is on strike at Suez Steel, were injured in the melee around the arrests earlier that day, according to the unions. The strike started in late July.

On August 15, the army smashed into two pro-Morsi encampments in Cairo. More than 638 people, including at least 40 soldiers, died. Egyptian unions have yet to post comments on the killings, but an independent Egyptian paper bitterly denounced the army and Vice President

Mohammed el-Baradei resigned in protest.

The arrests and the prior sit-in at Suez show the uncomfortable position of Egypt's independent unions in the continuing turmoil there.

Independent Egyptian unions and their members were among the leaders in the overthrow of 30-year dictator Hosni Mubarak in January 2011 - a role that earned them praise and awards from the AFL-CIO. The federation and its overseas arm, the Solidarity Centre, did not immediately comment on the army's August 15 crackdown.

But even as unions pressed for stronger worker rights and - among other things - a maximum wage imposed on company owners, the unions faced crackdowns, first from the army-run government that replaced Mubarak, then from Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood government and now from the

interim army-controlled civilian government.

"After the toppling of Mubarak, (Army chief Hassan) Tantawi, and Morsi in successive revolutionary waves...neither current Commander in Chief Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, nor interim President Adly Mansour nor Prime Minister Hazem al-Beblawi seem to have learned the lesson," the Egyptian Centre for Economic and Social Rights said in a statement the English-language Egypt Independent newspaper posted. Co-signers included leftist groups, public transport, port, Cairo airport and textile unions.

El-Sisi and Mansour "continue to deceive the masses, neglecting the demand of social justice in the transitional phase, under the pretext of the war against terror," the statement continued. "The new Mansour-Sisi government is using the old methods against striking workers, who were in the forefront

of the people's struggle...which overthrew Mubarak, then Tantawi, then Morsi, whose term witnessed the greatest wave of workers striking for their rights."

Other news sources noted there have been 3,800 workers' protests of various kinds since Mubarak's downfall, half of them from government workers.

The Suez Steel workers' struggle has lasted more than a year, though the strike is more recent, the statement said. The firm rejected the union's contract proposals about career structure, health care benefits, incentives and use of company profits.

The profits were the sticking point. Suez Steel's chairman claimed the firm was losing money, but the union found the firm donated approximately US\$430,000 (3 million Egyptian pounds) to the government for "national reconstruction."

The firm then fired 12 of the unionists and demanded all the workers return to their jobs before it would resume talks. But it also rejected all the contract demands, forcing the strike, the statement said.

The non-Islamist Strong Egypt Party defended the Suez Steel workers, too. "It is as if history is repeating itself," the party said. "We saw under the Muslim Brotherhood and Mohammed Morsi the security forces attacking the protesting workers of Portland Cement with dogs. Today, the Suez Steel workers, who have been on strike for more than 20 days to demand the return of their arbitrarily dismissed colleagues, are being attacked by the army, who arrested two people and injured two others." *PAI is a not-for-profit international organisation run by youths and students. *People's World* ☪

Fukushima: mission impossible?

Eric Baker

Scientists at Japan's Fukushima nuclear power plant are preparing for their toughest clean-up operation yet – two and a half years after three of the plant's reactors suffered a meltdown in Japan's worst-ever nuclear power disaster.

The operation, to remove 400 tons of highly irradiated spent fuel beneath the plant's damaged Reactor No 4, could set off a catastrophe greater than any we have ever seen, independent experts warn. An operation of this scale, says plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Company, has never been attempted before, and is wrought with danger.

An uncontrolled leak of nuclear fuel could cause more radiation than the March 2011 disaster or the 1986 Chernobyl catastrophe, say consultants Mycle Schneider and Antony Froggatt. "Full release from the Unit-4 spent fuel pool, without any containment or control, could cause by far the most serious radiological disaster to date," the scientists say in their World Nuclear Industry Status Report 2013.

The operation has been tried before – but only with the aid of computers. This time it will be a painstaking manual process.

