Peter Mac

Once again Australians have been dragged into armed conflict in the Middle East by the Abbott government’s sycophantic subservience to the United States, which is now conducting air attacks against the fundamentalist “Islamic State” (IS – formerly ISIS) forces that have conquered much of Iraq and Syria. The Abbott government initially expressed caution about getting involved, but then without even waiting for an official request from the US volunteered Australia’s services.

Instead of getting the pre-approval from or even consulting Parliament first, the government rushed in with the support of Labor’s Opposition leader Bill Shorten. The Abbott government refused requests from the Australian Greens for the government to give an explanation to Parliament.

The Greens have deep misgivings about Australia’s involvement in Iraq, as does independent Andrew Wilke, and will give notice of a bill requiring parliament to debate and approve Australia’s participation in armed conflict overseas.

Australia, Britain and the US plan to use military aircraft in humanitarian rescue exercises and as weapons supply, with the support of US allies Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates.

Referring to the persecution of religious minorities by IS, Tony Abbott hypocritically declared: “... no human being anywhere would wish to stand by and watch the preventable slaughter of innocent people”. If he really meant that, why is he sitting by and watching the massacre in Syria or Gaza? It all comes down to supporting the pro-US forces even if they are terrorists.

Australia has certainly committed terrible atrocities. However, Iraq could be saved without the commitment of Western troops, by providing material and financial support for an anti-IS united front of Iraq’s national groups.

In the difficult circumstances caused by this ordeal, our party calls upon all the political and social forces, parties, blocs and organisations, and in particular the forces that are in power at the level of the federal government, the Kurdistan Regional Government and the local authorities in the provinces, to unify their stance and efforts in the face of terrorism and the gangs of ‘Isis’ and their barbaric acts.

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“The recapturing of the areas seized by ‘Isis’ and eliminating it are urgent and immediate objectives that require mobilising all national efforts. This necessitates accelerating the efforts to overcome the existing differences between the Federal [Iraqi] Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government, and to achieve the broadest possible cooperation and coordination at both the political and military levels to ward off the dangers threatening Iraq,” the statement concluded.

To achieve this, the new Prime Minister needs to set about forming an all-encompassing national unity government that is able to address the daunting tasks facing the country at this historic juncture.

But religious divisions fostered by the US and others in Iraq and other Middle Eastern nations have been critical in defeating attempts by left and progressive forces to unite citizens of those countries in opposition to US interference in their affairs. Moreover, where it stood to benefit, the US has previously supported forces based on religious fanaticsim (including the Taliban in Afghanistan).

The US claims to have persuaded the new government that all national groups should have parliamentary representation for IS to be defeated. But the West (including Australia) is now arming the Kurds as a separate heavily armed pro-US entity, which could invite resentment, division and conflict, not unity.

**The war behind the wars**

But the wars in Ukraine, Iraq and Syria are linked because they have all resulted from US plans to retain its position as number one superpower, to control global oil supplies (most of which lie within Russia and the Middle East), and continue as world banker for oil transactions, with the US dollar as the trading currency.

The US currently rakes in more than US$1 billion each day as a result of the international agreement to denominate oil exclusively in US dollars, and to recycle surplus oil proceeds into US Treasuries. (See “My money’s on Putin”, Guardian #1653, 27-08-2014)

But the petrodollar arrangement is under threat. China and Russia have been trading oil in euros and more recently in their own currencies. If the other oil-producing nations follow their example and dump the US dollar as the international oil trading currency, the US would suffer a financial catastrophe. One of the main reasons for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was the former Iraqi government’s plan to abandon the petrodollar arrangement and set up a multi-currency oil trading scheme.

Syria and Iran have already discussed joining China and Russia in establishing multi-currency regimes. And that makes all of them potential targets for open US military intervention.

The US has refused to discuss with Syria joint action to defeat IS, even though Syria is under siege from the IS. The US plans to attack IS targets within Syria without the permission of the fiercely independent Assad government, and if the government resists the US may seize the opportunity to try to eliminate it.

