



People of the world demand HANDS OFF SYRIA!

Statement from the International Department of the CPA



For 30 months the US has been directing a devastating war on Syria. Satisfied with the results of “regime change” in Libya, another of the obstacles to US imperialism’s ambitions in the Middle East, the Obama administration has sought to destroy Syria using the same covert methods. Early protests in the country were hijacked and diverted. Sectarian divisions were played upon and well equipped, fanatical mercenaries were infiltrated into the country to do their worst. But the people of Syria have not been sidelined. They have rallied to defend the sovereignty of their country and US war planners have been left to consider their options. It is important to note that the Australian government has aided and encouraged the US at every stage of this latest, shameful violation of international law.

The toll of US meddling is still mounting – 100,000 people have lost their lives and millions have been displaced. This has shocked the world but the US, Britain, France, Israel, Saudi Arabia and other outsiders have pressed on with their assistance to the “rebels” wreaking havoc in Syria.

US war planners did consider the possibility that their proxy forces might be defeated so the trigger for a “Plan B” was cocked. Last year, US president Barack Obama warned that, should Syrian forces use chemical weapons on their own people, the US would intervene openly in the conflict. Obama’s “red line” was supposedly crossed with an attack with a neurotoxic agent on the Damascus suburb of Eastern Ghouta on August 21st. The President was quickly on the phone to his allies and thus the world was dragged closer to the brink of a war with nightmarish potential for escalation.

But this plan has not gone smoothly. A tried and true recipe has failed. For years the independent, secular government of President Bashar al-Assad has been demonised in the corporate media. Reporting of the war has stayed loyal to the Pentagon line. Insurgent atrocities have been attributed to government forces and the gains by the Syrian military have been downplayed.

This time, however, people are waking up to the manipulation. They remember the lies about Saddam Hussein’s Weapons of Mass Destruction, lies that were used to unleash the

“shock and awe” attack on Iraq. They question the “pact with the devil” entered into by the US and ruthless “Islamist” forces in Libya and Syria. They are appalled by the regular drone assassination attacks that include targets within independent, non-combatant countries. Australians never supported the deployment of troops to shore up the occupation of Iraq or Afghanistan. Collective memories of the misery caused by depleted uranium shells in Iraq and agent orange in Indo-China are being recovered.

Disgust at the hypocrisy of the US and its allies is increasing. Protests at the drive to war have broken out within days of Obama’s threatened intervention. Bigger demonstrations are being planned and the leaders of the aggressor countries are getting nervous. The British parliament has voted down support for a bombing campaign. French President Francois Hollande is tip-toeing away from his former support for more direct attacks on Syria.

Cracks are appearing in the edifice of the media-military-industrial complex. The peace-loving people of the world must press on and make the most of this precious opportunity.

It appears people are getting past the feelings of powerlessness that overcame the anti-war movement that rallied in unprecedented numbers to prevent the invasion of Iraq.

The complicity of the Australian government in US war plans in the Middle East and the Asia Pacific region will not change for the better with the likely election of the Coalition next weekend. Change will have to be forced on those loyal servants and informers of imperialism from outside the parliament – on the streets, in the workplace and in the community. Trade unions need to remember that questions of war and peace are and always have been union issues.

The demand that the Australian government withdraws its support for war on Syria must be pressed on whichever big party of capitalism wins the election. Voters must consider these questions when they vote on Saturday and support candidates that oppose involvement in US military adventures. Australia must use its position on the UN Security Council to stop the illegal invasion. ✪

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“Oh what a feeling!”

The Toyota advertisement with people leaping for joy in the air, came back to haunt the company last year when it called its workers together to tell them they were being sacked. Toyota was shutting its Melbourne plant and the workers were on the scrap heap. Retrenched workers camped outside the plant, put up a placard with the haunting message, “Oh what a feeling!”, written in large bold and red letters. It was a terrible feeling. Like any sacking, the workers who lose their jobs are gutted. They have families to support, rent or mortgages to pay, maybe a debt on their car, and a host of other expenses to meet. The sudden loss of income without a commensurate reduction in commitments can prove catastrophic.

There are a host of employer organisations, legal firms and other outfits that advise employers on the “best” way to sack employees. “You are dealing with psychological grieving and so you need to offer assistance to help people vent,” advises Peter Wilson. Wilson is from the Australian Human Resources Institute. Don’t do it too close to Christmas, he suggests. “One of the worst things an employer ever has to do is to take someone’s job away, particularly in this age when work is so integral to people’s life and identity.” (“How to deliver the bad news better”, Patrick Durkin, *Financial Review*, 28-08-2013)

This advice, however, is not based on sympathy for sacked workers or humanitarian grounds. Its aim is to avoid repercussions that might cost the company extra dollars or cause delays in sacking workers!

“If you fail to properly consult and there is an obligation under your enterprise agreement or award – and generally there is now – then the unions can come in and seek injunctions which would stop you activating redundancies unless you meet certain conditions,” warns Kirsty Faichen, a partner at the pro-Liberal, pro-employer legal firm Herbert Smith Freehills. (*FR*, 28-08-2013) Not only that, a disgruntled employee might go to the Fair Work Commission with an unfair dismissal claim. It is also important, according to Faichen to manage your reputation, especially a large redundancy. It certainly did not enhance Toyota’s reputation.

The unfair dismissal provisions of the Fair Work Act and other requirements in awards and EBAs, such as to consult first with the workforce and the trade union, are bothering employers. Under the Howard government’s WorkChoices, only one in three unfair dismissal claims were successful. But the new Fair Work Act has seen an increase to more than half of all claims by sacked workers succeeding. In the last six months over 6,000 claims of unfair dismissal were lodged with the Fair Work Commission. Around 80 percent of these were resolved by conciliation.

Very few workers are reinstated, but most settlements include payments. These payments on average are relatively small – more than half of them under \$4,000 and only 0.5 percent over \$40,000. The real cost to employers is in defending actions in the Commission. The Act, despite its considerable weaknesses, does make it more difficult to arbitrarily sack workers. Companies must jump through a few hoops and “deliver the bad news better” to avoid workers going to the Fair Work Commission.

The light at the end of the tunnel for the likes of Faichen and Wilson and employers large and small is that the Coalition, if elected, will make it easier to arbitrarily sack workers and not risk subsequent action. The Coalition is likely to exempt small employers completely from unfair dismissal provisions and remove provisions from awards and EBAs such as the requirement to give advance notice or to consult with workers and trade unions first. Good news for bosses.

But the other side of the coin is that the Coalition will leave workers with even less protection and entitlements than they have now. Women, in particular, will be more vulnerable to sexual harassment. It will be more difficult for employees to refuse to do unpaid overtime. It will become easier for companies to sack workers who are union activists, require sick leave, are injured or pregnant. When workers say “Oh what a feeling!” under a Coalition government, they will not be leaping in the air for joy.

PRESS FUND

The Liberals claim that their “direct action” climate change program would penalise corporations that increase their carbon emissions. However, last week opposition environment spokesman Greg Hunt stated that if the “direct action” charge had been applied last financial year the total cost would have been zero. That can only be correct if none of the polluters increased their emissions (most unlikely), or if the Liberals intend to “penalise” them at the rate of absolutely nothing per tonne of carbon emissions – in short, if “direct action” is totally phoney. And that’s very likely! But speaking of rates, the rate of Press Fund support is currently very low. Where is everybody? Please send in something for the next issue if you possibly can, because we really need your support. Many thanks to this week’s contributors, as follows:

Mark Mannion \$5, Sharyn Talbot \$50, Michael Smith \$20, Eric Durston \$10, “Round Figure” \$15

This week’s total: \$100 Progressive total: \$5,660

Statement by Communist and Workers’ Parties

Communist and workers’ parties express solidarity with Syria’s people and denounce the military attack against Syria which the imperialists of the USA, NATO and their allies are preparing in order to promote their interests in the region.

We reject the imperialist pretexts, which were also used in the war against Iraq and in other imperialist wars against Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Libya.

We call on the working class, the peoples all over the world to oppose and condemn the new imperialist war, and to demand that the governments of their countries have no involvement in and do not support the criminal military offensive.

Signed by 70 communist and worker’s parties, including the Communist Party of Australia – August 29, 2013

Statement from the Syrian Communist Party

The Syrian Communist Party, in these difficult days, calls on the Syrian people to close ranks, and make every effort to address the brutal colonial aggression.

Imperialism, with the United States at its head, has failed to conquer Syria through imposition of economic blockade and support of criminal gangs and heinous terrorist acts, many of them sectarian and ethnic, or through the vandalism and destruction of economic installations and imposition of obscurantist sharia law on an open and tolerant people.

Now we see America and its allies announce their willingness to move to direct military aggression, citing fabricated charges to justify aggression.

This brutish power hypocritically

accuses Syria of crimes that it has itself committed as the so-called leader of the free world and defender of democracy.

Witness the use by the invading American forces of bacterial & chemical weapons in the war against Korea in the middle of the last century; the use of Agent Orange in the war against the liberation movement of the people of Vietnam, which still causes Vietnamese women to give birth to deformed babies forty years after the end of this war; & use of depleted uranium by the U.S. military machine in the war against brotherly Iraq.

The crimes committed by US imperialism for many decades, provides for its leaders, including presidents, to be charged before the international war crimes tribunal.

The brave Syrian people, after heroic national steadfastness for more than two years, in the face of the undeclared war launched against them, will valiantly face the largest and most blatant military aggression.

The defence of the country and its sovereignty and independence, means defence of the Syrian national system, with heads held high, against all methods of aggression, refusing to submit or bow to humiliation.

In the difficult circumstances our country and people endure, all efforts must be made to strengthen all fronts: political, military and economic.

The Syrian people are not alone in their battle, a just struggle to support all freedom loving people in the world. ✪

Congress Appeal

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.

The CPA has launched 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 through on 02 9699 8844

Results of the guessing competition for the 12th National Congress

Congratulations to the winners:

1st Prize	V Gagatsakis	Rare Print by Len Gale
2nd Prize	Y Predebon	Cartoon by Gerardo Hernandez
3rd Prize	Mustafa	\$50 CPA bookshop voucher
Seller’s Prize	H North	\$50 CPA bookshop voucher

Our thanks and appreciation to all those who entered the competitions

Threat from giant grocery and petrol corporations

Peter Mac

This week the O'Farrell government announced that it will now require NSW petrol stations to display the standard prices of their fuel, not the price available to consumers who have discount dockets from Australia's two major supermarket chains.

That's a welcome move, but it doesn't go anywhere near enough to tackle the potential menace posed by the close associations between Woolworths and Caltex, on the one hand, and Coles and Shell on the other. Those alliances could lead to the elimination of their competitors around the nation, enabling these two power blocs of capital to carve up the market between them and squeeze the maximum profits from Australian consumers for both groceries and fuel.

Under the current docket arrangements shoppers at the two supermarket chains are offered a 4c per litre discount on fuel purchased from their petrol stations, for every \$30 spent on groceries. It rose to 8c per litre last year. Last month shoppers who used a supermarket loyalty card and spent \$200 or more on groceries in one purchase were able to obtain a discount of 45c per litre.

Consumer advocates argue that shoppers are paying for the discounts by paying more at the supermarket checkout, and that shoppers on low incomes are disadvantaged because they cannot spend enough at the checkout to gain the dockets.