Here's what needs to be done: more than 1,300 used fuel rod assemblies, packing radiation 14,000 times the equivalent of the Hiroshima nuclear bomb, need to be carefully removed from their cooling pool.

Arnie Gunderson, a veteran US nuclear engineer and director of Fairewinds Energy Education, told Reuters that "they are going to have difficulty in removing a significant number of the rods," especially given their close proximity to each other, which risks breakage and the release of radiation.

Gunderson told Reuters of an incredibly dangerous "criticality" that

would result if a chain reaction takes place at any point, if the rods break or even so much as collide with each other in the wrong way. The resulting radiation is too great for the cooling pool to absorb – it simply has not been designed to do so.

"The problem with a fuel pool criticality is that you can't stop it. There are no control rods to control it," Gundersen said. "The spent fuel pool cooling system is designed only to remove decay heat, not heat from an ongoing nuclear reaction."

The base of the pool where the fuel assemblies are situated is 18 metres above the ground. The pool itself is 10 by 12 metres, and the rods are seven metres under the surface of the water. One problem with that pool is it has been exposed to air in the 2011 catastrophe, when its roof was blown off by the explosion.

The operation is urgent – because even a minor earthquake could trigger an uncontrolled fuel leak.

The removal process is due to begin in November, with TEPCO predicting it will take approximately a year. Although TEPCO is confident the operation will be a success, some experts are more sceptical. TEPCO is currently failing to contain radioactive water seepage in another part of the facility.

Two empty fuel rods were removed as part of a test operation some time ago, but "to jump to the conclusion that it is going to work just fine for the rest of them is quite a leap of logic," Reuters quoted Gundersen as saying.

A giant steel frame currently towers over Unit 4, soon to be tasked with the extraction of the fuel assemblies. Each fuel rod weighs around 300 kilograms and is 4.5 meters long. They also contain plutonium, one of the most radioactive substances known to man. The radiation builds up during the later stages of a core's operation.



"If you build a wall, of course the water is going to accumulate there. And there is no other way for the water to go but up or sideways and eventually lead to the ocean,"

Toshio Kimura, a former TEPCO technician, said that the operation would normally be assisted by computers, but that luxury is gone. "Previously it was a computer-controlled process that memorised the exact locations of the rods down to the millimetre and now they don't have that. It has to be done manually so there is a high risk that they will drop and break one of the fuel rods," he said.

He is also expecting many issues for TEPCO ahead, as the process is estimated to take years. The scientists' task is not made easier by the fact that the building is also prone to corrosion from salt water.

Removing the fuel rods is just one part of the cleanup operation, itself expected to take around four decades – according to the International Atomic Energy Agency – during which any number of other problems could arise.

The fuel rod scare comes as TEPCO is currently failing to contain radioactive water seepage in another part of the facility – itself a growing issue with no concrete solution, apart from building a special underground wall. But with water quantity building up at an alarming rate, the most likely version of events is that the radioactive water will simply have to be released into the Pacific at some point. According to TEPCO, there are still "no perfect solutions."

"If you build a wall, of course the water is going to accumulate there. And there is no other way for the water to go but up or sideways and eventually lead to the ocean," said Masashi Goto, a nuclear engineer who has worked at several TEPCO plants. "So now, the question is how long do we have?"

This situation is not made easier by the fact that Japan is a seismically active island. Earthquakes keep striking at random, and even a small tremor could set in motion a catastrophic chain of events.

Costs soaring – no end in sight

Clean-up costs at the nuclear plant are projected to be in the billions of dollars, as the facility's operator has failed to meet its targets, leading to increased public distrust and forcing the government to step in.

In the two years since the March 2011 meltdown, the costs of the cleanup project could be spiralling out of control. If the clean-up is not carried out, it could cause incalculable

problems for Japan's economy, particularly in agriculture.

The Institute for Industrial Sciences at the University of Tokyo has recently estimated that the levels of radiation along the country's coastline are way above the government target.

"We have detected over 20 spots around Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant with levels of radiation five to 10 times higher than the surrounding areas, with diameters ranging from tens to hundreds of metres," the institute said.