Syria and Iran alsoplan to supply oil via a huge pipeline to Europe, as Russia currently does. That will lessen US influence in Europe, as well as promoting the development of the European Union (EU).

The US fears competition from superpower rivals, including the EU and Russia. The US is determined to destabilise the EU’s relationships with Russia, which has ample gas and oil reserves to assist economic development.

The integration into the EU of Ukraine (formerly a Russian ally) would not only heighten tensions between the EU and Russia, but would provide a “jumping off” point for US forces on Ukraine’s border with Russia. The EU package, that the previous Ukrainian President refused to sign, included a military section that would have permitted NATO forces along the border with Russia.

The US therefore promoted the overthrow of the former pro-Russian Ukrainian government (with the assistance of neo-fascist organisations), installed a government heavily influenced by fascists in order to sign up Ukraine in the EU as an anti-Russian US ally.

This government has led an all-out offensive against the Russian speaking population of Donestk as well as attacks on communists, trade unionists and progressive forces. The US and its allies, including Australia, have falsely accused the Russian government of orchestrating and assisting their demands for independence.

As a result, the world now faces the horrifying possibility of a military clash between two nuclear-armed nations.

**Looming threat to civil rights**

The Abbott government is attempting to overturn the long established legal principle of onus of proof, by introducing legislation to prevent people travelling to Middle East war zones unless they can prove they won’t fight for terrorists.

ASIO has warned that involvement in another conflict in Iraq would increase the chance of terrorist attacks on Australian soil, but the government wants to become involved as soon as the US gives the word.
Action to save women’s refuges

Last Sunday, August 31, around 200 people, including representatives from a number of trade unions, gathered in the Sydney suburb of Glebe in the rain to protest at the closure of the Elsie’s Women’s Refuge. As of Sunday women’s refuges and Aboriginal-run homelessness services are closed, and many other women’s services will no longer operate as independent women-only services. Many of the refuges are fighting to keep their doors open to women and children fleeing domestic violence.

In August this year a women’s refuge (1974) has been taken over by St Vincent De Paul, as has Dolores in the Eastern Suburbs and Bega women’s refuge: Delvena’s on the North Shore was taken over by Mission Australia; Kempsey by the Samaritans; Allawah House – crisis accommodation for girls 24-18, by the Benevolent Society.

The loss of independent services has devastated and outraged communities across NSW. Specialist staff with expertise that keep women and children safe, and that also have culturally appropriate connections, have been made redundant. This a familiar story for women’s refuges and Aboriginal crisis housing operating as domestic violence services across NSW. The large Christian organisations will oversee services very differently to small, secular community-run operation. This restructure is plainly incompatible with restorative, feminist and social justice perspectives.

Women’s services that will no longer operate as independent feminist services include: Marica’s in Campbelltown, East Lakes, Moruya, Bourke, Taree, Tweed Heads, Wagga Wagga.

Several other refuges are waiting on the government’s promise of possible 18-month extended funding. Lillian’s and Jean’s in Sydney’s inner west, and St George Women’s Housing are among these specialist services. Erin’s Place in Marshfield and Killara in Randwick and Claffy House in Burwood are already shut. Women’s domestic violence services in Grafton, Forbes, Queanbeyan and St Louise Lodge in Sydney will no longer be operating as domestic violence services.

These losses are part of major reforms across welfare that introduced competition in the social services sector. This process privileges the big NGOs, almost all of which are Christian (75 percent of homelessness service contracts were awarded to these organisations in June this year). The competitive tendering process is set to rule out across welfare services, beyond the homelessness sector: next to be hit will be the drug and alcohol sector.

There has been little transparency and workers, service users and the community have been kept in the dark.

In 85 percent of cases, domestic violence is sexual. This process privileges the big NGOs, almost all of which are Christian (75 percent of homelessness service contracts were awarded to these organisations in June this year). The competitive tendering process is set to rule out across welfare services, beyond the homelessness sector: next to be hit will be the drug and alcohol sector.