With their entry into the fuel business, Woolworths and Coles now sell about 80 percent of the groceries sold in Australia and 50 percent of the fuel and liquor.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is virtually at war with the supermarkets over their marketing practices, which have involved price cutting and the impoverishment or bankruptcy of some dairy farmers and other suppliers.

In June the ACCC took Coles to

court, arguing successfully that its so-called freshly baked bread was actually imported, and was days or even weeks old when sold, and later Coles was penalised for claiming that imported fruit and vegetables it sold was Australian-grown. The ACCC has also blocked Woolworths from developing a controversial new supermarket in western Sydney.

The prospect of lower prices for milk, fuel and other products is an irresistible temptation for many, but it's a honey trap for consumers. The history of capitalism is littered with cases of firms that bump off their competitors in price wars, and then use their monopoly position to jack up prices and keep them there. The losers don't just include the consumers, they include the smaller firms forced out of business and the employees of these firms.

In June last year Coles had 627 service stations. It sold \$7.5 billion of groceries and fuel from its Coles Express stores, with a pre-tax profit of \$124 million from fuel sales.

In the 2011-2012 financial year Woolworths sold \$6.7 billion of petroleum, with pre-tax earnings of \$127.1 from its 600 service stations.

The effect on independent service stations is starkly evident. Since 2009 a thousand service stations have closed.

The counter-attacks

Last week Rod Sims, chairman of the ACCC, told a meeting of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, "If these shopper dockets continue at these levels it's going to be very hard for other players to compete, and we may just end up with two players in the country selling petrol, which is not going to be in your interest."

"If Coles and Woolworths wish to offer their customers a discount it should be off supermarket products, not petrol. The ACCC believes this activity is likely to have a negative effect on competition in the petrol industry. Over time, higher petrol prices could be the result".



The Independent Retailers of Australia, an umbrella group that includes Australian Retailers, Master Grocers Australia, Australian Newsagents and Small Business Australia, has stated that the two million firms they represent employ five million staff, all of whom are under threat from the grocery-fuel alliance. They point out:

"At any discount above 6 or 7 cents per litre, it is hard to see how unsubsidised fuel retailers could compete on a sustainable basis. And if forced to discount more, then this would require sustained below cost selling."

"If the chains truly want to give a discount, they should reduce their grocery prices. We are hopeful the ACCC's year-long investigation into the fuel dockets will reveal the

damage the chains have caused to competitors in this market."

Independent federal MP Bob Katter is seeking the support of other independents and opposition parties for a bill aimed at reducing the amount of shelf space given to the supermarkets' own products, and for the divestment of companies involved in the fuel-grocery docket schemes.

The Greens have declared that they would campaign for a moratorium on expansion by Coles and Woolworths, and for the ACCC to have sufficient power to enforce the divestment of the companies.

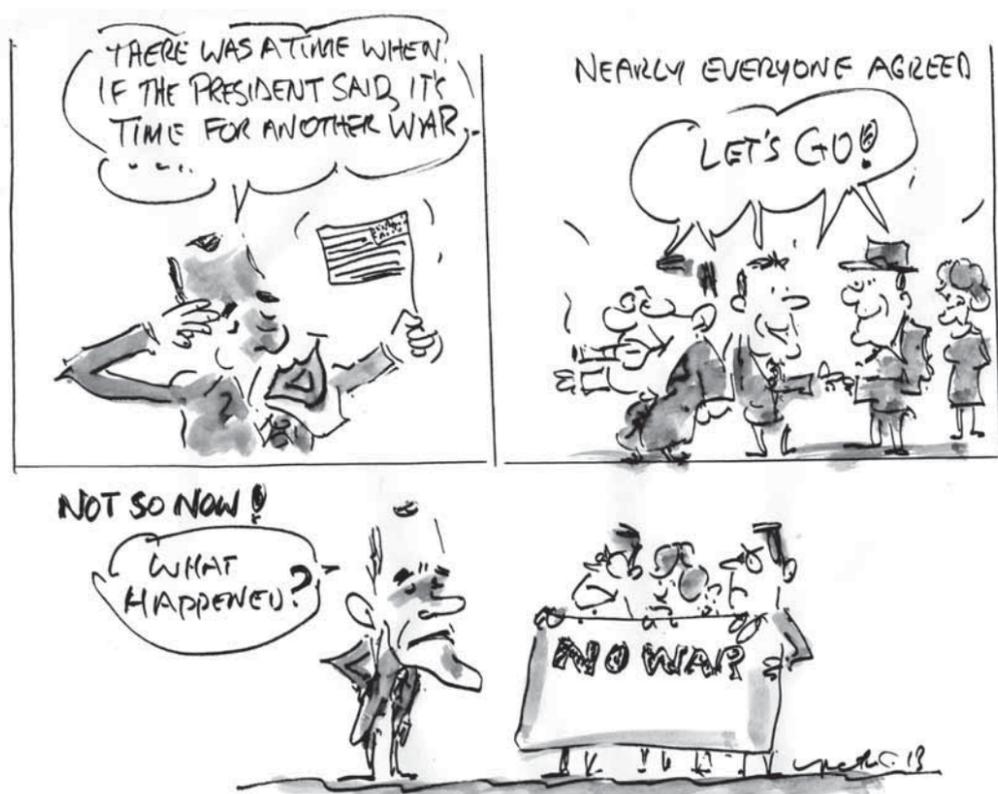
Negotiations on the establishment of a voluntary code of conduct have continued for nine months between the retailers, Woolworths and Coles, and the suppliers represented by the Australian Food and Grocery Council.

The National Farmers Federation represented dairy farmers until March, but withdrew in March because of the obstinate behaviour of the retailers.

For their part, Woolworths and Coles have argued that their activities should be governed by a voluntary code of conduct. That would undoubtedly suit them very nicely. The voluntary broadcast code has been an appalling failure at reigning in the excesses of the broadcast media empires, particularly with regard to their employees, the shock jock radio commentators.

The role of the ACCC and others in opposing the big retailers and publicising their reasons for doing so is admirable. But in the long run it's up to the ordinary consumers to back them, in order to achieve these objectives. ☘

Pete's Corner



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Special economic zones

Abbott and Rudd in race to the bottom

Bob Briton

What do most people think of when they hear the words “special economic zone”? It conjures up thoughts of developing countries trying to entice transnationals to their shores with a race to the bottom for taxes, lax regulation including for the environment, no unions, poor makeshift facilities for residents. Images of desperate internal or overseas migrants looking for work come to mind, life in substandard accommodation, company stores and abusive supervisors on the job. Given that reputation, it would appear strange that both Kevin Rudd and Tony Abbott have recently floated the idea of special economic zones in Australia – one in the Northern Territory for the Prime Minister and one in Tasmania for the wannabe PM.

Mr Abbott had proposed a white paper on tax incentives to lure business and people to the north in June. Labor ridiculed it then but has embraced it wholeheartedly while on the campaign trail. Detail is sparse but the plan could include a one third reduction in company tax from 30 percent to 20 percent from 2018. That puts it outside the four-year budget forecasts and the need to show the impact it might have on government revenue. The Constitution's ban on preferential tax arrangements for



states is sidestepped because the NT is a territory.

Labor appears to have done some homework on this but who will it appeal to? The business pages like the idea but would like to spread it beyond the NT and Tasmania. “Lower corporate taxes, more liberal foreign investment rules, better infrastructure and less red and green tape would make all Australia a special economic zone,” *The Australian Financial Review* opined recently. If it's good for the transnationals it's good for everybody, according to the Fairfax flagship.

Commentators with a bit more credibility insist that special economic zones would have no benefit for Australia. “You have to be very careful about the effect it has within Australia – that is it detracts investment that would have gone to other states and territories – that's at best a zero-sum-game for Australia,” said Bill Scales, former head of what is now the Productivity Commission.

Bob Katter believes the battle of the economic zones is being fought for his party's preferences in the federal poll of September 7. Rudd wants to expand the Ord

River irrigation scheme to boost NT agriculture but the third “pillar” of the vision are 20-year growth plans for Darwin, Cairns, Townsville and Mackay. Abbott has proposed a similar scheme for Darwin, Cairns, Townsville and Karratha. Katter's electorate might be in for some federal funding largesse.

Others are suggesting the proposals are to redress a “market failure”. Demand for potential agricultural and mining output is being restricted by under-developed infrastructure up north. Aside from the tax concessions, overseas investors will be pleased to see proposals for the removal of the threshold at which bids are scrutinised. Alternatively, scrutiny could be overlooked if the investment is in the form of a joint-venture with an existing enterprise.

Big mining ventures are the most obvious winners out of a northern special economic zone. Companies

would press to bring whole workforces to the NT using the much-abused type 457 visas. Aboriginal interests have been side-lined steadily by Labor and Coalition governments, reaching their current low point following the Northern Territory Intervention in 2007.

Exciting though the proposals are for mining transnationals, they are never enough for some people. WA businessman Ron Manners sits on the board of Gina Rinehart's “Australians for Northern Development and Economic Vision” organisation. He says the 20 percent company tax might be low enough to lure local investors but overseas investors would be looking for an even better deal. Having got themselves (and a disenfranchised Australian working class) into this bidding war, Kevin and Tony may have to sharpen the pencil. ✪

How much have we learned since March 2012?

Statement, Queensland Nurses' Union

Queensland's nurses and midwives have had a lot to contend with since March 2012. We have suffered massive job and service cuts under the Newman LNP government. We have seen unjust changes to Queensland's industrial relations laws greatly weaken our ability to work together to oppose such cuts.

We have had our right to freely associate and be politically active greatly curtailed by an insecure government with an axe to grind. The Newman government has also released plans to embark on the wholesale privatisation of public services in a wide range of areas, including health.

All of these changes have been rammed through parliament thanks to the government's huge majority. Once again Queenslanders are seeing how political power can destroy so much good when it is concentrated in one party.

The LNP were silent about these changes before the March 2012 election. No wonder we are still reeling not only from the breadth and depth of the cuts and privatisation, but also what they reveal about how little our contribution is understood or valued by the Newman LNP government.

So much of what we have fought so hard for over many decades is now threatened.

I never thought I would see the

day that nurses and midwives fear for their job security. That day is here.

People across Queensland are concerned about how these cuts and changes will weaken the health system they and their families rely on in times of need.

They are also worried about what this attack on nurses and midwives promises for everyone else. If the Newman government can do this to nurses and midwives, nobody's job is safe.

This parlous situation threatens to become even worse if changes at a federal level mirror those made here in our state. In September, each of us has the chance to show at the ballot box what we have learned since March 2012.

When we cast our vote, we must concentrate on what is in the best interests of our professions collectively, and of those in our care.

For me there are three key areas that require particular attention:

- Our industrial rights, conditions of employment and job security.
- Defending and advancing universal health care, ensuring access to care is based on need and not capacity to pay.
- Valuing the vital role that nurses and midwives play as the lynchpin of our health and aged care system.

They are all central to keeping nursing and midwifery strong.

We must be able to articulate not only why they are important but also what we expect our politicians to deliver for us. If our politicians don't deliver as promised, or if they fail to state their true agendas, we must hold them to account.

Our patients need us to do more than throw our hands up in the air and say politicians are all alike.

We must be prepared to take a stand and fight for our nursing and midwifery and union values. It is up to us to *show* leadership and not merely demand leadership from politicians.