TEPCO had been left to its own devices two years ago to deal with the clean-up and the compensation payments to people in the contaminated region. Now, with recent news of over 300 tons of contaminated water being leaked into the Pacific for more than two years, the Japanese government has decided to step in.

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, the government ordered TEPCO to bear the entire costs of the clean-up, but also told it to get back to profitability as soon as possible through cost-cutting, so that it could pay off its debts. The clean-up will weigh very heavily on Japan's energy consumption, however, on top of the already stringent energy austerity measures.

But TEPCO has insisted it will not be able to handle the clean-up bill, which is now projected at more than US\$10 billion. The company has already spent US\$3 billion and will require a major injection of US\$10 billion by March 2014, it says.

RT

Paramilitaries threaten trade unionists

Paramilitaries have threatened scores of trade unionists, many of whom are in labour negotiations, as well as human rights defenders and other organisations in Colombia.

The paramilitary group Rastrojo Urban Commandos (Los Rastrojos – Comandos Urbanos) emailed an announcement on August 4, with death threats. They named 30 people, most of them trade unionists, and a few organisations, said they were military targets and accused them of having links to guerrilla forces. They also threatened these people's families.

Among those named are the Union of Workers of the Mining, Petrochemical, Agro-Fuels and Energy Industries (Sindicato Nacional de la Industria Minera, Petroquímica, Agrocombustible y Energética, SINTRAMIENERGETICA), the United Federation of Mining and Energy Workers (Federación Unitaria de Trabajadores Mineros y Energéticos,

FUNTRAENERGETICA) and the Union of Workers of the Metal Industry (Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Industria del Metal, SINTRAIME).

Several of the people named are members of SINTRAMIENERGETICA and part of a union delegation negotiating with the mining company Drummond Ltd. They have been on strike for over two weeks, following failed negotiations. In recent months paramilitaries have made repeated death threats against members and leaders of SINTRAMIENERGETICA. Small-scale miners (mineros artesanales) had also begun a national mining strike in mid-July, which was supported by the trade unions named in the death threat.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

Expressing concern for the safety of all those named in the August 4 paramilitary death threat, and other members of

SINTRAMIENERGETICA, FUNTRAENERGETICA and SINTRAIME;

Demanding that the authorities provide protection for those at risk, in strict accordance with their wishes;

Urging them to order a full and impartial investigation into the death threat and previous attacks and threats, publish the results and bring those responsible to justice;

Urging them to take immediate action to dismantle paramilitary groups and break their links with the security forces, in line with repeated UN recommendations. PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE SEPTEMBER 19 2013 TO:

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Presidente de la República,
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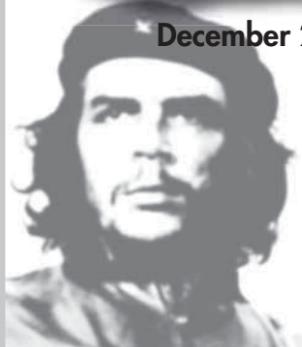
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on earth that has not been polluted with capitalist waste.

So like the pig rolling in its filthy pen the capitalist is likewise turning the planet into an environment where it defecates in its own bed, our planet. Let's reclaim it as ours because it is beginning to stink.

**Howard Patterson
Vic**

them, or their kids, from accessing the care they need. That's why we made delivering public dental care a central part of our agreement to form government.

The two old parties have long neglected dental care and the cost of their neglect is borne by some of the most vulnerable in our community – Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, the elderly, people living in regional and remote areas and low income earners.

As a doctor, I know how important dental care is to all Australians. And, we Greens have already delivered phase one of our Denticare plan – to deliver free dental care for 3.4 million children. We managed to secure this enormous dental reform because of the support of people voting us into a strong position in this Parliament, then pounding the pavement in 2012 to turn public support into action.

We will only be able to fully implement our plan to bring dental care completely under Medicare if we maintain our strong position in Parliament. Our plan to bring dental care under Medicare would mean that

dentists can bulk-bill dental services the same way doctors do. It will mean more people can afford dental care and will allow dental services to be extended to remote and regional sectors of the community.

