



The big business takeover

Anna Pha

PM Tony Abbott's Business Advisory Council will have a direct line to his government's Cabinet. More and more policy, legislation and other work of government will be contracted out to the Coalition's big business mates. Teams of business leaders will be advising on everything from coal seam gas mining (fracking) through to managing the Australian Taxation Office. As never before, business will be running government, dictating policy and plundering what remains of Australia's resources. Their message to the new Abbott Coalition government is "cut deep, cut fast", deregulate and privatise. As Treasurer Joe Hockey declared, Australia is "open for business", and it's going cheap without "red tape" or "green tape"!

In the lead-up to the elections the Business Council of Australia, the mining magnates, financial institutions and other employer bodies lobbied hard with their wish lists. The Coalition had the full backing of Murdoch's media empire with hundreds of millions of dollars free advertising and received millions of dollars of corporate donations.

Now it's time for the Coalition to repay its debts to those who put it there.

As the *Guardian* pointed out following the Coalition's victory, "The defeat of the right-wing Labor government and its replacement by the anti-people Coalition partners does not mean acceptance by the people of the Coalition's reactionary policies. On the contrary, it will spark increased organised resistance in the form of trade union and community action: people will have to stand up and resist the backward policies of the Abbott government." (*Guardian*, "Abbott PM: The lines are drawn", 11-09-2013)

The Coalition and its ruling class backers are very conscious of this and there is nothing they fear more than resistance, especially from the organised working class. Hence its plans to attack democratic rights and smash trade unions. But it still has the problem of selling an anti-people, anti-environment agenda to the wider community.

The sales pitch will be provided by what Abbott calls a "once-in-a-generation" Commission of Audit of government spending and income sources. Nothing will be excluded from the process, according to the government. The Audit is nothing more than a political



The Government plans to attack democratic rights and smash trade unions.

exercise to sell unpopular policies that are already set in concrete.

"The first task of the new government's proposed commission of audit will be to establish that there is indeed a budget emergency. Unless this is accepted by the government as well as the broader public, there will be no stomach for the measures required to make a meaningful difference." This advice comes from David Uren, the Economics Editor of Murdoch's *Australian* newspaper. ("Yes, Mr Abbott, there is a budget emergency", 13-09-2013)

As to what the Coalition has in store for the people of Australia, Hockey gave some insight with his warning of an end to the "age of entitlement". The "age of entitlement" is neo-liberal spin for government taking responsibility for the well-being of the community by providing such services as health, education, housing, pensions, unemployment benefits, etc, mostly funded through personal and company taxation revenue.

As Uren warns it will not be "an easy argument to win". Australia is one of very few countries with a AAA credit rating from the major credit rating agencies, Australia's debt is relatively small compared with other nations.

Abbott hardly conveyed a sense of emergency with a promise to improve the budget situation by a \$6 billion over four years, plus pay down \$16 billion of national debt. As Uren points out, "Set against \$1.7 trillion of government spending across that period, it represents a minuscule improvement."

The fabrication of an "emergency" is one of the Audit Commission's main tasks. If past audits are any indication, it will discover a big black hole in the government's budget - far bigger than ever imagined!

There will also be grim warnings that the current level of spending is "unsustainable", there is far too much waste, the population is ageing, public sector productivity is low, wage rates too high, taxes too high, etc.

All of this translates into slash and burn policies which were kept under wraps, to be revealed by the Audit Commission. This is the approach used by former Liberal Party leaders - Jeff Kennett in Victoria, John Howard federally, and more recently by Campbell Newman in Queensland and Barry O'Farrell in NSW.

Keep the electorate in the dark before the elections. Hold an "independent" audit into government spending and then put your

policies on the table. Howard's predecessor, John Hewson, had foolishly released policy details in the Liberal's "FightBack" document and lost an otherwise very winnable election in 1993. The lesson was learnt; no Liberal Party leader has since come clean before an election.

Howard audit

The audit commissioned by the Howard government laid the basis for billions of dollars of callous cuts in social spending. It also called for a wholesale reorganisation of state and commonwealth roles, with family services going entirely to the states, along with sole responsibility for school education and health spending.

In particular, it provided a blueprint for the privatisation by stealth of Medicare, public hospitals and education. This involved the gradual blurring of the boundaries and differences between public and private and gradually increasing funding to the private sector so that private and public schools were funded on the same basis, and likewise public and private hospitals received similar assistance.

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Towards a more democratic voting system

When Britain colonised the Australian continent, it dispossessed the Aboriginal people of their land and even denied their existence. It also exploited convict labour and, subsequently, the “free” settlers and working people, in the interests of British capital. For more than two centuries, the Australian people have struggled on many issues and won valuable reforms.

The struggles included campaigns for democratic rights and the right to vote, the Eureka Stockade of 1854 with its demands for “manhood suffrage”, the “abolition of the property qualification for members of the Legislative Assembly” and other objectives. Women won the vote towards the end of the 19th century. All this came about before Federation.

The establishment of a federal government was also a democratic struggle for nationhood against British colonialism. As far as elections are concerned, other reforms are needed which can bring about a more democratic electoral system.

Parliament and parliamentary campaigns have an important place in the whole process of the struggle to advance the interests of the people – provided that parliamentary activity is combined with vigorous struggle by the people outside parliament.

The system in which government is alternately shared between the Liberal National Coalition and the Labor Party obscures and protects the dictatorship of capital over our economic and political life.

In a changing society, opportunity must be given for new or changing political trends to have a legitimate place in the political life of the country in order to reflect people’s desires for change. That desire for change has been reflected in the increased vote for the Greens and swing away from Labor and support for independents.

In the case of the 2013 federal elections much of the anti-Labor vote flowed not towards the Coalition but to an array of right wing and nationalist parties. More than one in five of all votes, a record high, was cast for one of the minor parties.

In terms of the current voting system, if Liberal and Labor both outpoll the Greens or another party or candidate, that third party cannot be elected. For example, in the 2010 federal election the Greens, with more than 1.4 million votes, got only one seat (out of 150) in the Lower House. Expressing it in percentage terms, 11.7 percent of the vote delivered less than one percent of seats.

In the Senate the outcome was far more democratic. The greens, with more than 1.5 million votes in 2010 (12.9 percent) won six out of 40 seats (15 percent). The reason for these quite different outcomes in the two Houses is the nature of the voting system for each House.

The Lower House is based on single seat electorates (electoral divisions) and a preferential system where voters rank candidates in order of preference. To win a seat a candidate must gain a majority of votes – either outright or with the allocation of preferences of candidates receiving the lowest votes.

In Senate elections, six seats in each state and two in each of the territories are determined by a preferential-proportional system. Where candidates or parties do not have enough votes to win a seat outright, preferences are then distributed.

This form of representation for the “House of review” dates back to the time of Federation. It was formed to look after the interests of the states, giving each state equal representation, regardless of population.

The following are ideas for reform of the voting system, based on the principles:

- The election of representatives in accordance with the proportion of votes received, that is, proportional representation.
- Preferential voting, which provides for voters to have their priority ranking of candidates recognised and counted, should the voters’ first choice not be elected.
- Compulsory voting at each level of government. Non-compulsory voting helps the conservative forces.

Taking these three principles together would implement a compulsory, proportional, preferential voting system. This system gives the people a wider choice of candidates through multi-member electorates and a choice of local members to whom they can take their concerns.

We invite readers’ comments and suggestions on these proposals.

PRESS FUND

Clive Palmer wants all carbon taxes paid by corporate polluters to be refunded. For its part the Abbott government intends to eliminate the tax and abolish the Climate Change Authority, the Climate Commission, and the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, which is responsible for boosting the development of the renewable energy industry. But Abbott has not even appointed a designated science minister! We intend to cover the coalition’s move to cripple renewable energy production and impede the activities of any organisation that opposes the operations of the fossil fuel industries. However, we need your Press Fund contributions to help cover our production costs, so send in something for the next issue please, if you possibly can. Many thanks to this week’s supporters, as follows:

MH \$100, Mark Mannion \$5, “Round Figure” \$15
 This week’s total: \$120 Progressive total: \$6,020

Congress Appeal

The Communist Party of Australia is holding its 12th National Congress on October 4-7, with 70 or so delegates coming from around Australia. The Party has launched a Special Appeal to help defray the costs involved, including travel for interstate delegates. The opening of the Congress is on Friday October 4, and all *Guardian* readers are invited to attend. See page 6 for details.

“Sixty years of membership of the Party deserves at least \$60 to the Congress Fund”, writes Ina Heidtman in a note alongside her contribution, as she wishes the appeal well. We have set a target of \$10,000 and urge

all *Guardian* readers and CPA members and supporters to make a contribution. Our warmest thanks to Ina and all the other contributors for their generous contributions which have raised our first \$1,000.

Angelo Attard \$30, Ray & Fleur Ellis \$50, Ina Heidtman \$60, J Kiek \$20, Fred Rouady \$100, Barry Corbett \$10, Bob & Joy Brown \$250, T Markou \$50, Peter Andrews \$10, S C \$50, Stratos (Steve), Xanthoula & Joanna \$100, MH \$250, NH \$20.

Total: \$1,000.00



12th CPA Congress \$10,000 Financial Appeal

I, (Name)

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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:

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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

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Medicare would be gradually transformed to cover basic services and payments administered through private health insurance funds. Patients could join a private health insurance fund and receive refunds or be bulk-billed as they are now for basic services. If they wanted cover for additional tests or medial services or gap payments, they could take out additional insurance. Means testing for basic cover was also a consideration.

Australia is headed for the US model. Just how quickly depends on two factors, the political courage as referred to by Uren and the extent that mass opposition can be built to save Medicare.

Likewise with public hospitals; free public care is under threat. Already public hospitals are encouraging patients with private health insurance to “go private” in public hospitals.

The Gonski reforms which involve the winding back of education departments and giving state schools greater autonomy are also part of this process.

Uren has more advice for the government and those carrying out the audit. He identifies big ticket items such as Medicare, payments to states for hospitals, education age pensions and other social welfare payments and points to “spiralling” costs as an argument for massive cuts.

Newman audit

Queensland Liberal National Party Premier Campbell Newman further developed Howard’s approach. His “independent” audit team was led by former Liberal Party Treasurer Peter Costello.

Within months of taking office, 4,500 jobs were cut from the public service and the number climbed to 14,000 when the September budget was released in 2012. Costello’s audit

recommended 20,000 public sector jobs should go.

According to Costello the public service has become “a high cost provider of services over the past five years” and the state cannot afford to continue business as usual. The commission recommended that the government “review all current service delivery with a view to adopting higher productivity mechanisms, almost certainly with a greater reliance on private sector delivery”.