Power is the ability to influence. It may not always feel like it, but nurses and midwives collectively have a great ability to influence.

That is why the Newman LNP government has been gunning for us. We have shown we will not be bullied or intimidated. We have shown we will stand up and keep standing for those in our care.

We will never shy away from using our power, from exerting influence and demanding of our politicians that they respond to us on our terms, not theirs.

When you cast your vote at the 2013 federal election, keep your nursing and midwifery and union values at the forefront of your mind. Vote to keep nursing and midwifery strong. ✪

University of Sydney strike

Staff at the University of Sydney took the extraordinary measure of striking last Saturday on the university's Open Day. It's the 7th day of strike action since March over stalled collective agreement negotiations.

University staff gathered at the main gates on campus to explain to prospective students – and their families – the reasons for their collective bargaining campaign and how deteriorating staff working conditions will affect the quality of education and the conditions of learning.

National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) branch president Michael Thomson said it was a serious issue but the union action at Open Day was also fun and informative, with barbecues, balloons, and music laid on.

“We're reclaiming Open Day and the University of Sydney from the marketers and spin doctors.”

Staff were on the main gates from 8am and leafleted at public transport hubs during the morning. Thomson said that management's current pay offer to staff was a real wage cut of 0.5 percent a year.

“The paltry pay offer is part of a concerted effort by Vice Chancellors across the country to

force down the wages of staff in the higher education sector, even as they ask us to work harder for longer,” he said.

“At Sydney, student load increased by more than 5 percent in 2012 alone, yet staff numbers have remained unchanged. Management simply expects us to meet increased demand through increases in our workload and work intensification.

“Management's claim that anything more than their offer is unaffordable is an attempt to suggest staff are being greedy. However, our pay claim aligns closely with community standards and expectations.

“Figures released by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations show national system public sector employees received average enterprise agreement wage increases of 3.9% a year in the March quarter 2013. Across the whole national system, wages in enterprise agreements increased 3.7%.

“We deserve a fair pay rise that recognises both our hard work and broader community wage outcomes. The University of Sydney is a wealthy institution and can afford it.” ✪

Life under an Abbott government

Anna Pha

Coalition leader Tony Abbott has done his best to give his personal image a softer make-over and overcome his misogynist reputation. The anti-union, right-wing Christian fundamentalist claims to have reversed his opposition to multiculturalism, and suppressed his strident opposition to abortion and other women's and gay and lesbian rights. The Coalition has steadfastly refused to release much detail of what it has in store for the Australian people, but it is still possible to put together a picture of life under an Abbott government. It is not a pretty one.

Workers face a torrid time. The Coalition's aim is union-free workplaces, with internationally "competitive" wage rates (read rock bottom) and self-regulation by employers of health and safety and other conditions in the workplace. The minimum wage and youth rates would be slashed, penalty rates reduced or abolished. Wage rises would be disallowed if they were not funded by workers through such means as sacrificing conditions (paid breaks, paid overtime, sackings, casualisation, etc).

Right of entry for trade union officials and the already limited right to take "protected action" would be further restricted, unions bankrupted by stiff penalties and the already draconian powers of the Australian Building and Construction Commission strengthened and extended to cover the Maritime Union of Australia.

The big sting in the tail is the reintroduction of individual contracts by another name. Workers would be "allowed" to "opt out" of enterprise bargaining agreements (EBAs) in the name of "flexibility agreements". The content of EBAs would also be restricted to a narrower range of issues.

The Coalition has already indicated that it would delay the next two years' increases in the compulsory contribution which is in the process of being increased from nine to twelve percent. It might even pull the plug on further increases.

The unemployed are prime targets. In the eyes of the Coalition they

are to blame for a system (capitalist) which cannot provide them with work. It would take "a harder line" on recipients of the dole and other welfare payments – meaning make it more difficult to receive benefits and cut payments.

The Opposition are strongly opposed to a \$50 per week increase to the single rate of Newstart. They don't care one iota if it is impossible to live with on \$37.50 a day.

The sick can expect longer waiting lists for hospitals and fewer bulk billing doctors. Funding for primary and preventative health care would be cut and public hospitals starved of funds. Bulk billing, if it is not abolished, is set to be means tested.

In relation to public hospitals, the Opposition would "devolve power to local communities" – meaning privatisation of the administration of hospitals, a process already under way. Privatised public hospitals would be run for profit, resulting in dangerous, even life-threatening, short cuts.

There are no plans for dental care to come under Medicare. Big Pharma looks set to take over the administration of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, which would not only drive up prices for medicines but undermine the integrity of the process for adding products to it.

Students have little to look forward to. The Coalition plans to cut at least \$2.3 billion from universities and student support and place greater reliance on corporate funding for research. Fees will rise.

At the school level, it says it would "devolve power to local communities", spin for privatisation. Although it now claims to support Gonski reforms, public schools would continue to be under-funded. Teachers and the Australian Education Union are in for a rough time protecting education programs, class sizes and salaries and conditions.

Indigenous Australians are in for more of the same racist and criminal neglect. The aim is assimilation, not recognition. There are a few token programs, but not a word about lifting the Northern Territory Intervention, restoring rights to manage their own affairs, granting real land rights or protecting Indigenous communities



from further assaults by mining corporations.

Women and their partners/fathers are to be rewarded with six months paid parental leave at their existing rate of pay up to a rate of \$150,000 per annum. Some on lower incomes stand to get little more than half the payment as other parental payments are cut and the income taxed.

Abbott claims the high payments are vital to ensure "women of calibre" have families!

Big business is protesting loudly as Abbott has indicated the paid leave would be partially funded by a 1.5 percent levy on companies with an income of over \$5 million.

There are now suggestions that it might be funded by a HECS style of income contingent loan. The payments would be in the form of a loan, and the recipient – in most cases the mother – which would be repaid after returning to the workforce and income reaching a certain threshold.

As for other women's rights, Abbott's vision is blinded by Papal edicts, which he seeks to impose on all women. As he once said, "The problem with the Australian practice of abortion is that an objectively grave matter has been reduced to a question of the mother's convenience." He still remains steadfastly opposed to a woman's right to choose.

"Abortion is the easy way out. It's hardly surprising that people should choose the most convenient exit from

awkward situations," was another of his claims.

Asylum seekers are to be subjected to the same or similar inhumane treatment as being meted out by Labor. The Refugee Review Tribunal, a last chance to avoid returning people to danger and possible death, would be abolished.

Boats would be turned back risking lives, asylum seekers sent offshore for indefinite incarceration in the most appalling sub-human conditions, never to be welcomed to Australia's shores – in contravention of Australia's international obligations.

Abbott and Rudd continue their race to the bottom, attempting to play to racist elements in the community outdo each other in cruelty to refugees.

Gays and lesbians – Abbott is not even prepared to allow a conscience vote on marriage equality. Ending discrimination against gays and lesbians is a "fashion", not a human right; presumably, it would go out of fashion in Abbott's eyes after the elections. Abbott's minders have done their best to keep his homophobic views out of sight.

Migrants are welcome as long as they don't "try to change us" or wear burqas. Racism and xenophobia are being fostered to create divisions between communities and within the working class – a grim reminder of Howard's "children overboard" election ploy.

Pensioners are seen as a burden on society, of little use in the profit-making process and eating a big hole in the budget. One approach being discussed behind closed doors is some form of mortgage on the family home to recover some of the pension payments after death.

Meanwhile the Coalition is considering reintroducing taxation on superannuation income of retirees. It also has plans to cut government contributions to super and tax concessions for low income earners and seniors still in the workforce.

Homeless numbers look set to rise as the Coalition has no policies to reduce poverty or provide public housing for the thousands of homeless including young people and families on waiting lists for housing.

At least ten percent of Australians – 850,000 households – are paying more than they can afford on either rent or a mortgage.

Public servants are in the firing line with between 12,000 and 20,000 positions to go in the first round of cuts. Services would be cut, outsourced and agencies and government businesses privatised. The cuts

would be used to fund increased military spending and tax cuts for big business and the wealthy, and assistance to mining companies and the big polluters.

Single parents would not receive an extra cent. The January cuts to payments would remain in place. The Coalition takes a similar, punitive approach to single parents as Labor – based on backward thinking that their immoral behaviour led to their "situation".

The environment is a fundamental question of survival, yet the Coalition is set on a path of destruction and degradation. It would fast-track huge coal mines and fracking, provide no funding for rail and light rail projects, put billions towards road projects, provide ongoing support for coal fired generation and gas, and continue with fossil fuel subsidy for mining companies.

In addition an Abbott government would put states in control of more environmental matters which would be disastrous. It would dismantle Australia's network of marine parks, and abandon Tasmanian forests and the Great Barrier Reef. Abbott has no serious measures to address climate change, protect our river systems or save our farming communities from devastation by mining companies.

As the Greens point out, "What Tony Abbott's big business buddies find 'unworkable' is anything that stands in the way of their own private profits and Tony Abbott wants to let them write their own rules."

The elephant in the room is the GST which would remove all exemptions including health, education and fresh food and increase the rate to 15 percent or more. That would have a devastating impact on the living standards of families, especially people on low incomes and the subsequent decline in purchasing power would help drive the economy into recession.

If the Coalition gains control over both Houses of Parliament then it would not only ram through the policies that we know about but a great deal more. The only way to stop this happening is to ensure the Greens hold the balance of power in the Senate.

The CPA recommends putting Coalition candidates last on their ballot papers along with other reactionary candidates including those from the Rise Up Australia Party, Family First, Katter's Australian Party, Democratic Labor Party, One Nation, Christian Democrats, Palmer United Party and so on. We recommend a vote for Labor ahead of these reactionary groupings. ☺

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The history of America's death

Michel Chossudovsky

The recruitment of death squads is part of a well established US military-intelligence agenda. There is a long and gruesome US history of covert funding and support of terror brigades and targeted assassinations going back to the Vietnam war.

As government forces continue to confront the self-proclaimed "Free Syrian Army" (FSA), the historical roots of the West's covert war on Syria – which has resulted in countless atrocities – must be fully revealed.

From the outset in March 2011, the US and its allies have supported the formation of death squads and the incursion of terrorist brigades in a carefully planned undertaking.

The recruitment and training of terror brigades in both Iraq and Syria was modelled on the "Salvador Option", a "terrorist model" of mass killings by US sponsored death squads in Central America. It was first applied in El Salvador, in the heyday of resistance against the military dictatorship, resulting in an estimated 75,000 deaths.

The formation of death squads in Syria builds upon the history and experience of US sponsored terror brigades in Iraq, under the Pentagon's "counterinsurgency" program.

Death squads in Iraq

US sponsored death squads were recruited in Iraq starting in 2004-2005 in an initiative launched under the helm of the US Ambassador John Negroponte, who was dispatched to Baghdad by the US State Department in June 2004.

Negroponte was the "man for the job". As US Ambassador to Honduras from 1981 to 1985, Negroponte played a key role in supporting and supervising the Nicaraguan Contras based in Honduras as well as overseeing the activities of the Honduran military death squads.

Under the rule of General Gustavo Alvarez Martinez, Honduras's military government was both a close ally of the Reagan administration and was "disappearing" dozens of political opponents in classic death squad fashion.