All Australians should be able to access dental care.

**Richard Di Natale
The Greens**

the socialist countries, correct party policy and honest party members while advocating the most self destructive courses of action.

Anyone who is seeking the truth needs look no further than the *Guardian*. I have read the *Guardian* for about eight years now and I have always been impressed with its clear analysis of local and international events and its willingness to cover topics that the mainstream press has decided to bury. It was partly thanks to this that I ended up joining the CPA.

The United Nations media awards are accepting nominations, although the *Guardian* is very unlikely to be recognised. No doubt a paper with a "special" kind of journalism more suited to the ruling class' interests will be chosen. So I am writing today to show my appreciation to the people who make the *Guardian* a reality. Thank you for being the one honest paper in a sea of crooks. Please keep writing thought provoking articles with an excellent political outlook!

**Michael Hooper
SA**

Capitalism killing the planet

We have traditionally used the pig as a symbolic animal to represent the capitalist. It is seen as an animal that eats more than it needs; so much so that it looks as if it is about to burst. So we associate this perceived greed with capitalists' greed for money but there is another reason the pig behaviour best describes capitalists.

An ABC reports that a new scientific study indicates that there is "up to 40,000 fragments of plastic toxic waste in every square kilometre in the Antarctic seas". This used to be until recently the only place still left

Public dental care needed

When was the last time you visited the dentist? One in three Australians say they just can't afford to go. When I was a GP I used to get angry about the number of patients I saw whose medical problems stemmed from untreated issues with their teeth. People unable to afford or access dental care would often leave the trip to the dentist or the doctor until they were in chronic pain – adding an extra burden to already stretched GPs.

We Greens don't believe that anyone's bank balance should stop

Exposing the truth

Every time we turn on the telly or open a newspaper, Australian's are drowned in a flood of carefully crafted propaganda. The evil Chinese are stealing our minerals, North Korea is a threat to world peace and a yellow tide of refugees are going to destroy the Australian way of life.

Mainstream media is unsurprisingly at the beck and call of the ruling class. At the same time, enemies wearing the cloak of revolutionaries attempt to deflect increasingly class conscious working people away from effective struggle. These ultra lefts publish articles and letters attacking

Culture & Life

by

Rob Gowland

Housing - luxurious, makeshift and haunted

Wherever you go in this country at present, more and more people are doing it tough. And regardless of who wins the federal election, whether it's Labor or the Liberals, the economic situation is just going to get tougher. (Of course, if Abbott becomes PM, it will actually get very much tougher, although workers will be made to bear the brunt whoever wins.)

Meanwhile, in their usual heedless way, the moneyed classes go on their merry way as if everything was all right with the world and there were no threatening clouds on the horizon in any direction. Climate change can be ignored, the de-industrialisation of the country can be ignored, the growing impoverishment of the people can be ignored; every negative indicator can be ignored as long as we've got money – that's the way the well-off view the world.

And why wouldn't they? After all, it was by viewing the world like this that enabled them (or their Daddies or Grand-daddies) to thrust their way into the ranks of the propertied classes in the first place. If they'd been born with a strong sense of morality and concern for other people, they would never have made it to the top – at least not under capitalism.

So, while lots of people are doing it tough, and charities are issuing urgent calls for help because of the greatly increased number of families needing assistance with food, shelter and clothing, some people are paying \$4.5 million for a suburban house in Sydney, or \$1 million for a combined horse-float and caravan in Queensland.

Yes, horse float. The three-storey horse float, built in West Gosford, was made to order for a North Queensland cattle-property owner. Towed by a prime mover, its first level accommodates 14 horses and two strappers; the second level houses the family in a two-bedroom area with lounge/kitchen. And when parked, the roof pops up to become the third-level viewing platform with awning, for watching rodeos and agricultural shows, one assumes.

Needless to say, everything inside is luxurious. The vehicle sleeps six and is air-conditioned, of course. That story appeared in the *Central Coast Wyong Express Advocate* on June 14. One month later, on July 12, the same paper ran another story about housing on the Central Coast. The headline was self-explanatory: "Homeless battlers turn to shipping containers."