That is exactly what Abbott aims to do with his “nothing will be excluded” inquisition of the public sector.

Abbott inquisition

There are the same calls for a complete reorganisation of state and federal responsibilities as in the Howard audit, with the federal government handing over more responsibilities to the states. The unfinished business of the Howard audit is still on the Coalition agenda.

Massive cuts to the federal public service and its agencies along with the transfer of more responsibilities for funding to the states provides the excuse for the GST to be increased to 15 or 20 percent to provide the revenue states then require.

At the same time, remaining commonwealth functions will be contracted out to the private sector or just slashed. A great deal of policy development and drafting of legislation is already being done by the private sector. Other areas such as the management of NewStart and other welfare programs will increasingly be carried out by the private or philanthropic sectors. The loss of 12,000 public sector jobs is only the start of a program of privatisation of government.

Military spending and other intelligence and policy operations will be largely quarantined from cuts.

One of the aims of scorched earth

budget cuts is to reduce company and higher marginal tax rates to 25 percent and later to 20 percent. The burden of taxation will be shifted to the flat, regressive GST which leaves those on lower incomes paying a far larger percentage of their income in taxation.

Costello’s calls for “higher productivity mechanisms” in the public sector are also on the federal agenda. It is one thing to increase productivity in the mining sector through such means technology, robots and driverless trains but when it comes to human services it is quite different.

It means putting lives at risk, leaving vulnerable children at risk, the aged not receiving home visits they need, a decline in access to and quality of services. Once cut or contracted out to the less efficient and more expensive private sector, services will decline even further. Basic services will increasingly depend on ability to pay.

Environmental regulations will be “streamlined”, developers and mining corporations will have a free-hand to destroy national parks, wetlands, wilderness areas and plunder Indigenous and farming lands.

Existing environmental programs will be slashed, research and development grants will be redirected to corporate interests, including the production of fossil fuels, uranium mining and other environmentally destructive projects. Climate change will be treated as “crap”, in line with Abbott’s previous utterance, and the narrow short-term interests of his corporate mates prevail.

Big business and other reactionary political forces look set to dominate the parliament but the future will ultimately be shaped in our communities and workplaces. As the *Guardian* article quoted earlier pointed out, “effective resistance will take leadership, unity and a lot of work,” and there is no time to waste in commencing that process. ✪

"Apologise and withdraw comments"

The Australian and New Zealand College of Notaries

Open letter to Barry O'Farrell

Dear Premier,

Re: Peter Phelps' offensive speech in Parliament on 11 September 2013

As you are aware, there are more than 45,000 Chileans living in NSW. I am one of them. September 11 represents a day of mourning for Chileans around the world, but also for many Australians who believe in the respect for human rights and democratic institutions. September 11 marks the day on which the democratically elected government of President Salvador Allende was overthrown in a bloody coup d'état led by convicted criminal, General Augusto Pinochet. He authorised the bombing of the government palace La Moneda and killed many of the civilians who were accompanying President Allende at the time. Dr Allende committed suicide.

Your Whip, Mr Phelps, an officer who is invested with ensuring your party members abide by laws, has chosen this very occasion, September 11, to embarrass your government once more and to defy history by openly twisting and misrepresenting the barbaric actions of General Pinochet in Chile, calling him a "hero" in State Parliament. Mr Phelps' speech has caused deep hurt in the hearts of the thousands of Chileans who suffered terrible atrocities during Pinochet's regime, and reside in this community. Mr Phelps' actions are unforgivable. By praising an assassin, he has caused many of my fellow Chileans to relive those terrible days.

Mr Phelps has sought to abuse his parliamentary immunity to excuse the unforgivable actions of Pinochet and his cohorts in Chile. This cannot be permitted. Please remember that the atrocities of Pinochet's regime extended not only to Chile but to other countries (for example, the killing of

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Orlando Letelier, in Washington, on US soil, using a car bomb which also killed a US citizen and maimed another).

I am repulsed by Mr Phelps' comment that "We have to accept that sometimes it is necessary to do bad things to prevent terrible things from happening". I ask you Premier, whether you accept that the following "bad things", which were a daily occurrence during Pinochet's regime, must be done to any human being:

- rape of men and women, often in front of their children;
- burning the body of women;
- electric shock, burning people's bodies;
- killing children, kidnapping children and on occasions raising them with other families, often related to those who had killed their parents;
- slicing prisoners with machetes before being shot;
- not returning the body of many Chileans assassinated by the dictatorship to their families for proper burial;
- the development and use of chemical weapons on the civil population;
- the documented murder of several thousand Chileans and some citizens of other countries;
- the documented torture and disappearance of over 30,000 men, women and children for political reasons, including several hundred military officers who were, according to Pinochet, "too lenient" with prisoners or who attempted to alert the Chilean population to the coup d'état prior to it occurring.

Premier O'Farrell; no one who respects the rule of law can condone the above crimes as being "necessary".

I am disgusted by Mr Phelps calling Pinochet "a morally courageous man". Does Mr Phelps not know that



O'Farrell, your Whip, Phelps, has chosen September 11, to defy history by openly twisting and misrepresenting the barbaric actions of General Pinochet in Chile, calling him a "hero" in State Parliament.

Pinochet was charged and prosecuted with the following, amongst other crimes?

- Genocide, by Spanish courts,
- Murder, by Chilean courts, personally implicated in more than 300 cases of assassination, including those by the Caravan of Death, a Chilean Army death squad appointed by Pinochet which flew by helicopters from south to north of Chile between 30 September and 22 October 1973 and which personally executed 97 civilians.

Premier, most of the Chileans

killed by the Caravan of Death squad had voluntarily heeded the call of the military Junta and were in secured military custody, posing no threat and having no history of violence. The aim Premier was to terrorise the Chilean population into submission. Mr Phelps' speech condones those barbaric and terrifying actions.

Premier, Pinochet was not courageous; he was a coward, hiding behind some pretend illness to avoid the above trials being brought to an end. Pinochet was also a cheap criminal; he and his family were found guilty of large scale plunder of the Chilean treasury, of embezzling government funds, of receiving millions of dollars in bribes, of passport forgery, of receiving commissions for the sale of arms including to the UK and of having secret bank accounts in the United States and island havens for over 27 million dollars.

Mr Phelps wrongly and intentionally calls President Allende a communist. President Allende, who was also a practicing doctor, was a socialist and a deep democrat, not a communist. A simple reading of history would clarify this fact. I ask you Premier, are the political views of a person sufficient ground to kill them?

According to Mr Phelps, we must not place "one's own sensibilities before the requirements of survival". Premier; there was no civil war in Chile in September 1973 and survival was not an issue. There was a massacre by the military, intended to cause fear and paralysing terror and Chileans lived under that terror for 17 years. By condoning Pinochet's brutality and attempting to elevate him to the stature of a hero, Mr Phelps excuses those actions.

On behalf of the thousands of Chileans in NSW who carry the scars of those horrifying times on their bodies and their souls, some of which continue to receive medical and psychological treatment in NSW as a result of those horrifying days, I demand that Mr Phelps be immediately removed from his post. He is not worthy of representing the people of NSW. He must immediately apologise and withdraw his inappropriate comments. This is the minimum that must be done to show that your government, Premier, will not accept any attempt to glorify murder.

Yours faithfully,

Adriana Navarro,
Lawyer and notary

[Slightly abridged] ✪

Pete's Corner



DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Yellow Ribbons in Solidarity

Australia Cuban Friendship Society (ACFS) members in Perth picketed the US consulate on September 12, wearing yellow ribbons in solidarity with the call for the return home of the Cuban Five who have been held for 15 years in US prisons. Members expressed their outrage at the disgrace of the unjust incarceration.

The Cuban Five are five Political Prisoners incarcerated for trying to avert terrorist attacks organised by right-wing Cuban-Americans based in Miami against their homeland, Cuba. Gerardo Hernandez, Antonio Guerrero, Ramon Labañino, Fernando

Gonzalez and René Gonzalez were arrested on September 12, 1998 in Miami.

For 15 years, the Cuban Five have suffered physical and psychological torture! They have been denied visitation rights of friends and family. They have endured solitary confinement and mistreatment and often been hindered in accessing their legal counsel!

ACFS members in Perth joined thousands of others globally to call on the Obama administration to end the injustice now. Members shared leaflets about the Five with people passing calling on them to help fight the media blackout in the US

by posting the leaflet to friends and relatives in the US.

One of the Five, Rene Gonzalez, who completed his sentence but remained in the US because of an unjust order to serve three year probation in the US has finally returned to Cuba but says he will never truly be free until he is joined there by his four brothers.

The ACFS called on the Obama administration to immediately release the Five and allow them to return home to Cuba. The protest was closely monitored by consulate and state security personnel. ✪



Tiles of Solidarity

On Saturday September 14, the Australia-Cuba Friendship Society (ACFS) Perth unveiled the Tiles of Solidarity, a monument to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the unjust incarceration of the Cuban Five.

Under inclement weather conditions, friends in solidarity with the Cuban Five gathered at Solidarity Park in West Perth to unveil five Tiles of Solidarity. Solidarity Park has a long history for workers in Western Australia. The public land in front of the Western Australian Parliament was claimed by workers as a Workers' Embassy and five trade unionists involved in the occupation to claim the land were arrested.

The tiles have been placed on the back of the "Fountain of Youth" for permanent homage to the struggle of five Cuban men unjustly held in US prisons since 1998.

Joe MacDonald, national president of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, Construction Division, unveiled the five ceramic tiles given to his union by the Cuban Construction Union in 2009. For years both the CFMEU and the ACFS searched for a home for the ceramic tiles featuring the faces of the Cuban Five. "Solidarity Park" that represents the unity in struggle of the trade union movement in Western Australia was chosen for this permanent homage to the Cuban Five.

At great risk to themselves the Cuban Five are workers whose job was to monitor criminals in anti-Cuban terrorist organisations operating out of Miami;



groups that have been operating from US soil since 1959 and responsible for the deaths of over 3,400 people. The fight of the Cuban Five against terrorism in defence of their homeland made them victims of the US imperial policies on Cuba.

The only path to their freedom is through a people's movement and mobilising efforts that will free the Five Cuban heroes. Workers and their unions around the world can play an important role in this struggle.

"Tie a Yellow Ribbon" was played and yellow ribbons featured at the event to honour the call from Rene Gonzalez to use the ribbons that resonate for the average person in the US as a way to express longing for soldiers away at war and other absent loved ones. ✪

Meeting for Freedom of the Cuban Five

Keith Headland

HAVANA: An International Meeting For The Freedom Of The Five was held at the Hotel Nacional in Havana with the theme "15 Years, Enough", to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the arrest of The Cuban Five and demand their release.