In January 2005, the Pentagon, confirmed that it was considering:

"... forming hit squads of Kurdish and Shia fighters to target leaders of the Iraqi insurgency [Resistance] in a strategic shift borrowed from the American struggle against left-wing guerrillas in Central America 20 years ago".

Under the so-called "El Salvador option", Iraqi and American forces would be sent to kill or kidnap insurgency leaders, even in Syria, where some are thought to shelter. ... Hit squads would be controversial and would probably be kept secret.

The experience of the so-called "death squads" in Central America remains raw for many even now and helped to sully the image of the United States in the region.

Then, the Reagan Administration funded and trained teams of nationalist forces to neutralise Salvadorean rebel leaders and sympathisers.

John Negroponte, the US Ambassador in Baghdad, had a front-row seat at the time as Ambassador to Honduras from 1981-85.

Death squads were a brutal feature of Latin American politics of the time. ...

In the early 1980s President Reagan's Administration funded and helped to train Nicaraguan contras based in Honduras with the aim of ousting Nicaragua's Sandinista regime. The Contras were equipped using money from illegal American arms sales to Iran, a scandal that could have toppled Mr Reagan.

The thrust of the Pentagon proposal in Iraq, ... is to follow that model ...

It is unclear whether the main aim of the

missions would be to assassinate the rebels or kidnap them and take them away for interrogation. Any mission in Syria would probably be undertaken by US Special Forces.

Nor is it clear who would take responsibility for such a program – the Pentagon or the Central Intelligence Agency. Such covert operations have traditionally been run by the CIA at arm's length from the administration in power, giving US officials the ability to deny knowledge of it.

While the stated objective of the "Iraq Salvador Option" was to "take out the insurgency", in practice the US sponsored terror brigades were involved in routine killings of civilians with a view to fomenting sectarian violence. In turn, the CIA and MI6 were overseeing "Al-Qaeda in Iraq" units involved in targeted assassinations directed against the Shiite population. Of significance, the death squads were integrated and advised by undercover US Special Forces.

Robert Stephen Ford – subsequently appointed US Ambassador to Syria – was part of Negroponte's team in Baghdad in 2004-2005. In January 2004, he was dispatched as US representative to the Shiite city of Najaf which was the stronghold of the Mahdi army, with which he made preliminary contacts.

In January 2005, Robert Ford was appointed Minister Counsellor for Political Affairs at the US Embassy under the helm of Ambassador Negroponte. He was not only part of the inner team; he was Negroponte's partner in setting up the Salvador Option. Some of the groundwork had been established in Najaf prior to Ford's transfer to Baghdad.

Negroponte and Ford were put in charge of recruiting the Iraqi death squads. While Negroponte coordinated the operation from his office at the US Embassy, Ford, who was fluent in both Arabic and Turkish, was entrusted with the task of establishing strategic contacts with Shiite and Kurdish militia groups outside the "Green Zone".

Two other embassy officials, namely Henry Ensher (Ford's Deputy) and a younger official in the political section, Jeffrey Beals, played an important role in the team "talking to a range of Iraqis, including extremists". Another key individual in Negroponte's team was James Franklin Jeffrey, America's ambassador to Albania (2002-2004). In 2010, Jeffrey was appointed US Ambassador to Iraq (2010-2012).

Under the "Salvador Option," "Negroponte had assistance from his colleague from his days in Central America during the 1980s, Retired Colonel James Steele. Steele, whose title in Baghdad was Counsellor for Iraqi Security Forces supervised the selection and training of members of the Badr Organisation and Mehdi Army, the two largest Shi'ite militias in Iraq, in order to target the leadership and support networks of a primarily Sunni resistance. Planned or not, these death squads promptly spiralled out of control to become the leading cause of death in Iraq.

Intentional or not, the scores of tortured, mutilated bodies which turn up on the streets of Baghdad each day are generated by the death squads whose impetus was John Negroponte. And it is this US-backed sectarian violence which largely led to the hell-disaster that Iraq is today.

Upon his appointment to Baghdad, Colonel Steele was assigned to a counter-insurgency unit known as the "Special Police Commando" under the Iraqi Interior Ministry".

Reports confirm that "the US military turned over many prisoners to the Wolf Brigade, the feared 2nd battalion of the interior ministry's special commandos" which so happened to be under supervision of Colonel Steele:

"US soldiers, US advisers, were standing

aside and doing nothing," while members of the Wolf Brigade beat and tortured prisoners. The interior ministry commandos took over the public library in Samarra, and turned it into a detention centre, he said. An interview conducted by Maass [of the *New York Times*] in 2005 at the improvised prison, accompanied by the Wolf Brigade's US military adviser, James Steele, had been interrupted by the terrified screams of a prisoner outside, he said. Steele was reportedly previously employed as an adviser to help crush an insurgency in El Salvador.

Another notorious figure who played a role in Iraq's counter-insurgency program was former New York Police Commissioner Bernie Kerik who in 2007 was indicted in federal court on 16 felony charges.

Kerik had been appointed by the Bush administration at the outset of the occupation in 2003 to assist in the organisation and training of the Iraqi Police force. During his short stint in 2003, Bernie Kerik – who took on the position of interim Minister of the Interior – worked towards organising terror units within the Iraqi Police force: Dispatched to Iraq to whip Iraqi security forces into shape, Kerik dubbed himself the "interim interior minister of Iraq. British police advisors called him the "Baghdad terminator".

Under Negroponte's helm at the US Embassy in Baghdad, a wave of covert civilian killings and targeted assassinations had been unleashed. Engineers, medical doctors, scientists and intellectuals were also targeted.

Author and geopolitical analyst Max Fuller has documented in detail the atrocities committed under the US sponsored counterinsurgency program.

The appearance of death squads was first highlighted in May 2005: Dozens of bodies were found casually disposed in vacant areas around Baghdad. All of the victims had been handcuffed, blindfolded and shot in the head and many of them also showed signs of having been brutally tortured.

The evidence was sufficiently compelling for the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS), a leading Sunni organisation, to issue public statements in which they accused the security forces attached to the Ministry of the Interior as well as the Badr Brigade, the former armed wing of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), of being behind the killings. They also accused the Ministry of the Interior of conducting state terrorism.

The Police Commandos as well as the Wolf Brigade were overseen by the US counterinsurgency program in the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior.

The Police Commandos were formed under the experienced tutelage and oversight of veteran US counterinsurgency fighters and from the outset conducted joint-force operations with elite and highly secretive US special-forces units.

A key figure in the development of the Special Police Commandos was James Steele, a former US Army special forces operative who cut his teeth in Vietnam before moving on to direct the US military mission in El Salvador at the height of that country's civil war. ...

Another US contributor was the same Steven Casteel who as the most senior US advisor within the Interior Ministry brushed off serious and well-substantiated accusations of appalling human right violations as "rumour and innuendo". Like Steele, Casteel gained considerable experience in Latin America, in his case participating in the hunt for the cocaine baron Pablo Escobar in Colombia's Drugs Wars of the 1990s.

Casteel's background is significant because this kind of intelligence-gathering support role and the production of death lists are



The "Free Syrian Army" is upheld by the Western media as

characteristic of US involvement in counterinsurgency programs and constitute the underlying thread in what can appear to be random, disjointed killing sprees.

The Police Commando headquarters became the hub of a nationwide command, control, communications, computer and intelligence operations centre, courtesy of the US.

This initial groundwork established under Negroponte in 2005 was implemented under his successor Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad. Robert Stephen Ford ensured the continuity of the project prior to his appointment as US Ambassador to Algeria in 2006, as well as upon his return to Baghdad as Deputy Chief of Mission in 2008.

Operation "Syrian Contras"

The gruesome Iraqi version of the "Salvador Option" under the helm of John Negroponte has served as a "role model" for setting up the "Free Syrian Army" Contras. Robert Stephen Ford was, no doubt, involved in the implementation of the Syrian Contras project, following his reassignment to Baghdad as Deputy Head of Mission in 2008.

The objective in Syria was to create factional divisions between Sunni, Alawite, Shiite, Kurds, Druze and Christians. While the Syrian context is entirely different to that of Iraq, there are striking similarities with regard to the procedures whereby the killings and atrocities were conducted.

A report published by Der Spiegel pertaining to atrocities committed in the Syrian city of Homs confirms an organised sectarian process of mass-murder and extra-judicial killings comparable to that conducted by the US sponsored death squads in Iraq.

People in Homs were routinely categorised as "prisoners" (Shia, Alawite) and "traitors". The "traitors" are Sunni civilians within the rebel occupied urban area, who express their disagreement or opposition to the rule of terror of the Free Syrian Army:

Death squads including Lebanese and Jordanian Salafist units entered Syria's southern border with Jordan in mid-March 2011.

squads



a bona fide military entity established as a result of mass defections from government forces.

“Since last summer [2011], we have executed slightly fewer than 150 men, which represents about 20 percent of our prisoners,” says Abu Rami. ... But the executioners of Homs have been busier with traitors within their own ranks than with prisoners of war.

“If we catch a Sunni spying, or if a citizen betrays the revolution, we make it quick,” says the fighter. According to Abu Rami, Hussein’s burial brigade has put between 200 and 250 traitors to death since the beginning of the uprising.” (*Der Spiegel*, March 30, 2012).

The project required an initial program of recruitment and training of mercenaries. Death squads including Lebanese and Jordanian Salafist units entered Syria’s southern border with Jordan in mid-March 2011. Much of the groundwork was already in place prior to Robert Stephen Ford’s arrival in Damascus in January 2011.

Ford’s appointment as Ambassador to Syria was announced in early 2010. Diplomatic relations had been cut in 2005 following the Rafick Hariri assassination, which Washington blamed on Syria. Ford arrived in Damascus barely two months before the onset of the insurgency.

The Free Syrian Army

Washington and its allies replicated in Syria the essential features of the “Iraq Salvador Option”, leading to the creation of the Free Syrian Army and its various terrorist factions including the Al-Qaeda affiliated Al Nusra brigades.

While the creation of the Free Syrian Army was announced in June 2011, the recruitment and training of foreign mercenaries was initiated at a much an earlier period.

In many regards, the Free Syrian Army is a smokescreen. It is upheld by the Western media as a bona fide military entity established as a result of mass defections from government forces. The number of defectors, however, was neither significant nor sufficient to establish a

coherent military structure with command and control functions.

The FSA is not a professional military entity; rather it is a loose network of separate terrorist brigades, which in turn are made up of numerous paramilitary cells operating in different parts of the country.

Each of these terrorist organisations operates independently. The FSA does not effectively exercise command and control functions including liaison with these diverse paramilitary entities. The latter are controlled by US-NATO sponsored Special Forces and intelligence operatives which are embedded within the ranks of selected terrorist formations.

These (highly trained) Special Forces on the ground (many of whom are employees of private security companies) are routinely in contact with US-NATO and allied military/intelligence command units (including Turkey). These embedded Special Forces are, no doubt, also involved in the carefully planned bomb attacks directed against government buildings, military compounds, etc.

The death squads are mercenaries trained and recruited by the US, NATO, its Persian Gulf GCC allies as well as Turkey. They are overseen by allied special forces (including British SAS and French Parachutistes), and private security companies on contract to NATO and the Pentagon. In this regard, reports confirm the arrest by the Syrian government of some 200-300 private security company employees who had integrated rebel ranks.