The accompanying story deals with people living in shipping containers in a former caravan park that has gone into liquidation. Ms Shane Silvers, operations manager with Coast Shelter, told the paper: "Basically they [the containers] are illegal, but where do you go when you have nowhere else to go? At least they have a roof over their head.

"Unless you own your own home, we are all just a few pay packets away from homelessness. At a rough estimate, there are between 1,500 and 2,000 people a night sleeping homeless on the coast. ... You name a suburb anywhere across the coast and there is a family sleeping in a car."

According to recent statistics, one in 200

people across Australia are homeless. Last year, Coast Shelter accommodated 495 people in refuges, who stayed an average of 111 days, up on the previous year when the average stay was 102 days. "There is very little low-cost accommodation available," says Shane Silvers. "People have nowhere else to go."

Changing the subject completely: when I was in high school, I used to go every Saturday morning to the City Of Sydney Municipal Library in the Queen Victoria Building (before its restoration). The lady who ran the cloakroom at the library was a pleasant, chatty English woman who believed in ghosts. She once proudly showed me a B&W photo of a "poltergeist brick" sailing through the air in someone's backyard. The neighbour who presumably threw the brick is not visible.

There is no point in arguing with people who believe in "the paranormal", because they want to believe that "there are things that science can't explain". They actually want the world to be at least partially unknowable. It seems to make them more comfortable: if they are ignorant it's not because they won't make the effort to learn, it's because they "aren't meant to know" some things.

Nevertheless, wilful ignorance and self-delusion is hard to observe without wincing. However, we should not be surprised that so many people in this day and age still believe in evil spirits, witches and sorcerers, angels and demons, and of course your old-fashioned

ghosts. After all, they have never been taught to think rationally about anything, they are constantly reminded through the capitalist-controlled mass media that everything that happens in the world is irrational and random or else is only understandable to God.

If the mass media were to be enlisted in a campaign to educate people to better understand the principles of science, so they can see these irrational beliefs in demons and angels etc for the relics of ancient superstitions that they are, the media would be embroiled in a vicious battle with at least some of the established churches.

A recent edition of the *Central Coast Wyong Express Advocate* devoted a page to plugging the activities of a husband and wife team of ghost removers (he clears the house of the disgruntled spirits and his wife films the process). "Essentially," says Simon Down of North Avoca, "I free trapped spirits who are Earthbound.

"I am able to help move them on by connecting with a God source, or whatever spiritual source, and call in angels and helpers to encourage the spirit or entity to go, move on." That there are a lot of gullible people out there anxious for something "spiritual" to grasp hold of is shown by the fact that Simon has performed hundreds of "clearances" in the last eight years. In fact, he performs on average one "house clearing" every week on the Central Coast.

And some people think the population of Sicily is superstitious! ☺





Sunday August 25 –
Saturday August 31

If there is one thing that I really gets my goat, it's self-proclaimed "adventurers" and "daredevils". The sort of people who decide to row an Indian canoe across the Atlantic or go BASE-jumping off Andean peaks "for the adrenalin rush". If they get into trouble, the public is expected to foot the bill for turning out the Navy, Air-Sea Rescue, emergency hospital facilities, etc just to save their silly hides. If they die, their friends (who should have stopped them) say piously "he died doing what he loved". What? He loved showing off?

In 1974, one such "adventurer", Phillippe Petit, with a group of friends, rigged a cable between New York's Twin Towers (subsequently destroyed on 9/11) and walked from one to another as a stunt to add to his fame as a tight-rope walker, and to get him better bookings on the celebrity talk-show and lecture circuits. His stunt is the subject of *Man On Wire* (ABC2 Sunday August 25 at 8.30pm).

He and his associates of course think that his illegal stunt is "the artistic crime of the century", but really they are just being a public nuisance. Frankly, I found the program's adulation of Petit to be a pain.