Over 100 delegates from 33 countries took part in the event, held September 11-14.

Rene Gonzalez and members of the families of the Five have been taking part, along with many public figures, both Cuban and from other countries.

An exhibition of paintings by Antonio Guerrero was organised and held in the Jose Marti memorial in the Plaza.

The delegates went to a large spectacular musical event in the Karl Marx Theatre, to commemorate this anniversary, which was attended by Raul Castro and a number of government officials, where a number of well known artists performed, including Silvio Rodriguez, Danny



Keith Headland, Rene and his wife Olga.

Rivera, Victor Heredia, Ernesto and David Blanco.

Cubans responded to the call from Rene to wear a yellow ribbon on September 12, publicising it with the song "Tie A Yellow Ribbon Round The Old Oak Tree."

Yellow clothes were common in the street and yellow ribbons were hanging from cars, busses, apartments, balconies, trees, lamp posts, shops and businesses all over Havana.

The Hotel Nacional and grounds were also decorated with yellow. ✪

Great Barrier Reef

Future in hands of new parliament

We don't know how our new government will handle their custodianship of this global treasure ... but what we do know is that we are a strong and resilient movement of people who will stand up for the Reef when it counts most.

Thank you for all your hard work says Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) Great Barrier Reef campaign director Felicity Wishart. "What you have achieved is extraordinary:

"You've sent thousands of emails to candidates in electorates all across Australia asking them to sign the Reef Pledge for stronger protection of the Reef."

People also organised friends and colleagues to visit their local candidates with a face-to-face call to action. Also 3,500 plus supporters marched through Brisbane streets in the largest environmental rally the city had seen in recent years.

"Our community secured a commitment from the Greens to support a ban on dumping dredge spoils in the Reef's World Heritage waters."

Both the Coalition and Labor parties committed more funds to improving water quality from farm runoff, tackling outbreaks of Crown of Thorns starfish and actions to better protect turtles and dugongs.

"We got their attention and they were forced to respond.

"Together, we are a formidable force of thousands with proven determination and passion to fight for the Reef. The new government may think they have done enough, but they will need to do a lot, lot more.

"They can ignore the fact that dredging and dumping in the Reef's waters and more shipping is bad news for water quality and the Reef, but only if we let them.

"We've come this far, but the Fight for the Reef is far from over – in many ways, it's only just begun.

"I look forward to having you beside me in the battle ahead."

Meanwhile, the strong growth in interstate visitors to Queensland revealed in the National Visitor

Survey released last week can only be maintained or grow if the state's premier natural attraction is protected, according to the AMCS.

The Great Barrier Reef sustains a \$6 billion tourism industry and more than 60,000 local tourism jobs. But how many interstate or international visitors will travel to see a natural wonder damaged or ruined by port development, dredging, dumping or shipping, asks Felicity Wishart.

"The National Visitor Survey tells us more holidaymakers than ever from across Australia are heading north, with some of the strongest visitation growth in Reef communities such as the Tropical North," Ms Wishart said.

"These tourists and others from across the world come to experience and photograph coral and marine wildlife like turtles and reef fish, not port developments and dredge plumes.

"The Queensland Tourism Industry Council voiced its concern about the impact of coal port growth and increased chemical runoff on the health of the Reef and tourism jobs only last week.

"It is not alone. The World Heritage Committee, local communities, scientists and thousands of people around the world want more done to protect the Reef from the impacts of industrialisation.

"In about nine months the World Heritage Committee will assess whether the Great Barrier Reef will be listed as 'in danger' due to inadequate government protection, which would have dire consequences for the tourism industry that relies on it.

"The protection of the Great Barrier Reef can help strengthen local communities and the economy.

"It needs leaders in both the Queensland and Australian government who will recognise and support that potential; and reject plans for mega ports, dredging, dumping and increased shipping," Ms Wishart said.

www.FightfortheReef.org.au ✪

Calls for return of repressive industrial relations laws

Peter Mac

As the new government ruled by Tony Abbott takes over, a clear indication of the direction in which industrial relations is headed is given by a spate of pre-election demands by business leaders.

One of these was a call to return to the industrial "accord" of the Hawke era, which failed when it became painfully clear that the "reforms" it advocated favoured employers, who wanted unions to abandon long-held gains in working conditions, pay and industrial rights.

Written by Geoff Allen, founding chief executive of the Business Council of Australia, it declared that "Australia currently has little economic and productivity reform momentum. ... due in part ... to a lack of political commitment to seriously addressing a critical but challenging long-term reform agenda."

Another declaration in a similar vein was a recent editorial in *The Financial Review* entitled: "Needed: A new culture of work", which noted that "Labor's vision of industrial relations is based on the assumption of conflict between capital and labour."

The editorial began by claiming that the "reforms" it had in mind offer workers a really good deal. It stated that "... less intrusive workplace regulation could encourage a high performance work culture that naturally generates good jobs with good pay and conditions – because that is good for productivity."

Amazingly, at one point it claimed that "In a modern information age economy ... the old working class has become independent contractors owning the means of production through their superannuation funds".

Apart from the bleeding-obvious points that not all the workers have become independent contractors, and that involvement in a superannuation scheme does not result in a worker taking over the means of production from its corporate owners, the essential message of this editorial is that the government should hasten to reintroduce industrial relations "reforms", and that workers should welcome the change.

Attempting to turn reality on its head, these media statements ignore the fact that the value of commodities which is realised in the market is actually created by the work of employees, and that in order to maximise its profits any capitalist business must minimise the portion of this value which it returns to the worker as wages, and maximise the portion it retains for itself. That's the essence

of the "conflict between capital and labour" which characterises all capitalist relations.

And of course the writers ignore the fact that capitalism needs the working class, but the working class does not need capitalism.

The real agenda

The editorial in the *Financial Review* was highly significant, because after its apparently mentally-disordered analysis of what it saw as Australia's new economic formation, it suddenly launched a crystal-clear attack on award rates of pay and conditions, and endorsed the overturning of the "antiquated grid of prescriptive industrial awards", which it said should have been "allowed to wither on the vine".

It declared: "Because the system insists on preserving workers' 'hard-won gains' it builds in punishingly high penalty pay rates that reflect the nine-to-five Australian society of decades ago. Because it allows militant unions to monopolise the supply of labour, it imposes high costs that threaten the expansion of our massive liquefied natural gas projects ..."

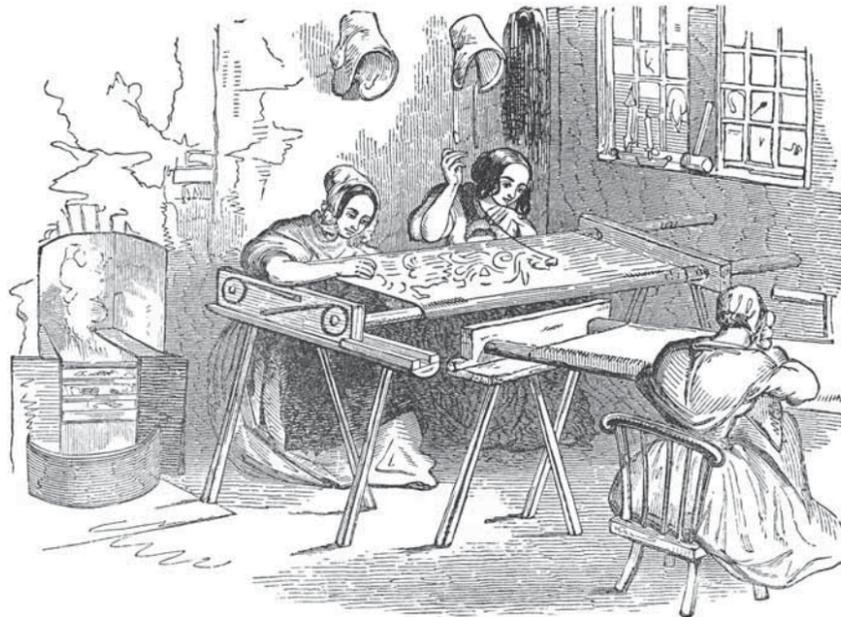
It described, with approval, the proposed changes to industrial relations in the wake of the Abbott government's election, noting: "The Australian Building and Construction Commission ... will be revived. Ms Gillard's broken promise not to give militant union officials the right to enter private businesses will be corrected. Union blackmail over greenfield sites will be resisted. And unions will have less scope to restrict individual flexibility clauses within enterprise agreements."

But apparently that's not enough. The editorial then complains: "But there will be no return to individual contracts. And the Coalition even talks about giving the Fair Work Commission more powers."

They needn't worry. The Coalition team led by Abbott is certain to attempt to revive all the repressive industrial arrangements introduced by the Howard government, if necessary with different titles and superficially different methods of operation.

The *Financial Review's* editorial is a clear indication of what Australian workers are likely to face under the Abbott regime i.e. productivity bargaining, a ban on strikes before bargaining commences, individual employment contracts, the abolition of award rates of pay and conditions, and a ban on union officials' visits to worksites and union involvement in contract negotiations.

They also face a revival of the



Howard government's infamous industrial institutions, including its former attack dog, the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC), which had been established in breach of Australia's treaty obligations, according to the International Labour Organisation.

The coalition has vowed to reinstate the Commission within 100 days of taking power. According to Liberal workplace policy, the ABCC's role would extend to offshore construction sites, and (despite its title) its ambit would cover the activities of the Maritime Union of Australia, which was involved in the long and bitter Patrick Stevedoring dispute under the Howard regime.

The government would also establish a Registered Organisations Commission, which would police the activities of unions (and, supposedly, employer organisations) with the power to impose penalties similar to those applicable to corporate directors who break the law.

The Fair Work Commission would be retained for the moment, but would be prevented from hearing claims of bullying unless they had been investigated by other bodies, and the Fair Work ombudsman would be allowed to advise small businesses as well as employees.

There would be a review of workplace laws by the Productivity Commission, and the government would seek to introduce further changes to industrial law after the next election.

It seems that it's time for Australian workers to don their industrial battle armour once again. ☘

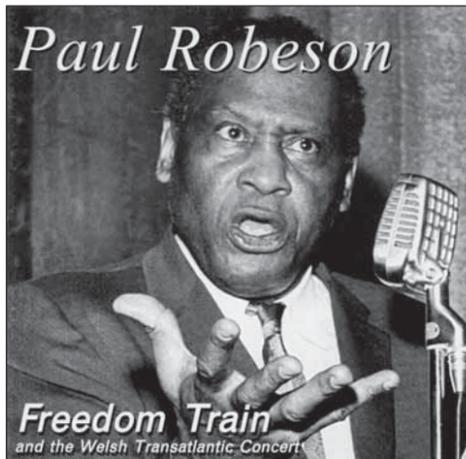


It has been reported that Saudi Arabia is offering a release to more than 1,000 prisoners on death row in that country if they agree to be trained and then sent to fight in Syria. Saudi Arabia is bankrolling the terrorists and it is just the latest move to support them. It seems that prisoners are becoming a useful commodity which can be bought and sold. In Texas the authorities allow non-violent prisoners to buy their way out of prison or not even enter prison as a new source of revenue. This is something which looks very attractive to the richest woman in Australia – Gina Rinehart – and she would like to see it implemented in Australia as the country needs "more workers and taxpayers".