The Jabhat Al Nusra Front

The Al Nusra Front – which is said to be affiliated to Al-Qaeda – is described as the most effective “opposition” rebel fighting group, responsible for several of the high profile bomb attacks. Portrayed as an enemy of America (on the State Department list of terrorist organisations), Al Nusra operations, nonetheless, bear the fingerprints of US paramilitary training, terrorist tactics and weapons systems. The atrocities

committed against civilians by Al Nusra (funded covertly by US-NATO) are similar to those undertaken by the US sponsored death squads in Iraq.

In the words of Al Nusra leader Abu Adnan in Aleppo: “Jabhat Al Nusra does count Syrian veterans of the Iraq war among its numbers, men who bring expertise – especially the manufacture of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) – to the front in Syria.”

As in Iraq, factional violence and ethnic cleansing were actively promoted. In Syria; the Alawite, Shiite and Christian communities have been the target of the US-NATO sponsored death squads. The Alawite and the Christian community are the main targets of the assassination program. Confirmed by the Vatican News Service:

“Christians in Aleppo are victims of death and destruction due to the fighting which for months, has been affecting the city. The Christian neighbourhoods, in recent times, have been hit by rebel forces fighting against the regular army and this has caused an exodus of civilians.

“Some groups in the rugged opposition, where there are also jihadist groups, “ire on Christian houses and buildings, to force occupants to escape and then take possession [ethnic cleansing] (Agenzia Fides, *Vatican News*, October 19, 2012).

“The Sunni Salafist militants – says the Bishop – continue to commit crimes against civilians, or to recruit fighters with force. The fanatical Sunni extremists are fighting a holy war proudly, especially against the Alawites. When terrorists seek to control the religious identity of a suspect, they ask him to cite the genealogies dating back to Moses. And they ask to recite a prayer that the Alawites removed. The Alawites have no chance to get out alive.” (Agenzia Fides June 4, 2012).

Reports confirm the influx of Salafist and Al-Qaeda affiliated death squads as well as brigades under the auspices of the Muslim Brotherhood into Syria from the inception of the insurgency in March 2011.

Moreover, reminiscent of the enlistment of the Mujahideen to wage the CIA’s jihad (holy war) in the heyday of the Soviet-Afghan war, NATO and the Turkish High command, according to Israeli intelligence sources, had initiated a campaign to enlist thousands of Muslim volunteers in Middle East countries and the Muslim world to fight alongside the Syrian rebels. The Turkish army would house these volunteers, train them and secure their passage into Syria.

Private security companies

According to reports, private security companies operating out of Gulf States are involved in the recruiting and training of mercenaries.

Although not specifically earmarked for the recruitment of mercenaries directed against Syria, reports point to the creation of training camps in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

In Zayed Military City, a secret army was in the making operated by Xe Services, formerly Blackwater. The UAE deal to establish a military camp for the training of mercenaries was signed in July 2010, nine months before the onslaught of the wars in Libya and Syria.

In recent developments, security companies on contract to NATO and the Pentagon are involved in training “opposition” death squads in the use of chemical weapons:

“The United States and some European allies are using defence contractors to train Syrian rebels on how to secure chemical weapons stockpiles in Syria, a senior US official and several senior diplomats told *CNN Sunday*” (CNN Report, December 9, 2012).

The names of the companies involved were not revealed.

Behind closed doors

Robert Stephen Ford was part of a small team at the US State Department team which oversaw the recruitment and training of terrorist brigades, together with Derek Chollet and Frederic C Hof, a former business partner of Richard Armitage, who served as Washington’s “special coordinator on Syria”. Derek Chollet has recently been appointed to the position of Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs (ISA).

This team operated under the helm of (former) Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Feltman.

Feltman’s team was in close liaison with the process of recruitment and training of mercenaries out of Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Libya (courtesy of the post-Gaddafi regime, which dispatched 600 Libya Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) troops to Syria, via Turkey in the months following the September 2011 defeat of the Gaddafi government.

Assistant Secretary of State Feltman was in contact with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal, and Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim. He was also in charge of a Doha-based office for “special security coordination” pertaining to Syria, which included representatives from Western and GCC intelligence agencies as well as a representative from Libya. In June 2012, Jeffrey Feltman was appointed UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, a strategic position which, in practice, consists in setting the UN agenda (on behalf of Washington) on issues pertaining to “Conflict Resolution” in various “political hot spots” around the world (including Somalia, Lebanon, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Mali). In a bitter irony, the countries for UN “conflict resolution” are those which are the target of US covert operations.

In liaison with the US State Department, NATO and his GCC handlers in Doha and Riyadh, Feltman is Washington’s man behind UN special envoy Lakhdar Brahmi’s “Peace Proposal”.

Meanwhile, while paying lip service to the UN peace initiative, the US and NATO have speeded up the process of recruitment and training of mercenaries in response to the heavy casualties incurred by “opposition” rebel forces.

The US proposed “end game” in Syria is not regime change, but the destruction of Syria as a Nation State. The deployment of “opposition” death squads with a mandate to kill civilians is part of this criminal undertaking.

“Terrorism with a Human Face” is upheld by the United Nations Human Rights Council, which constitutes a mouthpiece for NATO “Humanitarian Interventions” under the doctrine of “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P).

The atrocities committed by the US-NATO death squads are casually blamed on the government of Bashar Al Assad. According to UN Human Rights Council High Commissioner Navi Pillay:

“This massive loss of life could have been avoided if the Syrian government had chosen to take a different path than one of ruthless suppression of what were initially peaceful and legitimate protests by unarmed civilians,” (quoted by Stephen Lendman, “UN Human Rights Report on Syria: Camouflage of US-NATO Sponsored Massacres”, *Global Research*, January 3, 2012)

Washington’s “unspeakable objective” consists in breaking up Syria as a sovereign nation – along ethnic and religious lines – into several separate and “independent” political entities. globalresearch.ca ☘

The US proposed “end game” in Syria is not regime change, but the destruction of Syria as a Nation State. The deployment of “opposition” death squads with a mandate to kill civilians is part of this criminal undertaking.

People of the World are Fighting Back

Finian Cunningham

The United States of America stands exposed in the eyes of the entire world as the number-one terrorist threat to the future of humanity. Many have known this fact already, but now it is universally clear.

As the US prepares to launch an overt war on Syria (the covert war has been raging for 30 months), the vast majority of humanity can finally see through all its decades of pretence and conceit as the world's model of democracy and international law. And what they see is the ugly opposite. The US is a terrorist state that holds international law, democracy and human rights in utter contempt. It is ready, as it always has been, to kill countless civilians for its political ambitions. That is the conventional definition of "terrorism".

Syria's President Bashar al-Assad made a profound point recently when he said that his country has faced aggression for more than two years, but only now is the real enemy revealing itself – the US and its minions. But the US terrorist state is not just being called out over Syria. It is being revealed as the enemy to the entire world.

From past wars in the Caribbean, Central America, Philippines, Vietnam and Indochina, through coups and covert ops in Iran, Iraq, Africa, to recent killing fields in Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan and Somalia, the historical picture is now complete. All these conflicts and many more – too many to mention here – integrate into one indisputable truth. The US is the world's biggest terror state. If it is not dealt with definitely, then the future of the world is in peril more than ever.

In previous crimes of aggression, the US ruling elite could invoke the spurious cover of "a coalition of the willing", or the abused authority of

The people of the world have reached a critical mass of intolerance towards the rogue terror states of the US, Britain, France, Israel and a few other accomplices.

the United Nations or NATO. It was able to do that through deployment of lies, fabrications and a supine mass media that would lend credibility to the mendacity.

Now, thanks to alternative, critical media and instant global communications, the American lies don't work any longer. In an instant, they are exposed; just like the attempt in the last few hours of US Secretary of State John Kerry to frame up Syria over alleged chemical weapons use.

The *New York Times*, BBC and the usual Western media mouthpieces for imperialist propaganda dutifully facilitated Kerry and his US state terrorism with bombastic, important-sounding headlines: "Kerry lays out evidence against Syria".

The people of the world have reached a critical mass of intolerance towards the rogue terror states of the US, Britain, France, Israel and a few other accomplices. We have watched their relentless mass murder and exploitation of fellow humans in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. We have



witnessed how this tiny group of state terrorists imposes on the vast majority of humanity their vile criminality and in the process then insult us with grotesque lies and justifications.

This week the British parliament voted against the London government's arrogance to provide its usual criminal special relationship to the Americans. In the execution of past war crimes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya – to mention a few – Washington could rely on the trusty British imperialists to give a veneer of "coalition of the willing". British premier David Cameron's plans to repeat the criminality by backing Washington's plans to bomb Syria were dealt a crushing blow by the British parliament voting against any such military action.

Cameron was forced to withdraw. The vote in the British parliament is not so much a sign of ethics among Britain's political class. It is more a reflection of the global awakening among ordinary citizens that this insane state terrorism must stop.

The French government has also backed off earlier bellicose bravado, with French President Francois Hollande belatedly calling for a "peaceful, political solution" over the Syrian crisis. Even Washington's reliable Canadian puppet Prime Minister Stephen Harper has said that his country will not be getting involved militarily in Syria.

It is also reported that 10 members of the NATO alliance – one-third of the total – are not willing to support American strikes. This latter grouping comprises the usual minions of the US. And we haven't even yet acknowledged the more strident opponents, such as Russia, China, Iran and the majority of nations elsewhere in Asia, Africa and the Americas.

The people of the world have had it with elite Western rulers acting as terrorists who are holding humanity to ransom. The rulers are presiding not only over military terrorism. They are inflicting economic, social and ecological terrorism with their bankrupt capitalist smash-and-grab system.

That system has reached the point of meltdown and that is why we are being pushed into relentless wars - in order for the rulers and their politician puppets to corner the remaining resources. The ultimate solution to end the wars is for the people to overthrow the economic system that US and Western elite rulers preside over. The insane criminality of the US rulers over Syria is exposing this historic challenge facing humanity.

After the British parliamentary setback the US Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel said: "Our approach is to continue to find an international coalition that will act together. It is the goal of President Obama and our government ... whatever decision is taken, that it be an international collaboration and effort."

The only entities willing to support US aggression on Syria is Saudi Arabia and Israel. So, how's that for credibility? Coalition of the Willing? More like Coalition of the Killing.

Information Clearing House ✪

Jailing Manning, burying the Cuban Five

WT Whitney

Listening to her conscience, Private Chelsea Manning, formerly Bradley Manning, released US military and diplomatic reports to the public. Manning's 35-year sentence is longer by far than sentences handed out to other whistleblowers. A "government secrecy specialist" told the *New York Times* that Manning's sentence "reflects the gravity of the case and the government's perception of the damage that was done." She will be eligible for parole in eight years.

Comparison of Manning's sentence with sentences received by the Cuban Five prisoners, whistleblowers of another sort, is revealing. Sentences and convictions are unjust on both sides. But in terms of years of incarceration, the Five seem to have caused more vexation to the US government than Manning did. What did prisoner Gerardo Hernandez do to receive two life terms plus 15 years? Why life sentences (reduced on appeal) for Ramón Labañino and Antonio Guerrero?

Prosecutors charged them with conspiracy to commit espionage,

not with espionage. They also charged Gerardo Hernández with conspiracy to commit murder in the shoot-down deaths of four Miami-based Brothers to the Rescue pilots on February 24, 1996. Legal observers say he was blameless.