Nurses do a remarkably important job under execrable conditions for shit wages. Made for Britain's Channel 4, the four-part observational documentary series

Confessions Of A Nurse (ABC2 Mondays at 8.30pm from August 26) gets the lowdown on nursing as experienced in Britain's National Health Service. The film is a well-made observational doco that covers the plusses as well as the drawbacks to being a nurse. I found the first episode both interesting and enjoyable.

Catalyst is a science program, but the *Catalyst Special: Custom Universe* (ABC1 Thursday August 29 at 8.00pm) departs from science to engage in Sci-Fi speculation and fantasy. Beginning with the sensible scientific concept that if space is infinite, then ours will not be the only universe within that immensity, the scientists being interviewed start to play with ideas and wildly unscientific speculations such as "in other universes scientific laws might not apply". That kind of conjecture requires some scientific justification if it is not to be dismissed as simply time-wasting by a scientist who is bored by scientific method. When a supposedly reputable scientist tells the interviewer – with a straight face – "in a parallel universe I might be interviewing you instead of you interviewing me", someone is playing games. The program's attempts to present this nonsense as serious science is very disappointing. So do the prevarications some of these "eminent scientists" use to avoid answering the question "does God exist?"

Once owned a large coffee-table book about architecture in Britain written by Prince Charles. Curiously, it was a very good book, with a strong opposition to the depressing "housing estates" that were erected around tower blocks to replace the working and lower middle class residential communities that Councils hooked on "slum clearance" were mad keen to get rid of, so keen that they got rid of not just the old-fashioned houses but also the communities that lived in those houses. Seeing the first episode of *The Secret History Of Our Streets* (SBS ONE Fridays from August 30 at 7.30pm) reminded me that I appear



Latoya – *Confessions Of A Nurse* (ABC2 Mondays at 8.30pm from August 26)

to have lent the book to someone and it has not been returned. If any reader knows of its whereabouts I would be grateful to have it back.

As the program poignantly shows, almost identical "slums" in neighbouring areas have been gentrified and are selling for big money to middle class types with money. The communities that were destroyed so heedlessly could have been saved if their houses had been done up instead of being demolished.

Each episode deals with a limited area and interviews past and present residents, as well as – in episode one – a council officer who tried to save some of the houses. Recently discovered documents show that contrary to the story told at the time, the Council health inspectors did not declare the street unfit for people to live in but said the very opposite. So why was their report ignored and the area bulldozed?

Stan Lee is the creator of comic strips such as *Spider-Man*,

X-Men, and *The Hulk*. This makes him a celebrity in that world centre of rational thought, the USA, but a person of little account in the worlds of literature and science. Apparently impressed by the number of times his name is mentioned by the nerdy characters in the sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*, the ABC has lashed out and bought a series featuring Lee that actually typifies the brainlessness of American commercial television: *Stan Lee's Superhumans* (ABC2 Saturdays from August 31 at 7.30pm).

Co-hosted by "the world's most flexible man", the episode features a genuine "Shao Lin Monk", who with much grimacing and shouting at nothing, indulges in the sort of "impossible feats" that Indian fakirs and other carnival showmen have popularised for years (balancing on spear points while his assistant smashes a slab of marble that has been laid on the Monk's back, for example).

"Don't try this at home!"

solemnly warns our host. This is the ultimate in lowest-common-denominator programming: programs for the gullible and the brain-dead.

This week's stand-up comedian on *Funny As* is from the UK. *Dave Gorman: Live* (ABC2 Saturday August 31 at 9.30pm) is a recording of Dave's sold-out stand-up show at London's Bloomsbury Theatre, with the unfortunate title *Sit Down, Pedal, Pedal, Stop and Stand Up*. (Catchy, eh?)

Gorman, who did maths at university until he dropped out, brings such esoteric topics for humour into his act as "Perfect Numbers" (numbers that are the sum of their divisors), and the even stranger "Friendly Numbers" and "Sociable Numbers". He also explains how to use the postman to play a practical joke on your neighbour.