Almost 130 people have been evicted from public housing in WA under the Barnett government's three-strike rule. The latest case was of a woman who is terminally ill with breast cancer which spread to her brain. Shelter WA, a research and lobby group, argues that the three-strike rule discriminates by applying standards and scrutiny to public housing tenants which are not applied to people in private rental accommodation. The department's own definition of minor disruptive behaviour, which counted as a strike, was "activities that could reasonably be expected to occur on occasion in an ordinary suburban household, but which cause a nuisance to neighbours," pointed out Shelter WA's executive director.

NSW Family and Community Services Minister Pru Goward is in trouble. The minister has been accused of misleading the Parliament over the number of caseworkers in NSW. After consistently telling Parliament there were more than 2,000 caseworkers, a report by Ernst and Young revealed that the number was fewer by about 300.

The UN food agency, the Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), revealed in its latest report that one third of world food production is wasted. It costs the global economy around \$A810 billion a year. High-income countries waste food during the consumption phase, while developing countries are losing food during production, the FAO said. Produced but uneaten food occupies 30 percent of the world's farmland, the report says. "Food wastage reduction would not only avoid pressure on scarce natural resources but also decrease the need to raise food production" to meet the demands of a fast-growing world population, it said. Achim Steiner, head of the United Nation's Environment Program said: "This is a big wake up call. We may not even have captured many of the more indirect impacts of food waste... and the costs which will be borne by our children and their grandchildren".



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How the war on piracy became big business

Hazel Healy

On a blustery day last May, a sailor stands on the deck of HMS *Illustrious*, docked on the River Thames. Almost a year has passed since the last major hijacking by Somali pirates. Their parting-shot prize, the crude-oil tanker *MV Smyrni*, fetched a record-breaking ransom of US\$13.5 million.

Recalling his own counter-piracy voyage to the Gulf of Aden, the sailor confides it was "a bit of a wild goose chase". He never in fact saw any pirates.

Below deck, through a warren of ladders, oval doors and acronyms, the pirate nemesis "maritime security" sector is gathered for a seminar. Gavin Simmons, from the UK Chamber of Shipping, does not doubt the value of counter-piracy missions to the Gulf of Aden: "Shipping was important in the days of free trade and Empire and it's equally important today," he says, and praises the navy's "defence of the realm". Warships are credited, in part, with keeping Somali buccaneers at bay. Pirate attacks off the Gulf of Aden have fallen to just six in the first six months of 2013.

But this outlay of military might has engendered its own set of troubles on the high seas, which are now awash with armed men. A pumped private security industry is gearing up for new opportunities off the west coast of Africa.

Return of the buccaneers

Piracy plagued the world's oceans for thousands of years right through to the mid-19th century. It re-emerged in the 1990s, first with attacks in the Malacca Straits in Southeast Asia, and later exploded off the coasts of Africa.

The sheer volume of Somali pirate hijackings grabbed the world's attention. In 2011, the International Maritime Organisation registered an average of around one hijacking per week. They didn't come to steal but to extort – holding some 3,700 crew and 149 boats to ransom, they scooped a total of US\$385 million between 2005 and 2012.

The pirates spoke of fighting back at foreign trawlers that trashed their lobster breeding grounds, and of the damage caused by hazardous waste dumped on their shores. Early pirates were indeed aggrieved fishers, but the high-stakes lark of "taxing" ships tapped into a rich seam. Pirates had struck an artery of global capitalism.

Perched at the exit to the Suez Canal, in the Somali region of Puntland, the pirates soon ranged from the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea, and beyond to the southern coast of India. They were ruthless and indiscriminate. UN advisor Jack Lang went so far as to warn they were becoming the "Masters" of the Indian Ocean. They seized container ships, vast supertankers loaded with crude oil, and even emergency relief for the starving. Pirate operations were run on shareholder lines, with investors keeping half the takings, while the pirate rank-and-file earned

middling amounts that were soon leeches by armies of destitute relatives.

Not so much swashbuckling adventure then, as a high-risk survival strategy, among a pretty dismal set of options in stateless Somalia.

Naval heavy hand

World powers hit back with military surveillance, deterrence and criminal prosecutions.

Since 2008, state-of-the-art warships, reaper drones and Special Forces have patrolled the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. NATO, the EU and a US-led task force deployed forces alongside national flotillas from 22 countries, including Pakistan, Iran and China. The UN Security Council authorised attacks at sea, from the air and on land.

Shipping and oil companies lobbied hard for protection. But counter-piracy also chimed with navies seeking a *raison d'être* in an age of government spending cuts. It also gave nations an opportunity to project national and regional power. The Gulf of Aden is a fine place for a warship: the gateway to Asia, and a chokepoint for energy with 3.4 million barrels of oil per day passing through.

Despite the harrowing tales of captured crew – 50 of whom remain in pirate hands – world powers are not doing this for the Filipinos, who make up the majority of seafarers worldwide.

Some 98 percent of hostage victims are from the Majority World, left vulnerable by a cut-throat, globalised shipping business running skeletal crews, who are overstretched and too tired to stand careful guard.

Ironically, the naval operations have made this a more deadly business. Since 2008, the number of hostage deaths has actually risen. They die in firefights and rescue attempts. Jumpy Somali pirates got nastier, and reports of torture and killings increased.

Piracy is a brutal business. But trigger-happy navies have also clocked up a body count. While some pirates die in hostage rescues – the South Korean navy shot eight pirates storming a boat last January, while the Dutch and US navies killed another five – there are also allegations of deliberate murders. The Russian navy, for one, is said to have sent 10 pirate prisoners to their deaths.

Innocent fishers are also dying. The Indian navy wiped out the entire 15-person crew of a Thai fishing vessel in 2008. Since then, at least eight fishers from India and Yemen have died at the hands of soldiers or private guards.

The prosecution of pirates has proved challenging, though over 1,100 are now detained in prisons worldwide. But justice for deaths at the hands of the military is even harder to secure. The only attempt to date is in India, where two Italian marines deployed on a tanker are awaiting trial after killing two fishers last year.

After 2008, pirates simply pushed further out into the Indian Ocean using mother ships. One observer compared it to having "a police car trying to patrol an area the size of France".

Collateral profits

Back in London, new industries were springing into life. Kidnap and ransom insurance ballooned into a US\$250-million business from a standing start; shippers spent up to US\$1.7 billion in 2012 on private armed guards. Soon ransoms accounted for just one percent of direct costs incurred by piracy, despite average ransoms rising to US\$4-5 million.

Ships were encouraged to adopt their own defences by adding razor wire and greased, electrified handrails, measures proven to repel three-quarters of attacks.

But shipping companies wanted more. Private security stepped into the breach. Neptune Maritime Security, for example, offers its battle-hardened armed personnel as a pirate-deterrent for shippers with the line "our guards know when NOT to fire!" It is part of the booming, sometimes over-zealous, private maritime security industry that has blossomed in the Gulf of Aden over the last two years.

Governments used not to be keen on lethal force being deployed on commercial boats. But, despite worries about "cowboy outfits", countries such as Britain, the US and Italy have lifted bans on armed guards aboard vessels that fly their flag, while they traverse distant zones like the Red Sea.

Around 300 Private Maritime Security Companies (PMSCs) – at least 50 percent of which are British and dominated by ex-service personnel – offer advice and guards in the Gulf of Aden. Firms can expect to take home around US\$52 million per month.

Arms embargo violations

For shippers, a US\$75,000 outlay on private security is worth paying to avoid lengthy hijackings and delays. The cost is generally passed on to clients, and then ultimately to consumers.

But private security presents ethical quandaries. As one piracy expert recounts, "you hear reports of skiffs turned over, bodies full of bullet holes".

Contractors operate in an accountability vacuum. No global treaties cover weapons fire from commercial ships. Technically, a vessel is subject to the laws of its flag state – the country where it is registered – but incidents receive minimal investigation, according to the International Maritime Organisation. It has led some to speculate that it is only a matter of time before Somalia gets its own "Blackwater moment", in reference to the occasion when private contractors for the US military killed 17 Iraqi civilians.

Campaigners criticise voluntary codes of conduct for private security contractors as insufficient. They accuse Britain in particular of ushering in a self-policing model for its bevy of firms, one that will not protect human rights.

PMSCs are posing new challenges for arms control. "We are seeing a big increase in UK arms exports of things like assault rifles, body



armour and pistols to small countries in the Indian Ocean – we don't know who these firms are or who controls them," says Kaye Stearman at Campaign Against Arms Trade.

There are now some 18 floating armouries bobbing around in the Red Sea, Gulf of Oman and Mozambique Channel. These privately owned ships – old tugs, or research vessels – rent out weapons outside territorial waters so as to sidestep weapons regulations.

Observers worry that opportunities for private actors to obtain military force are higher than ever. "Now that the heyday of piracy is over," asks one UN investigator, "what will happen to this huge capacity that has been built up?"

Special Marine Services, a British anti-piracy outfit, has already branched out on to land to train and equip armed forces in the autonomous Somali region of Galmudug. The UN has recently pulled it up for violating Somalia's small arms embargo.

The same PMSCs are now looking to establish a foothold in the troubled Niger Delta.

West Africa hotspot?

The Gulf of Guinea, which stretches from Senegal down to Angola, has always been an unruly coastline, with pirate attacks happening since the 1970s. But lately, oil theft and robbery have spread out of Nigeria into neighbouring waters, and further out to sea.

Heavily armed militants seize tankers for long enough to siphon off their oil for resale. Last year's oil spoils came to US\$42 million. With four hijackings so far this year and 31 attacks, the intensity is far lower than in the Gulf of Aden when piracy was at its height. But with West African oil now a key energy source – Nigeria alone could supply a quarter of US oil needs by 2015 – it too has become an international concern.

As in Somalia, piracy in Nigeria also grew out of a resource-related rebellion by Niger Delta communities, that later took on a criminal hue.

But, unlike Somalia, the countries around the Gulf of Guinea are functioning nation-states. And Nigeria, for one, is not keen to see foreign armed actors in its territorial waters. International navies, in this case, are limiting themselves to capacity building.