Arrested in 1998, the Cuban Five were in Florida to monitor and report on preparations for terror attacks against Cuba, and to warn of any US military attack. They targeted private Cuban-American paramilitary groups, although Antonio Guerrero did watch movements of military aircraft at a Key West Naval Air Station, where he was employed.

US military and intelligence officials testified at their trial that the Five posed no threat to US national security interests. Convicted on relatively minor charges, prisoner Rene Gonzalez was released in 2011. Fernando González, similarly, will be freed early in 2014.

Manning's case and that of the Cuban Five are poles apart in terms of damage done to US government policy interests. Yet US rage, as measured by sentence

length, landed largely on those who did the least. Why was that?

The fact that right-wing Cuban émigrés have a hold on US policy-making on Cuba and even media coverage was one factor. Maybe, deep down, anti-communism still holds sway, despite hoopla on anti-terrorism. And Cuban social achievements, espousal of Latin American unity, and fight for national independence may have been unsettling enough for retribution, with the Cuban Five serving as proxies.

But importantly, the prosecution, trial, and sentencing of the Five took place in a void. There was no sizable popular movement at their side, nor any trace of sympathetic public opinion. The fate of Gerardo Hernández and his comrades could as well have been decided on a distant planet. At their trial in Miami, restraints were off. Vengeful, cruel instincts had charge.

Studied neglect of Cuban realities had set the stage. In general, stories of people's lives, hopes, and struggles in countries under foreign domination get short shrift in the intruding nation.

US media coverage and public curiosity about daily life on the island shrank once Cuba charted an independent course and worldwide criticism of the US blockade mushroomed. US dissidents' habitual concentration on single issues contributed to neglect of Cuba.

A movement did mobilise, however, on behalf of Private Manning, one based largely on rejection of US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and admiration of Manning's courage. Jailers released Manning from eight months of solitary confinement following demonstrations. The Cuban Five prisoners endured 17 months of pre-trial isolation. While Manning's judge could have issued a 90-year sentence, she settled on 35 years, far less than the 60 years sought by prosecutors. The prospect of organised outrage may have been daunting.

Had the cause of the Five been linked to a political movement, lawyers could have widened their audience. Court proceedings can give voice to historical context and defendants' purposes. The trials of anti-apartheid activists in South Africa, for example, advanced

political education. Lawyers and supporters of the Five would have had a stage for highlighting contradictions between the much-vaunted US rule of law and what really happens. Not least, equal justice under the law serves to unify disparate political tendencies.

The common thread by which agitation for the Five is tied to other issues would be anti-imperialism. Their case has roots in soil giving rise to struggles for immigrant rights, racial justice, and labour rights, and against military interventions. To establish such linkages is not easy, but the Cuban Five prisoners and their families have faced a mountain of suffering and there is little choice but to begin.

Right now, the job at hand is to pressure the US president to pardon the Cuban Five prisoners. As noted recently by a *New York Times* editorialist, "President Obama's use of the pardon power remains historically low." So he needs to be pushed.

How else but through large numbers standing up and speaking out? *People's World* ✪

Kurdish struggle a key factor in Syria and beyond

Conn Hallinan

For almost a century, the Kurds – one of the world's largest ethnic groups without its own state – have been deceived and double-crossed, their language and culture suppressed, their villages burned and bombed, and their people scattered. But because of the US invasion of Iraq, the Syrian civil war, and Turkish politics, they have been suddenly transformed from pawn to major player in a pivotal part of the Middle East.

The Kurds – who speak a language distantly related to Farsi, the dominant language of Iran – straddle the borders of north eastern Syria, northern Iraq, and western Iran, and constitute a local majority in parts of eastern and southern Turkey. At between 25 to 30 million strong, they have long yearned to establish their own state. Now, with their traditional foes weakened by invasion, civil war, and political discord, the Kurds are suddenly in the catbird's seat.

But in the Middle East that can be a very tricky place to dwell.

The Kurds' current ascent began when the US established a no-fly zone over northern Iraq following the 1991 Gulf War. When the Americans invaded and overthrew Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iraqi Kurds saw their opportunity: they seized three oil rich northern provinces, set up a parliament, established a capital at Erbil, and mobilised their formidable militia, the Peshmerga. Over the past decade, the Kurdish region has gone from one of the poorest regions in Iraq to one of the most affluent, fuelled in the main by energy sales to Turkey and Iran.

It is an astounding turn of fate.

Twenty-nine years ago the Turkish government was burning Kurdish villages and scattering refugees throughout the region. Some 45,000 people – mostly Kurds – lost their lives in that long-running conflict. Today, Turkey is negotiating with its traditional nemesis, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and trying to cut a peace deal that would deliver Kurdish support to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's push to amend Turkey's constitution and give him another decade in power.

In 1988, Saddam Hussein dropped poison gas on the Kurdish town of Halabja, killing between 3,000 and 5,000 people. Today, the Iraqi government of Nouri al-Maliki may be outraged by the Kurds' seizure of oil assets, but the Baghdad regime is so preoccupied by a sectarian-led bombing campaign against Shiite communities that it is in no position to do more than protest. Last November, the Maliki government backed away from a potential showdown with the Peshmerga in the northern town of Tuz Khurmatu.

Fifty years ago the Syrian government stripped citizenship rights from 20 percent of its Kurdish minority – Kurds make up about 10 percent of that country's population-creating between 300,000 to 500,000 stateless people. Today, Syria's Kurdish regions are largely independent because the Damascus regime, locked in a life and death struggle with foreign and domestic insurgents, has abandoned the northern and eastern parts of the country.

Only in Iran are Kurds in much the same situation they were a

decade ago, but with the Tehran government's energy focused on its worsening economic situation and avoiding a confrontation with the US over its nuclear program, that, too, could change.

In short, are the Kurds' stars finally coming into alignment?

Maybe and maybe not. If the invasion, politics, and civil war have created opportunities for the Kurds, they are fragile, relying on the transitory needs or current disarray of their traditional foes, the central governments of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran.

Turkey is a case in point.

Endogen needs the votes of Kurdish parliamentarians to put a new constitution up for a referendum in time for the 2014 elections. Ending the conflict with the Kurds could also boost Turkey's application for European Union membership and burnish Ankara's regional leadership credentials. The latter have been tarnished by a number of Erdogan missteps, including his unpopular support for the Syrian insurgents and his increasingly authoritarian internal policies.

Most Kurds would like to end the fighting as well, but that will require concessions by the Endogen government on the issues of parliamentary representation and the right to educate Kurds in their own language.

But Endogen has balked at these two demands, and the Kurds are growing impatient. PKK leader Cemil Bayik recently warned that "September 1 is the deadline" for a deal and a failure to reach an agreement by then "will be understood that the aim [of the Turkish government] is not a solution." Given the long history of animosity, it would not take much to unravel peace talks between the two parties.

Syria's Kurds have threaded a hazardous path between their desire for autonomy – some would like full independence-and not taking sides in the current civil war. Indeed, the fighting going on in northern and eastern Syria is not between the insurgents and the Assad government, but Kurds represented by the Kurdish Democratic Union and the combined forces of the extremist al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, both of which are affiliated with Al-Qaeda.

Most of Syria's oil reserves are in the Kurdish region and control of them would provide a financial base for whatever side emerges victorious.

The Assad regime may have abandoned the north, but Damascus recently has made headway against the insurgency, gains greatly aided by infighting among its opponents. So far the war is a stalemate, but it might not stay that way forever. Even Syrians opposed to the Assad government are tired of the fighting, and most have no love for the sectarian groups that have increasingly taken over the war against the Damascus regime. In short, the current autonomy of Syria's Kurds may be a fleeting thing.

Of course, it is possible that the Syrian Kurds might cut a deal with Assad: help drive the insurgents out of the area – maybe in alliance with the Iraqi Kurds – in exchange for greater autonomy. That would enrage both the Turks and the Maliki government, but it is not clear either could do much about it.

Erdogen's support for the Syrian insurgents is widely unpopular in



A Kurdish Peshmerga soldier holds a Kurdistan flag.

Turkey, and any direct intervention by the Turks to block autonomy for Syria's Kurds would put Ankara in the middle of a civil war. With an election looming next year, that is not a move Erdogan wants to make. As for Iraq, thanks to the US's dismantling of Saddam Hussein's army, Baghdad doesn't have the capabilities to take on the Peshmerga at this point.

What will finally emerge is hard to predict, except that a return to the past seems unlikely. Iraq's Kurds can only be dislodged by a major invasion from Turkey in cooperation with the Baghdad government. Given that Kurdish oil and gas are increasingly important to the Turkish economy, and that any invasion would be costly, why would Ankara do that?

And cooperation between Baghdad and Ankara has been soured by Turkey's willingness to ignore Baghdad's protests over its exploitation of Kurdish-controlled (but Iraqi owned) oil and Turkish support for the Sunni extremists trying to overthrow Assad. Those same extremists are massacring Shiite supporters of the Maliki government in Basra, Baghdad and Karbala.

Turkey's Kurds – between 20 and 25 million, the largest Kurdish concentration in the world – are on a knife's edge. There is little doubt that the average Turkish Kurd wants the long-running conflict to end, as do the Turks as well. But Endogen is dragging his feet on the key peace issues, and the PKK may decide it is time to pick up the gun again and return to the old Kurdish adage: trust only the mountains.

The solution to all this is not all that difficult.

For Turkey, granting Kurdish language rights and cultural autonomy, and reducing the minimum percentage of votes to serve in the Turkish parliament from its current 10 percent, would probably do the job.

For Syria, the formula for peace would be much the same, with the added move of restoring citizenship to almost half a million now stateless Kurds. But that is only likely to happen after a ceasefire and a political settlement of the civil war.

The Iraqi government will have

to bite the bullet, recognise that an autonomous Kurdish area is a reality, and work out a deal to share oil and gas revenue.

As long as Iran is faced with an attack by the US and/or Israel, that country's Kurds will be out in the cold. The US and its allies should keep in mind that sanctions and threats of war make a peaceful resolution of long-standing grievances by Iran's minorities, which also include Azeris, Baluchs, and Arabs, impossible. If the US is truly concerned about minorities in Iran it should find a way to negotiate with the Teheran

government over Teheran's nuclear program.

But the Iranian government, too, would do well to seriously engage with its Kurdish population. Autonomy for the Kurds is out of the bag and not about to go back in, regardless of what the final outcome in Syria and Turkey are. Sooner or later, Iran will have to confront the same issue that governments in Damascus, Ankara and Baghdad now face: recognition and autonomy, or war and instability.

People's World ☘

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 commemoration 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

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Heightened exploitation

Now the government has plans for "productivity-enhancing reforms."

Wayne Swan hops on the productivity wagon with the employer body, the Business Council of Australia. "Higher productivity growth will be the key to ensuring a smooth transition to new sources of growth, improving living standards and longer term prosperity," says the BCA.

By higher productivity the BCA means lower wages, higher output per worker, lower cost per unit of production, fewer regulations, further restrictions on trade union rights.

"The government is working cooperatively with business and the unions to lift Australia's annual productivity growth rate to 2 per cent or better," says Treasurer Chris Bowen.

Bowen speaks of a transition in the economy in which "non-mining sectors of the economy will need

to lead growth in the future," and a "broader economic reform agenda."