His humour is light, amusing but not hilarious, and can even become tedious. He is clearly a bit of an acquired taste. ✪

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August 23

ALCOHOL RELATED VIOLENCE – MORAL PANIC OR A SERIOUS POLICY CHALLENGE?

Alex Wodak, Dr, Drug & Alcohol Unit, St Vincents;
John Della Bosca, Honourable, Campaign Director of "Every Australian Counts" – Campaign for a Disability Insurance Scheme;

August 30

RUDD'S SHAMELESS NEW REFUGEE POLICY - DUMPING BOAT PEOPLE ON PAPUA NEW GUINEA FOR PROCESSING & SETTLEMENT

John Dowd, AO and QC, Chair International Commission of Jurists;
Tony Kevin, Former diplomat, author *A Certain Maritime Incident – the Sinking of SIEV X and Reluctant Rescuers*;

September 6

MISOGYNY & SEXISM IN AUSTRALIA – IS IT GETTING WORSE & WHY?

Eva Cox, Long time feminist activist & Professorial Fellow UTS;
Kate Gleeson, Lecturer in Gender & Politics, Macquarie University;

September 13

AFGHAN WOMEN: A SEAT AT THE TABLE WITH THE TALIBAN

Speakers from Amnesty International Aust, (details forthcoming);

September 20

O'FARRELL'S UNPRECEDENTED CUTS TO THE PUBLIC SECTOR – JOBS & SERVICES UNDER THREAT

Chris Stone, Director Public Service Research Unit, Centre for Policy Development;
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Work without dignity

Jeremy Corbyn MP

Well done to all those who demonstrated outside Sports Direct last weekend – on what we call a “slow news day” they managed to win excellent publicity for the scandal of zero-hours contracts. This malign employment practice is rife throughout Britain’s retail sector and is now spreading into education, manufacturing and even hospitals.

It has been revealed that even a number of local authorities, including Labour-controlled Brent, employ people on these contracts. Quite simply a zero-hours contract is the perfect relationship for an employer to have towards an employee. The employee has no notion of their likely income and is unable to plan their life in any way or take any other work.

If they rely on benefits they face the nightmare of having to claim a different amount every week. The employee also has no rights. Thanks to the Con-Dems workers have to be employed for two years before they can take an unfair dismissal case to an employment tribunal, but whether zero-hours staff can even do this is unclear, since their legal status – employee, worker or self-employed – is often murky.

These conditions are the scourge of our age. It is a crying shame that while the last Parliament did manage to regulate employment agencies to some extent and introduced the gang-masters legislation, it did nothing to outlaw zero-hours contracts or give trade unions in Britain the same level of protection they enjoy elsewhere in Europe.

We are joining the “race to the bottom” in terms of rights at work and the “flexible labour force” so beloved of Peter Mandelson and his new Labour acolytes.

The campaign against zero-hours contracts must be seen in the context of huge public-sector job losses, probably approaching half a million, since the start of the economic crisis, and the re-employment of some of those redundant workers in the private sector.

In almost all cases, the private-sector jobs these workers have taken are on lower wages, with inferior working conditions, lack pensions and are more insecure. This is a sort of dreamland for Chancellor George Osborne, whose ideal is an economy in which workers’ insecurity boosts profits for business.

The government claims that unemployment is falling as new jobs become available.

However, recent figures show that 7.8 percent of the workforce are not working. That’s 2.51 million

people out of work, around half of whom have been searching for work for over two years, the highest figure since 1997.

What’s also scandalous is the number of young people out of work – nudging towards the one million mark across Britain.

It’s less than the 57 percent youth unemployment rate in Greece or the shocking Spanish rate of 70 percent, but it is still frighteningly high. More and more bored and increasingly bitter young people are hanging around waiting for something to do. We are in danger of creating an entire lost generation of young people who are unable to get any kind of secure employment on leaving school, college or university.

The social consequences of this will be as dire as the consequences of mass unemployment in the 1930s and 1980s. Real wages, that is wages adjusted for inflation, continue to fall.