Currently, foreign PMSCs are banned in territorial waters. But they are pushing for a bigger role. Foreign firms already provide unarmed security advisers, equipment, boats and intelligence and are "preparing to deploy" floating armouries. An estimated US\$150 million was spent on private security in the Gulf of Guinea in 2012.

"This is a business that needs a market," reflects social anthropologist and conflict specialist Axel Klein. "I think there has been a professionalisation of anti-piracy measures that has developed its own momentum and material interest, and needs new threats to counter."

Protecting fisheries

This militarised response is unsafe, unsustainable and self-perpetuating. Money should be redirected towards a more holistic, sustainable

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Warning on climate change

Bjorn Carey

Not only is the planet undergoing one of the largest climate changes in the past 65 million years, Stanford climate scientists Noah Diffenbaugh and Chris Field report that it's on pace to occur at a rate 10 times faster than any change in that period. Without intervention, this extreme pace could lead to a 5-6 degree Celsius spike in annual temperatures by the end of the century.

The planet is undergoing one of the largest changes in climate since the dinosaurs went extinct. But what might be even more troubling for humans, plants and animals, is the speed of the change. Stanford climate scientists warn that the likely rate of change over the next century will be at least 10 times quicker than any climate shift in the past 65 million years.

If the trend continues at its current rapid pace, it will place significant stress on terrestrial ecosystems around the world, and many species will need to make behavioural, evolutionary or geographic adaptations to survive.

Although some of the changes the planet will experience in the next few decades are already "baked into the system", how different the climate looks at the end of the 21st century will depend largely on how humans respond.

The findings come from a review of climate research by Noah Diffenbaugh, an associate professor of environmental Earth system science, and Chris Field, a professor of biology and of environmental Earth system science and the director of the Department of Global Ecology at the Carnegie Institution. The work is part of a special report on climate change in the current issue of *Science*.

Diffenbaugh and Field, both senior fellows at the Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment, conducted the targeted but broad review of scientific literature on aspects of climate change that can affect ecosystems, and investigated how recent observations and projections for the next century compare to past events in Earth's history.

For instance, the planet experienced a five degree Celsius hike in temperature 20,000 years ago, as Earth emerged from the last ice age. This is a change comparable to the high-end of the projections for warming over the 20th and 21st centuries.

The geologic record shows that, 20,000 years ago, as the ice sheet that covered much of North America receded northward, plants and animals recolonised areas that had been under ice. As the climate continued to warm, those plants and animals moved northward, to cooler climates.

"We know from past changes that ecosystems have responded to a few degrees of global temperature change over thousands of years," said Diffenbaugh. "But the unprecedented trajectory that we're on now is forcing that change to occur over decades. That's orders of magnitude faster, and we're already seeing that some species are challenged by that rate of change."

Some of the strongest evidence for how the global climate system responds to high levels of carbon dioxide comes from paleoclimate studies. Fifty-five million years ago, carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was elevated to a level comparable to today. The Arctic Ocean did not have ice in the summer, and nearby land was warm enough to support alligators and palm trees.

"There are two key differences for ecosystems in the coming decades compared with the geologic past," Diffenbaugh said. "One is the rapid pace of modern climate change. The other is that today there are

multiple human stressors that were not present 55 million years ago, such as urbanisation and air and water pollution."

Record-setting heat

Diffenbaugh and Field also reviewed results from two-dozen climate models to describe possible climate outcomes from present day to the end of the century. In general, extreme weather events, such as heat waves and heavy rainfall, are expected to become more severe and more frequent.

For example, the researchers note that, with continued emissions of greenhouse gases at the high end of the scenarios, annual temperatures over North America, Europe and East Asia will increase 2-4 degrees C by 2046-2065. With that amount of warming, the hottest summer of the last 20 years is expected to occur every other year, or even more frequently.

By the end of the century, should the current emissions of greenhouse gases remain unchecked, temperatures over the northern hemisphere will tip 5-6 degrees C warmer than today's averages. In this case, the hottest summer of the last 20 years becomes the new annual norm.

"It's not easy to intuit the exact impact from annual temperatures warming by 6 C," Diffenbaugh said. "But this would present a novel climate for most land areas. Given the impacts those kinds of seasons currently have on terrestrial forests, agriculture and human health, we'll likely see substantial stress from severely hot conditions."

The scientists also projected the velocity of climate change, defined as the distance per year that species of plants and animals would need to migrate to live in annual temperatures similar to current conditions. Around the world, including much of the United States, species face needing to move toward the poles or higher in the mountains by at least one kilometre per year. Many parts of the world face much larger changes.

The human element

Some climate changes will be unavoidable, because humans have already emitted greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, and the atmosphere and oceans have already been heated.

"There is already some inertia in place," Diffenbaugh said. "If every new power plant or factory in the world produced zero emissions, we'd still see impact from the existing infrastructure, and from gases already released."

The more dramatic changes that could occur by the end of the century, however, are not written in stone. There are many human variables at play that could slow the pace and magnitude of change – or accelerate it.

Consider the 2.5 billion people who lack access to modern energy resources. This energy poverty means they lack fundamental benefits for illumination, cooking and transportation, and they're more susceptible to extreme weather disasters. Increased energy access will improve their quality of life – and in some cases their chances of survival – but will increase global energy consumption and possibly hasten warming.

Diffenbaugh said that the range of climate projections offered in the report can inform decision-makers about the risks that different levels of climate change pose for ecosystems.

"There's no question that a climate in which every summer is hotter than the hottest of the last 20 years poses real risks for ecosystems across the globe," Diffenbaugh said. "However, there are opportunities to decrease those risks, while also ensuring access to the benefits of energy consumption."

Stanford Report 2013 ✦



attack on piracy, which addresses its root causes: poverty and grievance.

Naval assets should be protecting West Africa's rapidly depleting fisheries, not just oil rigs. Illegal Unregulated Unreported (IUU) fishing undermines governance, destroys livelihoods and deepens poverty in coastal communities. The insecurity and conflict that result create a fertile recruiting ground for pirates. Nigeria alone loses US\$60 million of state revenue to IUU "pirate" fishing, every year; in the region as a whole, the losses climb to US\$1.6 billion.

Western nations that import fish need to tighten up by imposing proper checks on the origin of catches and prosecuting offenders.

They should also pull the shipping industry into line, and stop shippers registering with shadowy flag states such as Liberia, in order to dodge labour and environmental regulations.

As journalist William Langewiesche notes, pirate tolls are nothing compared to the taxes that shipping – "not exactly a criminal industry but an anarchic and amoral one" – would have to pay, if law and order prevailed.

If illegal fishing is left unchecked, more piracy fronts may open up. Fishers in Senegal, who have seen catches drop 75 percent in 10 years, warn they will "fight for fish at sea" with guns, if the plunder is not stopped.

With piracy in retreat in Somalia, the foreign trawlers have returned. Indian Ocean fisheries workers are frustrated by naval ships that seek piracy tip-offs but do not take action on illegal fishing.

In the long run

Defending the resources of poor nations and boosting livelihood options are just one part of the solution. International relations scholar Christian Bueger says a "peace-building methodology", which recognises complexity and engages the locals, will be the key to wiping out global piracy in the long run.

Fragile societies can have their own solutions. In Somalia, local umbrage saw pirates expelled from their coastal lairs for bad behaviour. Somali journalist Jamal Osman reports that diaspora uncles berating hostage-takers by mobile phone from London may have had as big an impact on victim's welfare as the World War Three-style flotillas.

We need to think outside the hard-security box. This may include recognising that Nigeria's militant pirates, as unsavoury as they are, are also powerful political players in fragmented states. There may be ways to marry the interests of different stakeholders. Would shippers consider choosing razor wire over armed guards and putting the money thereby saved into a fund for fishermen? Would insurers drop their fees on seeing evidence of good community relations?

A slowly re-emerging trade in spindly lobsters close to Somali shores, for example, needs cold stores, infrastructure and fishing gear, not high-flying Global Hawks droning overhead.

In the long term, counter-piracy will be best served by a development approach, not by exporting our gunslingers.

New Internationalist ✦



Syria deal needs to face down US terror

Finian Cunningham

Russia's diplomatic efforts to avert a potential international conflagration over Syria are to be lauded. But it would be preferable if Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and others in Moscow refrained from referring to US officials as "our American partners." Washington is not a "partner" or "colleague" to anyone who is serious about upholding international law and peace. Its behaviour is that of an outlaw state that needs to be faced down, not pandered to.

Ironically, Washington says that the world needs to take a tough stance towards President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, otherwise other alleged tyrants will be emboldened. The truth is that the world needs to take a tough stand on Washington to curb its predatory aggression that seems to know no bounds.

Lavrov and his American counterpart John Kerry are currently holding talks in Geneva in a bid to come up with a credible formula by which the Syrian government can hand over its stockpile of chemical weapons.

The proposal that Syria submits these weapons to international control was formally announced at the start of the week by Russia's top diplomat.

It was greeted enthusiastically by the Syrian government, which within days signed up to the international Chemical Weapons Convention banning such munitions. US President Barack Obama also made a surprise swerve from his war agenda, disclosing in a televised nation-wide address that he would explore the Russian initiative.

This development appears to provide a welcome diplomatic alternative to the drive for war that the United States has been pushing. The

US threat of military action against Syria escalated dramatically since August 21 following an alleged chemical weapons attack near the Syrian capital, Damascus, in which it appears that several hundred people were killed.

With US warships toting more than 200 cruise missiles mobilised in the East Mediterranean and plans to deploy long-range B-52, B-1 and B-2 fighter bombers, the world was watching the makings of a catastrophic collision, given that any such attack on Syria would inevitably draw in other antagonists, including nuclear-powered Israel and Russia, as well as Iran and America's allies Britain, France and the Persian Gulf monarchies.

Hence, there was palpable international relief when Russia proffered the gambit for Syria to decommission its arsenal of chemical weapons.

The plan, in principle, has been endorsed by European governments, China and Iran, and the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon.

However, the chemical solution, so to speak, is being framed in a manner that does not bode well. It is incumbent on Russia and others to ensure that the US and its allies do not abuse the initiative to create just another lever for their criminal agenda of regime change against the Syrian government.

At the opening of the Geneva meeting between Lavrov and Kerry, the American diplomat displayed his usual arrogance by asserting in the joint press conference that "the Syrian regime" was guilty of using chemical weapons. Kerry also said that the US reserved the right to use military force if Damascus does not deliver on commitments to disarm these munitions.

This high-handed attitude from



Kerry flies in the face of the facts that the perpetrators of the latest chemical weapon attack near Damascus were the Western-backed militants. Russia's Lavrov should have abruptly struck down this American arrogance and calumny.