Some indication of what lies ahead, in particular under an Abbott-led Coalition government, can be seen in the BCA's agenda released last month. It extends beyond the workplace.

There is a new drive by transnational capital for a massive take-back of past gains by the working class in industrialised countries. This includes dismantling the welfare state, slashing wages, casualising workforces, dismantling the public sector, deregulating labour markets, slashing taxation of company profits, and extending the powers and reach of monopoly capital.

These measures would raise the rate of exploitation of workers to new heights and result record profits and gut workers' living standards. It is the same agenda as being imposed in Cyprus, Greece, Spain, and Portugal.

There are other ways of increasing productivity and building a strong manufacturing sector. These include planning of economic development, building our skills base and research and development, expanding the public sector, and a strong, militant and united trade union movement to defend past gains and fight for workers' rights.

T Southern
Brisbane



Solidarity with Palestine

A letter to the editor of the *Adelaide Advertiser* from Allon Lee, Policy Analyst, Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council, Melbourne stated that there have been no new West Bank settlements, which is another Zionist lie. Houses are demolished every day in the West Bank. He goes on to say that since 2003 all settlement growth has occurred within the existing boundaries and suburbs of Jerusalem. Again another lie.

Palestinians living in Jerusalem are being displaced everyday and their homes demolished.

He states that Palestine leadership is jeopardising the peace process. Allon stated that in 2000 Israel gave a deal to Palestine of statehood; the only hitch was they gave half their existing land away.

No wonder Palestine said "No" and rightly so. Looking back through the last 25 years, the Palestinians have done everything to try and get peace. Every time they have a solution Israel knocks it back by stating they need more. You have the Israeli government

Sydney

Commemorate 40 years since the military coup in Chile

Sunday September 8

Addison road Community Centre – Great Hall

142 Addison Marrickville

11:00 am Opening ceremony / Art exhibition

2:30 pm Short documentary followed by forum

6:45 pm Cultural concert

saying we will have from the river to the sea: That is the Jordan River to the Dead Sea which is all of Palestine and parts of Egypt.

The BDS movement is gaining strength around the world. Not only boycotting products made in Israel but Professor Stephen Hawking is backing the academic boycott of Israel by pulling out of a conference hosted by Israeli president Shimon Peres in Jerusalem as a protest at Israel's treatment of Palestinians.

Tracey Smallwood
CPA Western Suburbs Branch
Adelaide

Culture & Life

by
Kepa Artaraz

"Seeds of change" in the struggle against global hunger



Farmers in Bangladesh testing and preserving seeds. (Photo: Melanie Ko)

Karen, an international aid worker with the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), squats in front of the broad beans she has planted in her vegetable garden in the suburbs of London. Her hands are muddied and the rain is torrential, but the glint in her eyes leaves no doubt about her satisfaction. "The seeds for these beans came from a seed exchange event I went to last year. The truth is that they have grown much better than the hybrid ones I bought. And they are free!" she exclaims.

Meanwhile, a world away in Chillavi, a remote corner of Cochabamba, Bolivia, indigenous leaders working with local NGO CENDA (Communication and Andean Development Centre), are writing an open letter to their President to protest at the successful lobbying of agribusinesses to introduce GM technologies in the country, in spite of constitutional promises to the contrary.

CENDA has been working for decades with indigenous peoples in the region. They use traditional knowledge and practices to constantly improve seed and native plant varieties in an effort to increase production by adapting their crops to climate change and making them pest resistant. This helps them put real, nutritious food on everyone's table in their community and beyond.

Seeds lie at the heart of the complex system of food production and global hunger. Here is the problem in a nutshell: currently the world

produces more than enough food for everyone in the planet. Yet, according to the UN World Food Program, close to one billion people will go hungry to bed tonight and 2.6 million children under the age of five will die this year of malnutrition. At the same time, 50 percent of the food produced in the world does not make it to a plate. In Britain we waste one third of all the food we buy, a pattern replicated in most wealthy countries.

Working with nature

One could argue that fair distribution of existing food production is one of the most important issues for tackling global hunger. Yet if you were to believe the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) or Monsanto – to name but one of the major global biotechnology firms – the solution has to include technological improvements such as "improved" seeds (GM or not) or old-fashioned economic growth that will allow the poor to buy all the food that they cannot currently afford. The two arguments are often linked; when GM technologies are suggested, it is generally to plant cash crops as part of economic growth agendas.

Food campaigners around the world – whether indigenous peoples in Bolivia or activists in London – are mobilising in search of an alternative means of ensuring that global hunger is eradicated. They are linked by a shared belief in the importance of working with nature to create localised food systems that empower

small-scale producers. They constitute the food sovereignty movement and are suspicious of the pleas from corporate power that theirs is a benign contribution to the challenges posed by global hunger.

Food sovereignty is about changing political and economic structures that keep people unable to feed themselves.

The rejection of the idea that we can treat food like any other commodity has fundamental implications for the role of big agribusinesses in global chains of food production. As the critique goes, agribusinesses impose unsustainable farming practices and reduce biodiversity in favour of intensive monoculture that is in turn more vulnerable to disease. In addition, agribusinesses are accused of squeezing out small-scale farmers worldwide, directly contributing to creating the poverty which causes so many to die of hunger.

Take the example of seeds. Big corporations like Monsanto develop and patent hybrid and GM seeds that, they claim, improve yields by producing drought and pest-resistant plants. According to their own website, "Monsanto patents many of the seed varieties we develop. Patents are necessary to ensure that we are paid for our products and for all the investments we put into developing these products." Furthermore, "the vast majority of farmers understand and appreciate our research and are willing to pay for our inventions and the value they provide".

For the food sovereignty movement

however, this is simply not true. They argue that the food system is failing the poorest people because the balance of power is tipped in favour of global companies. In the case of seeds, "just 10 such giant firms control 73 percent of the global market share," says Hope Shand from Seeds Savers Exchange, a non-profit organisation dedicated to preserving and sharing native and rare garden seeds.

In London, the conversation with Karen turns to people power and the deep roots of the global hunger crisis. "You see, images of starving children on our TVs might generate charity but this is unlikely to deal with the structural reasons of persistent global hunger." Food sovereignty is about changing political and economic structures that keep people unable to feed themselves. "I have indigenous peoples to thank for what they can teach us about land management and seed improvement," says Karen as she removes weeds from the potato patch.

It seems then, that part of the answer to the future challenges we face as a species might lie in looking back to our ancestral knowledge. Meanwhile, back in Bolivia, an article in CENDA's newsletter explains in the clearest possible terms the contradiction between growing food for profit or for eating. "They tell us that if we use GM seeds, we can grow soya for export and make a lot of money. When will they understand that you cannot eat money?"

New Internationalist ☘



Rob Gowland
previews
 ABC & SBS
 Public Television

Sunday September 15 –
 Saturday September 21

First up this week is an Australian telemovie, *An Accidental Soldier* (ABC1 Sunday September 15 at 8.30pm), based on the highly regarded second novel by John Charalambous *Silent Parts* about a man who walked away from the horror of trench warfare in WW1 and instead found peace and contentment with a widowed French woman. It is also about the effects of his act on his family back in Australia, unsure about whether he died "over there" or not.

Peter Pierce, professor of Australian literature at James Cook University, said of the novel: "This book is one of the most poignant and unusual of reflections on war and remembrance. It bypasses so many well-trodden Australian fictional paths in making its own muted, moving way."

"This is not a tale of battle but of two home fronts, and of how French and Australians coped with rumour and loss. It does describe, plangently and complexly, the brief separate peace that Harry Lambert made with the Frenchwoman Colombe Jactatot."

This television adaptation is directed by Rachel Ward and stars Marie Bunel as Colombe and Dan Spielman as Harry Lambert.

In 1999, an expedition going up Mount Everest discovered a frozen body high in the mountain's "death zone" with its ice axe

embedded in a steep slope of scree. The climber had obviously fallen and properly had dug his axe in to stop himself from sliding any further. But the unknown climber's leg was badly broken, and he had perished of cold where he lay.

To the surprise of the climbers who found the body, it was dressed in gabardine and wearing hob-nailed boots. It proved to be the body of British explorer George Mallory who disappeared on Everest in 1924! What the discoverers of his body could not tell was whether he fell on the way up or the way down. In other words, did Mallory achieve his goal of reaching the summit? The only thing missing from Mallory's belongings was a photograph of his wife which he had promised to place on the summit if he got there.

The feature-length documentary *The Wildest Dream: Conquest of Everest* (ABC2 Sunday September 15 at 8.30pm) follows the mountaineer who found Mallory's body, Conrad Anker, as he returns to Everest to replicate Mallory's ill-fated expedition as closely as possible, in an effort to discover whether the British climber could have reached the summit.

The film combines the account of Anker's expedition with archive photos and specially restored film footage and dramatisations of Mallory's expedition, interspersed with evocative letters between Mallory and his wife, Ruth. The film uses the vocal talents of Ralph Fiennes, Hugh Dancy, Alan Rickman and Natasha Richardson, and is narrated by Liam Neeson.

Continental drift is so slow that it is hard to visualise it as an ongoing thing, but the world has been drastically reshaped over millennia, and continents have moved, bumped into one another, split into bits or formed mountains in an extraordinarily slow dance of colossal power. This process is the subject of the four-part series *Rise Of The Continents* (ABC1 Tuesdays from September 10 at 8.30pm).

This week's episode deals with



An Accidental Soldier (ABC1 Sunday September 15 at 8.30pm).

Australia, once joined to Antarctica, its deserts covered with forests until it split off and moved northwards to warmer climes. The shared wildlife of Australia, South America, New Zealand and South Africa (large flightless birds, certain marsupials) are relics of that time in Earth's history.

At first sight, a zombie drama is not what one expects from SBS but the British series *In The Flesh* (SBS2 Tuesdays at 8.35pm) strives to be more than your usual Hollywood "monster pic". It started last week, but is worth picking up on if unusual post-apocalypse dramas are your thing.

The series starts after the Zombie Uprising has been defeated by the military and the Human Volunteer Force (HVF). Now the authorities have achieved the ability to medicate the undead (who are now recognised as suffering from PDS or Partially Deceased Syndrome) so they can

return to their former lives. However, not everyone accepts them as normal and the zombies' ravenous acts of brutality when not medicated have left deep emotional scars.

Modern fantasy literature has taken almost every type of mythical creature to its bosom, from Djinn to vampires to werewolves, so why not sensitive zombies? In fact, in this very well made series we have at least one gay zombie and some very prejudiced straight people.

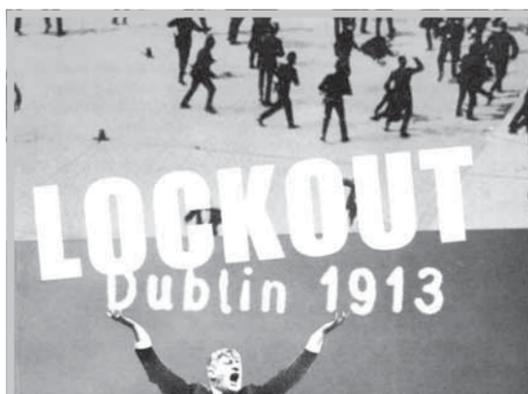
And that is really what the series is about: "redemption, forgiveness and the battle against prejudice".