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These changes seek to keep people in situations that they would otherwise leave. Diverse communities need community-run, independent specialist women-only services.

Don’t let these services be ripped away. Help build resistance to these closures and these outright attacks on women.

Aboriginal and people young people.

PPRESS FUND

According to the BBC program QI, approximately one percent of United States citizens are in jail, and they make the uniforms for US armed forces. What a system. It’s virtually slave labour and it facilitates US imperialism’s global demands. In contrast, US prisoners, the Guardian team is totally dedicated to its work. Freedom is the consciousness of necessity! However, we rely on Press Fund contributions to fund day-to-day production, so please send us something for the next edition if you possibly can. Talking about contributions, why not make regular contributions by way of automatic banking direct debits? Even a small contribution each week would help us a lot. Many thanks to those who contributed this week as follows: Dr Gianni Dittura $10, Mark Mannion $5, “Round Figure” $15, John S $30 (for winning the guessing competition)

This week’s total: $60 Progressive total: $5,090

March Against Abbott, Perth

Richard Titelius

On a mild overcast day in Perth over 200 people gathered to protest the economic, fiscal and social policies of the conservative government of Prime Minister Tony Abbott and especially the austere Federal Budget of his Treasurer, Joe Hockey.

The rally was organised by March Australia Perth and the MC for the event was Alex Bainbridge who told the protesters of the growing income inequality occurring in Australia where 1.73 million households at the bottom of the ladder have the same income as the top 10 households.

It is a country where corporatizations have increased the share of income that is creamed off as profits from 24% to 37% today. Against this backdrop the Hockey wants the poorest households in the country to take $842 worth of cuts per annum while the richest households will only lose $71.

One first speaker, was the Vice President of Sinn Fein, Mary Lou McDonald, visiting Australia from Ireland. She is no stranger to austerity which the working class has had to endure since their short economic bubble burst in September 2008. Many workers have been subjected to unemployment and severe economic hardship.

McDonald urged protesters to reject the sectarianism, racism and inequality of conservative governments in Australia and Ireland. The budget that is being brought down here in Australia is similar to what is being sought by the conservative government in Ireland. The working people of Australia should demand the right to an education, a roof over their heads and a decent health care system.

Another speaker who runs an environment program Understerry on a community radio station RTFR FM out of Curtin University, said defence spending is set to increase until 2020.

The Abbott government now has a 10 percent ammunition market, 10 percent of Australia’s population has been placed under siege, the Iraq war has cost taxpayers $20 billion, with reduced services to turn to, women are forced to stay at home. Women who do leave are to be faced with an increased risk of homelessness.

“Go home, stay home” is the Baird government’s message. These changes seek to keep people in situations that they would otherwise leave. Diverse communities need community-run, independent specialist women-only services.

Don’t let these services be ripped away. Help build resistance to these closures and these outright attacks on women.

Aboriginal and young people.

No Australian forces to Iraq!

Continued from page 1

Labor has raised no objections to the government’s plans for military involvement in Iraq. In 2003, Australia’s participation in the war in Iraq had bipartisan support, as did Australia’s involvement in the long and terrible war in Vietnam almost 35 years earlier.

But the Abbott government now has little support from the public, and its plans to commit Australian troops to fight for US interests in Iraq could be defeated by mass protests.

It is crucial for the Australian people to defeat the government’s plans for military involvement in support of US interests in Iraq and Syria and to support the Green’s call for Parliament to debate and decide on any military involvement. Within Iraq attempts are being made for a peaceful solution.

The Iraqi Communist Party held a successful meeting with President Dr Fuad Masum on August 17, emphasising the party’s support for the sincere efforts exerted by the President to form a national unity government with broad representation. The President welcomed the proposal put forward by the Communist Party for holding a National Conference, as a contribution to ideas and initiatives that help to launch and organise the process and mechanisms of dialogue and consultation among the various political forces and blocs, and to overcome the state of division and estrangement that prevailed during previous periods.