The Americans and their Western allies have not presented a scintilla of credible evidence to support provocative claims that the Assad government used chemical weapons. Western claims are negated by Syrian government denials, and by official Russian reports that it was the so-called rebels who committed this and previous chemical weapons crimes, in a blatant effort to trigger the very kind of military intervention that Washington is threatening.

Several other sources refute Western assertions, such as admission by the militant groups themselves, and testimony from recently released European journalists who say their militant captives acknowledged responsibility for the attack.

The release of classified US army files also show that Washington knew that the mercenary groups were in possession of the deadly nerve agent sarin. The latter disclosure supports other evidence that the US and its allies colluded in the atrocity on August 21, which they have audaciously blamed on the Syrian government.

On the basis of fabrication and lies, Washington dispatched an armada of warships in order to point a gun at the head of the Syrian people.

Moreover, the Obama White House threatened that it would attack Syria unilaterally regardless of the United Nations Security Council. As Russian President Vladimir Putin, among others, noted, such action amounts to the crime of aggression. Even without firing a single cruise missile, the mere threats that Washington has issued and continues to issue constitute a crime of aggression.

President Assad is entirely correct therefore to insist that his country's disarmament of chemical weapons must be on condition that the US drops its unlawful military threat immediately. Furthermore, any proposal to remove Syrian government chemical munitions must be part of a multi-lateral process.

Some of the other urgent factors that need to be addressed include Western stockpiles of weapons of

mass destruction that are threatening peace and stability in the Middle East, principally those of Israel, which is why Syria has historically acquired its arsenal.

Another essential part of a multilateral process is for the US and its allies to halt immediately the supply of weapons and mercenaries into Syria. This criminal covert destabilisation has been going on for more than two and half years and is the primary reason why the country is ensnared in a conflict that has resulted in 100,000 deaths and up to seven million refugees out of a population of only 22 million.

Washington's state terrorism is central to the problem in Syria, including the use of chemical weapons by foreign-backed mercenaries. The US is in no moral or legal position to lay down demands on the Syrian government over its compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention. Syria's ally Russia needs to adopt a more militant attitude towards the US and its Western co-conspirators. The US is not a colleague or partner. It is a criminal party that should feel the full force of international law.

Pretending otherwise is only pandering to Washington's state terrorism, and instead of finding a chemical solution to the Syrian crisis, the very real danger is that we are only postponing American aggression. Information Clearing House ✪

The Americans and their Western allies have not presented a scintilla of credible evidence to support provocative claims that the Assad government used chemical weapons.

Iraqi union leader: "War not over for our workers"

John Wojcik

LOS ANGELES: "US troops are gone from my country but the war is not over for Iraqi workers," said a union leader from that country in an interview here September 9.

Hassan Juma'a Awad, president of the Iraq Federation of Oil Unions, was in town as a guest at the AFL-CIO's 2013 convention where he spoke at a special event organised by US Labour Against the War.

Hassan Juma'a said that workers in his country are routinely denied their right to organise unions and to speak out about working conditions. And he said oil workers

whom he represents are engaging in a full-fledged battle to prevent big multinational oil companies from completely taking over the nation's oil industry. Until the US invasion of Iraq the oil companies were nationally owned. BP, ExxonMobil and others have systematically been grabbing control over the industry ever since the US invasion, he said.

"They started out by coming in as consultants and in some cases now essentially control the major oil fields. There are US\$43 billion in oil profits that should be going to solve the lack of electric power and housing in the post-war cities and towns of Iraq," he said, "but the gangster element in control now

after the US invasion has ensured that the Iraqi people haven't seen a dime of that money.

"The situation is such that the people of Iraq gain very little from their own oil industry and in fact have to ask how does it benefit us at all?" he said. "We get environmental problems, higher cancer rates, but the money doesn't go to improving conditions for the people."

Iraq's Ministry of Oil, doing the bidding of the multinational oil companies, filed criminal charges against him earlier this year alleging that the strikes he has led undermined the Iraqi economy. But after the government failed to

produce evidence, a judge threw out the case in July.

Previously, government charges against Hassan Juma'a were dropped after an international solidarity campaign organised by the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Centre and US Labour Against the War. The campaign eventually garnered support from 150 organisations in 24 countries, and by winning dismissal of the charges he avoided three years in prison.

"I am happy to be back here with my brothers and sisters in American unions," he said. "When I visited in 2005 it was with good results."

His visit that year with other

Iraqi union leaders was important in getting the AFL-CIO to pass a historic resolution calling for the end of US participation in the war in Iraq. "Workers in Iraq were critical in the struggle to end the US occupation of my country," Awad said. "We appreciate the support of the American unions and the American people. We need your continued help in our fight for union rights and democracy and we are well aware that many of the bad things that happened to our workers – the attacks on their right to organise, the privatisation of their resources – these are now battles for you too." *People's World* ✪

Chile may elect socialist, again

Emile Schepers

Today, September 11, is the 40th anniversary of the bloody military coup that ended the life of Chile's socialist president, Salvador Allende, and began the long dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet. Two months from now, on November 17, another socialist president, Michelle Bachelet, is likely to be elected with the support of the same left-wing forces that brought Allende to power in 1970.

Allende, from the Chilean Socialist Party, implemented progressive policies that threatened the interests of US based transnational corporations in the fields of copper mines, which were nationalised, and communications. These corporations, aided by the Nixon administration, worked hard to destabilise his government and the Chilean economy. Finally, on September 11, 1973, a military coup ousted Allende, who died in the fighting.

Subsequently, at least 3,000 left wing Chileans were murdered, tens of thousands tortured and many more driven into exile. The Pinochet regime, working with other South American dictatorships and the United States through "Operation Condor," sent its assassins to kill exiled Chilean political figures such as army leader General Carlos Prats, murdered in Argentina in 1974, and Allende's foreign minister, Orlando Letelier,

murdered along with American colleague Ronni Moffit in the middle of Washington DC, on September 21, 1976.

Among those murdered was Bachelet's father, an air force brigadier general, who was tortured to death by Pinochet's henchmen. Michelle Bachelet was also imprisoned and tortured.

Pinochet stepped down in 1988, after negotiating a deal he thought would protect himself and his family from prosecution. Elections followed in 1989.

The initial elected governments after Pinochet's resignation were those of the centrist "Concertación" which included the Socialist Party, the Christian Democratic Party, the Party for Democracy and the Social Democratic Radical Party, but not the Communist Party. The communists felt that the ideologically heterogeneous makeup of the Concertación, and the concessions it made to Pinochet in exchange for restoring elections, made it necessary for communists to act in opposition and run separate candidacies.

The Concertación's candidates won the elections of 1989, 1993, 1996 and 2000 and 2005. The president elected in 2000 was the Socialist Party's Michelle Bachelet. In that election, the Communist Party supported an independent dissident socialist candidate, Tomas Hirsch Goldschmidt, while the right-wing



Michelle Bachelet amongst her supporters.

candidate was Sebastian Piñera of the National Alliance, who has connections with the Pinochet regime. Bachelet narrowly won the runoff.

Bachelet ran a popular centre-left administration, in spite of protests by students, indigenous people and others over policies left over from the Pinochet days. She made headway on issues of labour and women's rights. However, the Chilean constitution does not permit re-election for consecutive terms. In the elections of 2009, the Concertación candidate was Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle, and Piñera ran again as the right wing candidate. The

Communist Party nominated Jorge Arrate. Piñera and Frei Ruiz-Tagle made it into the runoff, which Piñera won by a small margin.

Piñera's term has been wracked by massive demonstrations of students, workers, indigenous Mapuche people and environmentalists, all of whom object strongly to the president's right-wing policies that are seen as having roots in the Pinochet dictatorship. Students, supported by labour, have protested against privatisation of education, and for quality schools for all. Environmental protests have taken aim at water privatisation schemes that threaten to harm the environment. The Mapuche indigenous group, fighting to recover lost lands, has been subjected to repressive Pinochet-era "anti-terrorism" legislation.

The Socialist Party is running former President Bachelet as its candidate (the ban on re-election only applies to consecutive terms). This time, the Communist Party has decided to support her candidacy. The main right-wing candidate is Evelyn Rose Matthei Fomet. Piñera's former secretary of Labour and Social Security, running under the banner of the Independent Democratic Union. There are several other smaller-scale candidacies. At writing, polls are showing Bachelet far ahead.

The Chilean election is of great regional and international importance. There is a great struggle in Latin America and the Caribbean going on at present. On one side is the Bolivarian dynamic, which tries to build solidarity among the nations of Latin America and the Caribbean, and find forms of internal development based on human solidarity and social justice, not neo-liberalism. Aligned with this position are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Uruguay, Venezuela and some of the small Caribbean states. On the other side is the Pacific Alliance, including countries with conservative governments dependent on the United States: Mexico, Colombia, Chile and Peru (Costa Rica and Panama are associate members). This alliance strongly supports neo-liberal, free trade policies and US foreign policy. Geographically, the Pacific Alliance states are well positioned to be part of the Trans Pacific Partnership.

If Bachelet, with communist and socialist support, wins the election, she is likely to reorient Chile toward the Bolivarian dynamic and away from US domination. There are powerful people who will want to try to prevent this.

People's World ☸

Saul Landau told truth about Cuba

WT Whitney

Saul Landau - reporter, author of 14 books, filmmaker (45 of them), poet, college professor, and determined foe of US assaults on Cuba - died on September 9 in Alameda, California, at the age of 77.

Landau served as senior fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington. At one time or another, he taught at California Polytechnic University in Pomona, the University of California-Santa Cruz, and American University in Washington. But his main vocation was that of agitator and political educator.

That bent emerged in Madison, Wisconsin, where, as a student, Landau organised a "Joe Must Go" group aimed at the red-baiting Wisconsin senator, Joseph McCarthy. Later, Landau was a researcher for anti-imperialist sociologist C Wright Mills and helped found *Ramparts* and *Mother Jones* magazines in San Francisco. He was a public television reporter there and also joined a mime troupe.

The breadth of Saul Landau's interests shows in themes he pursued in books and especially films. Often in collaboration with others, he wrote about "The New Radicals" (1966), "National Security and US Foreign Policy" (1988), guerrilla insurgencies in Central America (1993), George W Bush's

"Preemptive Empire" (2003), and US culture ("Bush and the Botox World" - 2007).

Landau's documentary films explored Syria (2004), Iraq (2002), the US-Mexican border (1999), Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico (1966), Iraq (1999), Nicaragua (1983), Beirut, Lebanon (1982), Jamaican President Michael Manley in 1976 and 1980 - and much more. Landau's highly regarded film "Paul Jacobs and the Nuclear Gang" (1980) documented the cover-up of terrible health effects from US atomic bomb testing in the 1950s.