Nevertheless, it never descends into worthiness or preaching. The series remains an exciting, dark drama. Zombies make a very satisfactory subject for a story about prejudice, for most people would find them creepy. However, zombies do not exist in the real world whereas prejudice does, so it is a pity that the talent which

has gone into making this admirable series could not have been expended on a more credible examination of this subject.

If fantasy creatures are popular in today's literature, then studies of sexual dysfunction are all the rage on television. There can be few viewers who have not had the opportunity to view a wide variety of malformed sex organs or vicariously indulge in all manner of sexual couplings and fetishes courtesy of TV.

The latest offering in this genre is *Can Have Sex, Will Have Sex* (ABC2 Friday September 20 at 9.40pm), which "takes a candid look at the sex lives of four disabled people". The voyeuristic nature of this particular example is obvious (in fact one of the subjects – cerebral palsy sufferer Pete – has dreams of becoming the UK's first disabled porn star, thus appealing to two voyeurism markets at the same time). *



Adelaide

"The Dublin Lock-out was the most monstrous industrial action ever taken between Dublin employers and workers".

Sunday September 15 at 2.00pm
 Irish Club – Carrington St Adelaide

Admission: \$10

A Presentation by the Adelaide Irish Drama Group

Come along and celebrate the Centenary of the 'Great lockout' Dublin 1913.

The strike began in August 1913 when 400 employers under the leadership of William Martin Murphy began to lockout workers, members and supporters of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union, ITGWU. William Martin Murphy was like Murdoch of today, owned newspapers, transport companies and numerous businesses. Murphy had the support of the establishment, the church, Irish Home Rule Party - led by Redmond, the Ancient Order Hibernians (AOH), the Orange Order and some nationalists to defeat workers' rights for better wages and working conditions.

In response to the lockout Big Jim Larkin who established the ITGWU and James Connelly organized the struggle for the right to belong to the ITGWU in defiance of Murphy and cronies.

After many attacks by police (supporting the employers), the death of 3 strikers, 2 bashed by police and 1 woman shot by scabs James Larkin and James Connelly united to establish the Irish Citizen Army or ICA, to defend the strikers and workers against Murphy, the employers and the Police.

Following 8 months of bitter struggle the workers were forced back to work, despite the fact that the workers were supported by the British Workers and Trade Unions who supplied them with food ships and money. Although defeated and starved back to work, the working men and women of the ICA, under the leadership of James Connelly, Countess Markievicz and Michael Mallin learned the real lesson of class war. Three years later the ICA joined with progressive Republicans to take on the might of the British Empire. The 1913 lockout was the beginning of the process of preparing the working class of Ireland to take a leading role in the struggle for independence and a new Republic in 1916.

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Sydney

POLITICS

in the pub

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;
 Anne Gardner, General Secretary Public Service Association;

September 27

WHITHER DEMOCRACY IN EGYPT?

Noah Bassil, Dr, Lecturer, Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, Macquarie University;
 Amro Ali, PhD Candidate University of Sydney, Middle East & Egypt Specialist, author of amroali.com;

October 4

NO MEETING

Public Holiday weekend;

October 11

SHOULD MILITARY DRONES BE BANNED?

Joseph Pugliese, Associate Professor, Department of Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies, Macquarie University;
 David Stephens, Dr, Consultant, Secretary "Honest History";

Every Friday 6pm 'til 7.45

Gaelic Club

64 Devonshire Street Surry Hills

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Serious human rights concerns over Israeli practices in Palestine

Kanaga Raja

According to a UN news release, following its latest fact-finding visit to Amman and Cairo on June 22-27, the UN Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories has warned that “popular discontent could result in another round of violence” in the Occupied Territories.

(The Committee was not allowed by Israel to visit the Occupied Territories.)

The Committee, established by the UN General Assembly in 1968, comprises three UN member states currently represented by Ambassador Palitha TB Kohona of Sri Lanka (Chairperson), Ambassador Dato Hussein Haniff of Malaysia and Ambassador Fode Seck of Senegal.

“Israel’s continued detention of an estimated 5,000 Palestinians should be of deep concern to the world,” said Ambassador Kohona, highlighting especially 20 prisoners “who are on hunger strikes to protest abuses such as arbitrary detention, poor prison conditions, denial of family visits, solitary confinement, lack of access to education and negligent medical treatment”.

“Witnesses informed the Committee that Israeli prison doctors have betrayed their Oath – the fundamental premise of the medical profession that their patients’ health comes first,” he further said in the news release.

The Sri Lankan envoy pointed out that several witnesses had raised the case of Maysara Abu Hamdiyeh, who died earlier this year from cancer after being misdiagnosed and mistreated – having had to wait for over four months before being sent to hospital.

“Witnesses also discussed the death of Arafat Jaradat, citing clear evidence of torture while under Israeli interrogation,” Ambassador Kohona said.

“The most alarming testimony concerned the systematically abusive detention and interrogation by Israeli authorities of Palestinian children,” he stressed.

Witnesses reported that approximately 200 children are in Israeli detention at any given time, and that children are often taken away in the middle of the night, blindfolded and hands tied, after being shocked awake by Israeli soldiers busting in with sound grenades, smashed glass and instructions screamed at the entire family.

“Witnesses stated that Palestinian children are denied requests to be accompanied by a parent, denied access to a lawyer, and put at serious risk of torture and ill-treatment at the hands of Israeli security officials,” the Special Committee Chair said.

On Israel’s blockade of Gaza, Ambassador Kohona said: “For over six years, the lives of Palestinians in Gaza have been profoundly disrupted by Israel’s blockade.”

According to the UN news release, under the Oslo Accords, Israel agreed to a 20-nautical-mile area for Palestinian fishermen in Gaza, but the Israeli government has militarily enforced a three-nautical-mile limit.

The Committee was informed that Israel has extended access for fishermen up to six nautical miles, but was also informed that Israel had

again reduced it to three nautical miles during the prime fishing season.

“Gaza’s 4,000 fishermen used to catch four tons of fish each year, now they bring in only 1.5 tons,” the Committee noted, adding that today 80 percent of Palestinian fishermen live in poverty.

In turn, said the Committee members, Israel’s severe punishment of Palestinian fishermen, including by confiscating their motors, reduces access to health care and educational opportunities for their families.

“Again this year, we received allegations of Palestinian fishermen being subjected to arrest, confiscation of their equipment and abusive treatment by Israeli security forces.”

“Gaza’s farmers find themselves in similar circumstances,” the Committee noted, stressing that “they aren’t maximising the cultivation of their traditional crops of strawberries, carnations, herbs and sweet peppers, due to Israel’s near total restriction on exports and enforcement of a buffer zone inside of Gaza.”

According to the UN news release, the Committee expressed regret that testimony concerning the buffer zone mirrored what they have been told during previous visits, namely, that a lack of clarity regarding the Israeli-enforced no-go area creates grave dangers for Palestinian farmers, since Israeli soldiers fire live ammunition at persons between 300 and 1,000 metres from the fence.

“Farmers in Gaza can’t till all of their land and much of what they do produce can’t be exported,” Ambassador Kohona said. “The Committee was told that five persons have been killed and 92 injured near the buffer zone since the end of November 2012 alone.”

“The international community must pressure the Israeli government to let Palestinians farm, fish and export. Otherwise, Israel will entrench Gaza’s dependence on the international community,” the Sri Lankan envoy underscored.

The Committee also stressed that six years of blockade is bifurcating Palestinian society. “We heard of many Palestinians in Gaza who haven’t seen family members in the West Bank for years, owing to Israeli restrictions on movement between Gaza and the rest of Palestine,” Ambassador Kohona said.

“There is a sense that dividing the Palestinian population between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is an objective driving Israel’s blockade. This should be an urgent concern to the UN Security Council.”

The Committee said it heard disturbing testimony about the treatment of Palestinians who seek a permit to leave Gaza, including efforts by Israeli officials to pressure them into becoming informants and force women to undergo humiliating strip searches.

“The Committee deplores such treatment and strongly urges the Israeli government to treat all Palestinians with respect and dignity,” Ambassador Kohona said.

According to the UN news release, witnesses from Gaza further informed the Committee of the extremely limited educational opportunities open to their children, owing to Israel’s restrictions on travelling outside of Gaza to study in Palestinian schools in the West Bank.



On Israel’s attacks during the November 14-21, 2012 “Operation Pillar of Defence”, the Committee, which was briefed extensively on this operation, said: “While we have a range of concerns regarding Israel’s compliance with the basic principles of international humanitarian law during Pillar of Defence, of particular worry were reports of Israeli attacks that targeted journalists covering the conflict.”

“Such attacks, especially those that resulted in the death of journalists, wantonly reject the right to freedom of expression,” the Committee underlined.

Settlement expansion

The Committee also heard extensive testimony on continuing settlement construction in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the widespread phenomenon of Israeli settler violence and Israel’s discriminatory planning and zoning regime that effectively prohibits Palestinians from building or even renovating their homes.

According to the UN news release, witnesses told the Committee that even when Israel has, in the past, temporarily frozen settlement expansion, it has sped up the construction of its network of roads that link settlements and Israeli business interests in the occupied Palestinian territory.

“One witness explained that the expansion of the settlements combined with the unilateral establishment of closed military zones and so-called nature reserves jeopardise the contiguity of the West Bank. Another witness described how Israeli settlements and the continued construction of the Wall are isolating Palestinian communities and forcing displacement. In this regard, the Palestinian village of Al-Walaja was highlighted as a case requiring urgent intervention by the international community.”

In the first five months of this year, the Committee heard, 42 Palestinian structures were demolished and 149 displaced in East Jerusalem. One witness reminded the Committee that not all demolitions are reported as some families are forced to demolish their own homes to avoid huge fees from the Israeli government.

Listening to reports of businesses, including multinational corporations, which are profiting from the Israeli settlement enterprise, the Committee stressed: “Businesses have a responsibility to not be complicit in Israel’s policies and practices that openly violate Palestinian rights.”

“It is inconceivable that any business could not be aware of the illegal nature of Israel’s settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem,” Ambassador Kohona said. “There is a need for scrupulous due diligence and a clear awareness of the potential legal and reputational consequences for businesses associated with the Israeli settlement enterprise.”

The Committee also highlighted the ongoing research mentioned by witnesses concerning non-profit groups, such as 501(c)(3) organisations in the United States and similar organisations in Canada, which collect donations and transfer funds to Israeli organisations supporting the expansion of settlements.

[According to Wikipedia, a 501(c) organisation is an American tax-exempt non-profit organisation, under Section 501(c) of the US Internal Revenue Code.]

“If accurate, such organisations are perpetuating the occupation and likely aiding and abetting what is clearly a war crime,” the Committee members said.

“The Special Committee joins many of the witnesses in hoping that current efforts to restart meaningful negotiations are successful. We were repeatedly told that the only way to end Israeli violations of Palestinian rights is to end the occupation. While we are deeply hopeful that such efforts advance quickly, we also note that Palestine’s new status as a non-Member Observer State opens the door to international mechanisms that can take up many of the Israeli policies and practices that have been violating Palestinian rights for so long,” the Committee stressed.

According to the UN news release, the Special Committee will be presenting a full report on its mission and other activities to the UN General Assembly in November 2013. *Third World Resurgence* ☘



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