However, one person’s misery seems to be another person’s success in the new Britain. The UN human development report came out this week with the astonishing assertion that inequality in Britain is growing faster than anywhere else among OECD nations. It’s now among the highest of any of them.

A combination of high profiteering and low wages has made some shareholders and company chief executives extraordinarily rich.

While there is an understandable – and correct – furore over the salaries of some charity chief execs these pale into insignificance compared to the mobile phone-number salaries of most bank CEOs.

In the midst of the crisis facing millions of people in Britain the Tory Party is obsessed with the supposedly excessive power of trade unions, and unfortunately the Labour leadership seems to have fallen into the trap of this debate.

This isn’t doing the party’s fortunes any good, and indeed is deeply dispiriting to many of its activists and supporters. A letter published in yesterday’s “I” newspaper is typical. Labour supporter Brian Dooley wrote: “The Labour Party has moved too far to the right – it allows the Tories to set its agenda, has abandoned socialism, has become compliant to the coalition and provides no alternative to the draconian austerity measures.”

Labour’s forthcoming Brighton conference should start by moving in a different direction. The benefit cap so beloved of Iain Duncan Smith affects 700 families in my borough alone. Some will be forced to move away from their families, schools or jobs simply to survive in the feverish London property market.

The bedroom tax is presented by



the coalition as a way of sharing out hard-pressed council accommodation, yet in reality it’s a penalty on families who have nowhere to go even if they wanted to move.

It’s just a way of cutting the funds of families who desperately need the money.

Reality television encourages this whole debate by endlessly focusing on so-called scroungers.

Maybe the BBC and other media outlets could take a walk round the centre of any of our big cities and see the number of homeless and street sleepers who have been cruelly cast aside by the destruction of our welfare state.

Quite bluntly, if the labour movement doesn’t stand up for the principles of the welfare safety net and the right to universal services such as the NHS remaining free, then they will be so eroded they will disappear.

The 60 years from the 1940s on will be seen historically as a lost golden age when we tried to become a civilised society. The protests planned in Manchester on September 29 are thus not just a demonstration outside the Tory Party conference.

They are a way of putting pressure on the government over the NHS and welfare, and also of sending a stern message to MPs of all parties – including Labour – that they have a duty to protect the great achievements of the welfare state, including the NHS.

Pernicious message of exclusion

Images of burly uniformed Home Office officials stopping people at London railway stations over the last few days – accompanied by an advertising van touring the streets of Brent telling “illegals” to go home – typify the nasty image of Theresa May and this government.

These officials are apparently told to apprehend anyone who appears to be, for example, avoiding eye contact or walking away from them in a station – behaviours which are obviously indicative of illegally migrating to this country.

As of last week the details of 139 “suspects” had been taken. The

officers will move on to different parts of London and no doubt other cities.

A lot of people are, quite rightly, appalled at this – and soon enough the process is bound to be contracted out to G4S or some similarly seedy security company. There are people who are surviving in Britain without any papers giving them the permanent right to remain.

Many of them have been here a very long time and do their best to support their families and others. More often than not they are the victims of the unbelievable inefficiency of the Home Office through losing files, not responding to letters and making wholly irrational decisions

about the safety of someone’s return to another country.

Instead of the brutality of racially profiling people on the streets, we should look instead at the human vulnerability of people who have often fled wars or torture to seek a safe haven in Britain.

A year ago London’s mayor and the British government were bending over backwards to show the world what a success a multicultural city like London is.

Now they seem more like the English Defence League in their inhuman approach to human suffering.

Morning Star ✪

Melbourne

CHILE, 11 SEPT 1973

40 YEARS OF SOLIDARITY AND STRUGGLE

JOIN US IN SEPT AT TRADES HALL

MAIN EVENT SUNDAY SEPT 8 AT 6PM

CULTURAL COMMEMORATION EVENT

AT TRADES HALL BAR, BELLA UNION

OTHER EVENTS:

SEPT 4: OPENING OF HISTORIC PHOTO EXHIBITION 6PM

SEPT 11: WREATH LAYING/COMMEMORATION 5PM

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