Notably, Landau produced films covering the rise of Chilean President Salvador Allende, later overthrown in the US-assisted military coup in 1973. Orlando Letelier, foreign minister in the Allende government, was one of thousands who ended up being tortured and incarcerated. Landau helped spearhead a worldwide campaign for his release. Yet Chilean agents killed Letelier in 1976 in Washington. Landau and co-author John Dinges' book on the case, "Assassination on Embassy Row," alleged FBI involvement. Declassified US intelligence material subsequently released by Washington's National Security Archives provided confirmation.

Ultimately, Saul Landau's signal contribution may have been that he told the truth about Cuba and 50 years of US siege. He made six Cuba-related films. The most

remarkable were "Fidel," a report of Landau's week-long jeep trip across the island with the Cuban leader in 1968, and his 2012 film "Will Real Terrorist Please Stand Up." There, Landau documented the falsehoods and violence marking the notorious anti-Cuban terror campaign emanating from the United States. He showed how the Cubans Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, René Gonzalez, and Fernando Gonzalez came to Florida to defend against the terror and why four of them remain in US prisons after 15 years. Through that film and in other ways Saul Landau contributed mightily to the cause of the Cuban Five.

During the last three years of Saul Landau's life, he and actor Danny Glover visited and became friends with prisoner Gerardo Hernandez, who is serving two life terms. Landau issued down-to-earth, intimate reports after each visit. They circulated widely.

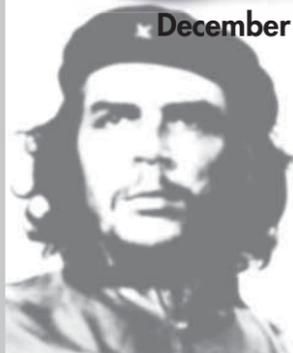
A month before Landau's expected death, Hernandez wrote him: "It is just a journey, Saul, the other is not true ... How could it be true, with so many people who admire you and love you? A trip where? ... You'll be here whenever Danny visits me, and in Cuba when the Five are reunited." In August, Saul Landau received Cuba's Medal of Friendship, issued by the Cuban Council of State.

People's World ☸

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polluting industries, while the people, animals and the planet go on suffering and dying.

We really do have to make a choice and soon, as our indifference is now reaching the verge of risking the wellbeing of this precious life on earth. And liveable planets are hard to find.

Steven Katsineris,
Vic

Good planets are hard to find

So many billions spent each year on military budgets and armaments and wars (and the USA is the biggest spender of all), it would solve all the world's ills many times over, stopping severe hunger, poverty and disease and providing properly funded education, health and welfare.

We certainly cannot let those in power keep going on this way, destroying the earth with all their chemicals, mines, wars, land clearing, climate change, etc and continue to waste billions on wars, arms, greed,

A reminder

A reminder of the politics of outgoing foreign minister Bob Carr and former right wing numbers man, Bill Kelty. In 1996, when the Keating Labor government was defeated by Howard's coalition, the actions of the then NSW premier Bob Carr, during the course of the election, could not have been better calculated to bring the Labor government undone.

Carr's repudiation of specific election promises to abandon tollways on a number of Sydney highways and then to raise one of the tolls on the very eve of the elections can only

be described as deliberate sabotage.

Bill Kelty's outburst at the time, that the return of the Howard government would be the signal for wage demands of up to 30 percent, played (deliberately?) into Howard's hands.

For 13 years prior, Kelty as ACTU secretary, made deals with the government which limited workers' wage claims.

At that time another contributing factor to the dismal Labor Party showing was the silence of the Labor Party left which went along with the right wing policies of Hawke and Keating. Their silence contributed to sinking the boat.

And so, the same disastrous policies continue, this time with the Parliamentary party in absolute disarray. People don't like treachery and chaos in government.

Every Labor government in the past, whether federal or state, has led to the return on the conservative parties. All of which brings me to ask the questions: What's left of the left in the Labor Party, and whereto from here?

T Southern
Brisbane

Danger - Asbestos

Each spring in homes across NSW, people start work on DIY improvement projects they have been planning throughout winter. The popularity of reality TV shows that focus on renovations serve as inspiration to many, but before people get started it is vital they remember that 1 in 3 Australian homes still contain asbestos.

Asbestos was used in many common building materials up until the early to mid 1980s, so exercise caution if you have a home built before that time.

Malignant mesothelioma is an invariably fatal cancer, caused by inhaling asbestos fibres. Not everyone

who comes into contact with asbestos will get sick, but for some a single exposure is enough to trigger the disease.

In Australia we are now seeing a "third wave" of people developing asbestos related diseases. The "first wave" were miners and manufacturers, the "second wave" were trades people. This "third wave" is made up of families and home handy people.

There are resources available, so if in doubt seek more information. There are a number of helpful government and non-government websites, including the NSW Workcover website.

Joanne Wade
Slater & Gordon Lawyers

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Life, demagogues and phoneyes

Now that the tumult and the shouting is over – for the time being, at any rate – we can perhaps look at some features of this latest federal election. To understand the significance of the outcome of the election, one has to realise that to the more avid supporters of capitalism, business is sacred. Yes, sacred. Nothing can be allowed to interfere with the corporate pursuit of profit, which is a noble and uplifting activity that not only makes the world go round but is the source of all good things in life.

Such is clearly the credo of our new PM, and it bodes ill for the working people of this country, for Mr Abbott sees Australia's workers, small farmers and other battlers not as the producers of the nation's wealth but as the foot-dragging obstacle to improving corporate profits. And as we said, nothing is more important than corporate profits.

Corporate profits are also very important to the new wildcard in the electoral game in Australia, mining magnate Clive Palmer, our very own Berlusconi clone. The desire of filthy rich demagogues to go into politics is of course encouraged by the example of the United States of America, where all successful politicians must either be millionaires or have access to some one else's millions.

Last year when Palmer set about founding his party, he announced that he was in fact "re-founding" it. It was to be a re-established United Australia Party or UAP. The UAP had been the conservative party of big business

in this country in the 1930s, but when Robert Menzies gained control of it he renamed it the Liberal Party, not because its policies changed but because the UAP's name was so much on the nose (thanks to those very policies, of course).

I don't suppose Menzies' habit of kowtowing to English royalty went down too well with a member of Australia's national bourgeoisie like Clive Palmer, so his nostalgia for a pre-Menzies big business party is understandable. Simple minded, but understandable.

Unfortunately, there was already a registered political party called the Uniting Australia Party, so he had to drop the UAP idea. He chose instead to glorify himself, as such a person would. That a wealthy demagogue with a clutch of populist policies can get himself elected to federal parliament may disappoint us, but it should not surprise us. The mass of the people are not seriously encouraged to analyse or examine candidates' policies. Most of the time, they are not even told what those policies are.

Clive Palmer has no doubt thrown plenty of money around in his electorate of Fairfax to make him popular, and he is a known supporter of the regional call for north Queensland to become a separate Australian state.

But do the electors there really believe that a multi-millionaire (if he is not a billionaire) can have any appreciation of the problems facing ordinary people – workers, small farmers, shopkeepers, pensioners, the unemployed? To vote for someone so out of touch with the reality of

ordinary people's lives is an act of desperation by people who have lost faith in political parties, who hope (rather than believe) that his promises will come true.

Demagoguery comes in many forms, but it always offers people what those doing the offering think people want to hear. Not what the people need or what they deserve, but what they have been told to want. What they have been told to think is important to them. While Palmer United campaigned on the curious slogan "Reunite the Nation" (in what way is it currently disunited?), the Libs campaigned on the extremely simplistic slogan "More jobs, Stronger borders".

You could go on line and read their "Plan", but they knew most people wouldn't bother. People knew it was mostly political spin anyway.

The Greens were somewhat eclipsed in the plethora of hitherto unknown parties that stood (especially for the Senate). There can be no doubt that some of the new Senate parties were simply Liberal fronts intended to divert votes away from Labor and the Greens. We had a couple of "Independents" standing as a team in our area. Their policies were nebulous, not bad, focussed on local issues, but they also made a big point of making sure their preferences went straight to the Libs.

The Greens were burdened with the desire to tell the electors the truth and to actually have policies, rather than relying on glib slogans. But this meant that to get their message across they had to get people to actually read their election

material in detail. Their main slogan, "Standing up for what matters", does not in fact tell you what they are standing up for at all. Only if you read their ad in full would you discover that their program included opposing new coal mines, more money for the unemployed and single mothers, cutting CO2 emissions by a whopping 90 percent by 2030, more money for universities, expanding Denticare and humanitarian treatment of asylum seekers.

Admittedly hard to put all that in a catchy slogan, unlike the other major players who didn't bother with policies, just chose a slogan their focus groups told them would sound good and be remembered until polling day.

The deficiencies in bourgeois democracy, and the ease with which it can be manipulated by those with money, were glaringly obvious in this latest federal election. It has led to numerous calls to limit the ability of "small parties" to get on the Senate ballot paper.

This is backed by people who want to stop outfits like the Gun Lovers Party cluttering up the ballot paper, but if adopted such limits would be used to prevent working class parties from contesting elections. We have enough of a hard time already under the existing restrictions, thank you.

It has even provided an opportunity for some people (even in our own Party!) to question the wisdom and validity of compulsory voting, one of the working class's victories we must defend and retain. ☘





Sunday September 22 –
Saturday September 28

A new ABC international co-production starts this week, *Serangoon Road* (ABC1 Sundays from September 22 at 8.30pm). A period detective series in an exotic location, the series is set in Singapore in 1964-65, when British colonialism was fighting to stop the spread of Communism and defeat various national liberation struggles, including the one in Malaya which had just been crushed and the one in Singapore which was still being waged.

The series centres around Sam Callaghan (played by Don Hany), a former military intelligence officer fighting the "Commies" in Malaya, and Patricia Cheng (played by Joan Chen) boss of a detective agency whose husband was killed by persons unknown. Sam did occasional jobs for her husband so Patricia is keen to have him join the firm, to go into the places she cannot.

Also on the scene is an idealistic CIA officer, Sam's sometime married girlfriend Claire, a Chinese girl in love with the CIA agent, and the head of the local Chinese criminal gang, the Red Dragons. The first episode begins well, with an American sailor on R&R murdered while under suspicion of being a Commie agent. A Black US sailor is fingered as his co-conspirator and accomplice in the crime. Or did politics have nothing to do with it, and is the CIA station chief going to let

the sailor be murdered by other US soldiers just to close the case?

The script is certainly not progressive. Rather, it mixes humanitarianism with cynicism, but it is competently done and holds the interest. Someday, honest, historically accurate films will be made about the "Malay Emergency" and the actions of the British and Australian military in Borneo, Malaya, and Indonesia. But not yet.

If the dubious delights of the end of the Raj in Singapore aren't your cup of tea, perhaps the very revealing documentary on the ABC's other channel might be. *The Tillman Story* (ABC2 Sunday September 22 at 8.30pm) is rated by radical documentary-maker Michael Moore as "one of the most important films you'll ever see!" That's a comment that particularly applies to Americans, because the essence of *The Tillman Story* is the way the US military and government collude with the media (especially Fox News) to manipulate, control and direct not only the information that Americans get about what's happening in the world but also the emotions they should be feeling at any given time.

Patriotic "tributes" to soldiers who've fallen in Afghanistan are staged at football matches complete with special routines by cheerleaders and deliberate misinformation is intoned by dignitaries on the big display screens. Family members are pressured to take part in these events as "their patriotic duty".

Pat Tillman, a thoughtful young man who was a champion footballer with a multi-million dollar contract, convinced by the propaganda that he should serve his country, gave up his football career and enlisted along with his younger brother, to go to Iraq. They went, and Pat was killed. The US military posthumously awarded him the Military Star and made up a fictitious story about how he was shot leading his men in a fire-fight against terrorists who had ambushed his convoy.

Weeks later the truth emerged: he



Pat Tillman (left) and his brother Kevin – *The Tillman Story* (ABC2 Sunday September 22 at 8.30pm)

had been shot by "friendly fire", by other US soldiers who were shooting their weapons with no clear idea of who they were shooting at but who were shooting because "everyone else was". The award of a decoration to a high-profile figure killed in such a shambolic event smacked of buying off the family and the media, and the Tillman family were not impressed.

One of the really interesting things about this film by Amir Bar-Lev is the way US soldiers and special forces operatives – men whose "patriotism" and loyalty is undoubted – are nevertheless disgusted by the warfare they are called upon to fight and are completely frank about their distrust of the US government – it's motives, its statements, its actions.

Along with Michael Moore, I too think this is an important documentary that deserves to be seen.

The way the Earth has been shaped by natural forces over aeons and the effect that shaping has had on the environment and especially

on living creatures (including us, of course) is the subject of the series *Rise Of The Continents* (ABC1 Tuesdays at 8.30pm). This week is the turn of America (North and South), but I admit to being disappointed. South American wildlife that originated in North America, like the llama, are dealt with but wildlife that started out in Antarctica, like the marsupial possums that spread up to North America or South America's large flightless birds that so clearly are related to emus, ostriches, cassowaries and the extinct Moa, are not.

In short, the program is rather hit and miss, with a number of interesting bits that don't quite make a coherent whole.

Derren Brown is a highly successful illusionist in the UK, whose acts of "magic" make ignorant and impressionable people talk glibly about "paranormal powers", talk that Derren – a prominent sceptic and pronounced atheist – totally rejects as absurd. A good magic show, like

Derren Brown's Something Wicked This Way Comes (SBS2 Thursday September 26 at 9.00pm), is based on illusion and misdirection, and when well done leaves the audience gasping "how the devil did he do that?" But just because you don't know how – or couldn't see how – he did it does not make it supernatural or paranormal. Just well performed.

The police series *New Tricks* (ABC1 Saturdays at 7.30pm) succeeded because of the consummate acting skill of the veteran actors playing the veteran detectives. After ten years, however, the team is breaking up. James Bolam has already left, Alun Armstrong is going and Amanda Redman is about to go. Although a series built around particular actors can survive the disappearance of that actor (look at *Taggart*), it is not easy if the series is identified with the actor or actors who have left. Whether *New Tricks* can or even should continue with a new cast is debatable. ★

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New threat to state's economic role

Martin Khor

Two new trade agreements involving the two economic giants, the United States and European Union, are leading a charge against the role of the state in the economy in developing countries.

Attention should be paid to this initiative as it has serious repercussions on the future development plans and prospects of the developing countries.

In fact some economists and analysts consider it perhaps the most important issue that determines the difference between economic success or failure in developing countries.

The immediate post-colonial period saw a tendency to a strong state, including government ownership of some key sectors, that included industry and banking.

Past decades have witnessed a wave of privatisations across both rich and developing countries. But the state still owns or controls utilities, infrastructure, public services, banks and a few strategic industries in many developing countries.

State enterprises or commercially run companies owned by or partially linked to the government play an important role in many a developing country.

Private companies also receive state assistance and support in many ways, including loans to small and medium enterprises and farmers, subsidies and tax breaks for research and development or technology purchase, preferences in government procurement and infrastructure provision including in special economic zones.

Countries provide incentives for foreign companies, such as tax-free status. However, the state also has special treatment for local companies, such as grants, cheaper than normal credit and subsidies, and government contracts.

The developmental role of the state in developing countries is now coming under attack

from developed countries. This is promoted by the big companies in the United States, Europe and Japan, which seek to enter the markets of developing countries which are the source of their future profits.

The support given by the state to domestic companies are seen by the multinational companies as a hindrance to their quest for expanded market share in developing countries.

They are thus seeking to change the world view and policy framework in developing countries, to get them to reduce the role of state enterprises as well as to curb the government's promotion of local private companies.

The two latest big attempts towards this is through the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) and the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

A sub-chapter on state-owned enterprises (SOEs) is a prominent part of the TPPA, which is being negotiated in Kota Kinabalu this fortnight.

The United States and Australia are leading the move to have rules to discipline the role of the government in the economy, through a two-pronged approach.

First, to get the government or other monopolies to behave in a "non-discriminatory" way, including when they buy or sell goods and services. This includes that they may not give preferences or incentives to the local firms.

Second, companies that are linked to the government (including through a minority share) should not get advantages vis-à-vis other firms in commercial activities. Of course the developed countries that are proposing this are thinking of their companies – how they can get more access to developing countries' markets.

In the TTIP, a United States-European Union agreement, negotiations for which started earlier this month, the European Union is preparing a sub-chapter on state-owned enterprises, with rules that seem quite similar to what the United States and Australia are proposing in the TPPA.



Although the TTIP only involves Europe and the United States directly, the rules it sets are intended to have consequences for other countries.

According to press reports, the two economic giants are planning that the rules they set in the TTIP will become the standard or template for future bilateral agreements that also include developing countries.

They also hope that these rules will be internationalised in the World Trade Organisation, which has over 130 member states.

The EU's position paper on SOEs says that its aim is to "create an ambitious and comprehensive standard to discipline state involvement and influence in private and public enterprises".

And that "this can pave the way to other bilateral agreements to follow a similar approach and eventually contribute to a future multilateral engagement".

In other words, the constraints on the role of the state, and the reduction of the space for behaviour or operations of state-linked companies, will become the way of the future for all

countries, if the United States and European Union plans succeed.

Developing countries that succeeded in economic development were able to combine the roles of the public and private sectors in a partnership that advanced overall national development.

Asian countries, including Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and China, have pioneered this model of public sector collaboration with the private sector.

Those few developing countries that managed to get development going were all driven by the "developmental state", or the leadership role of the government in establishing the framework of economic strategy, and the collaboration between the state, state enterprises, and commercial companies, including those in which the state has an interest.

If developing countries like Malaysia have to come under new international rules that curb the role of the state and re-shape the structure of their economy, then the prospects for future development will be adversely affected.

Third World Network ✪

Free Justin Carter

Steven Katsineris

This story of what has happened to Texas (USA) teenager Justin Carter is almost too dreadful to believe. But in February this year Justin Carter was jailed for making a bad joke on Facebook.

According to his dad, while Justin was playing a video game "Someone had said something to the effect of 'Oh you're insane, you're crazy, you're messed up in the head.' To which [Justin] replied 'Oh yeah, I'm real messed up in the head, I'm going to go shoot up a school full of kids and eat their still, beating hearts,' and the next two lines were 'lol and jk' [all sic]."

Even though it was a clearly a joke – underscored by the shorthand for "laugh out loud" and "just kidding" – a woman who saw the post reported Justin to the police. For this Justin was arrested and jailed for making "terroristic

threats" and faces \$500,000 for bail and up to 8 years in prison!

His dad told CNN: "He's very depressed, very scared, and ... He's pretty much lost all hope."

Justin's mother Jennifer Carter wrote the following about the chain of events:

"My son, Justin Carter, was arrested on February 14, 2013 (yes, Valentine's Day) because of a sarcastic comment he posted on Facebook about a computer game which was then taken out of context by a complete stranger! Please sign my petition to help release my son, Justin.

"My son has been in jail for months because we can't afford to pay the half million dollar bail money. It took a month before he was even questioned and he spent his 19th birthday behind bars. To this day, Justin has not had a trial. No weapons were found during a search of his apartment, and so we're really confused and

heartbroken that our family is being violated like this.

"While stuck in jail, Justin has been assaulted a number of times. He has been locked in solitary confinement for weeks. I urgently need your help.

"Justin's a good kid. He wouldn't hurt anyone, let alone a child. What I understand happened is that he was in an argument on the League of Legends website, which continued on a Facebook page, and someone on Facebook called him crazy and messed up in the head.

"So he responded in a sarcastic tone by saying something along the lines of 'Oh yeah, I'm real messed up in the head, I'm going to go shoot up a school full of kids and eat their still, beating hearts'. His response may have been in bad taste, but it was written in a non-threatening way that didn't translate well online. None of his friends or family would even question his intention as anything other than a

poor choice of words. Things got out of control, but my son is not a felon and terrorist as he's currently being charged!

"The authorities' over-reaction is ruining Justin's life. And it's setting a dangerous example trying to punish kids who often say strange things that I believe are protected under freedom of speech. The justice system's abuse of Justin is wasting time and money that could otherwise be spent to help people who honestly need it!

"I hope you will sign this petition. I'd like Justin to be released. And I would like a more reasonable law to be put in place so this doesn't happen to anyone else again."

Update: "We still need your help. Thanks to an anonymous donor, Justin is now out on bail. I'm happy to have him out right now, but my son is still facing a felony terrorism charge and years in prison if found guilty. I have said

all along that his Facebook joke was made in poor taste and understand why it raised some concern, but Justin has no prior record and he was clearly not actually threatening anyone. Please sign and share to continue supporting Justin's campaign. We need to make sure he's not labelled as a terrorist simply for making a Facebook comment. Thank you." Jennifer Carter.

Please sign the petition to Justin – we'll deliver it to his family, and also to the people who are persecuting him. So far 214,584 supporters have signed this petition. Please join us.

Sign the petition to Justin Carter: "Justin, please know that thousands of people across the country are horrified by what you're going through, and will stand with you and try to make things right." www.change.org/petitions/release-my-son-justin-carter-being-prosecuted-for-a-facebook-comment ✪



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