No Australian forces for Iraq!

With Anna Pha and Bob Briton

Even with Parliamentary support.
Ian Viner AO QC, the Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in the Fraser government who introduced the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act in 1976, is totally opposed to the idea that the Commonwealth should surrender the Act to the Northern Territory.

The idea was floated by the NT Chief Minister, Adam Giles, in an interview with the ABC’s radio current affairs program, Background Briefing, on Sunday July 13.

Giles told the ABC: “I think at the end of the day patriation (of the Act to the Northern Territory) is the best model. I think there’s probably an opportunity for us … to be able to get the Land Rights Act back from Canberra, which will allow us to work closer to the people on the ground, because fundamentally, Canberra is a long, long way away from the Territory.”

Attorney General John Elferink was quick to push the same line on ABC radio the next day, couching his support for NT control of the Act in terms of economic development.

“After 40 years you would hope for much greater outcomes. Certainly the link was more direct, i.e. the Commonwealth should surrender the Act to the Northern Territory. Let there be no more suspicion. Let there be no more surprise, because the Government’s proposals to recognise Aboriginal land rights in legislation is one more expression of the Government’s commitment to liberal and progressive reform. It is the objective of the government to secure conditions in which all Australians can realise their own goals in life – to find fulfilment in their own way – consistent with the interests of the whole Australian community.

“The Australia we, as a Government, look to is one in which there is diversity and choice, because it is in diversity that people can pursue the lives they want in ways that they determine. Securing land rights to Aborigines in the Northern Territory is a significant expression of this objective. It is an objective that will be pursued in a way consonant with the rights of other Australians. I am sure this progressive step will be studied with interest in the States with respect to their land. This bill is a major step forward for Aborigines in the Northern Territory not only for this generation but also for future generations who will benefit from it. They will have a land base that will be preserved in perpetuity. The introduction of legislation to grant land rights in the Northern Territory is an essential, progressive measure in the social and political history of Australia.”

(Abridged)

Land Rights News

CLIP wants in on the Act

Don’t let NT take over Land Rights: Viner

Viner, who still practises as a barrister in Perth, spoke to Land Rights News and challenged the claim that the Land Rights Act was a vehicle to promote economic development.

“My statement should not be misused. The Act was an instrument, expressed in the second reading speech (see below) to recognise, in Australian law, ownership of Aboriginal land,” he said.

“Woodward (Justice AE Woodward, who was appointed Aboriginal Land Rights Commissioner by the Whitlam government and whose report led to the land rights legislation) said ownership would give Aboriginal people the opportunity to use their land for economic purposes; in those days it was really just pastoral use and mining. These days, there will be new agricultural uses as Northern Australia is seen as a new frontier of food production.

“But the purpose of the Land Rights Act was not primarily for economic development. That may have been a secondary outcome. Certainly, it was always foreseen that land ownership opens up economic opportunity, but the primary purpose was to grant title.”

“If it’s wrong to say the Act was introduced for economic purposes. If you look only in economic terms, it’s easy to say, change the law of ownership and open the land up to be bought and sold.

“That’s what happened in New Zealand, and it destroyed Maori traditional ownership. Any economic development has to be on Aboriginal terms and under Aboriginal control.”

Viner’s original reading of the Act: Hansard

Excerpts from the Second Reading Speech on June 4, 1976 by Ian Viner, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, to the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Bill:

“This Bill will give traditional Aborigines inalienable freehold title to land on reserves in the Northern Territory and provide machinery for them to obtain title to traditional land outside reserves. The coalition Parties’ policy on Aboriginal affairs clearly acknowledges that affinity with the land is fundamental to Aborigines’ sense of identity and recognises the right of Aborigines to obtain title to lands located within the reserves in the Northern Territory. The Bill gives effect to that policy and, further, will provide Aborigines with the opportunity to claim and receive title to traditional Aboriginal land outside reserves. The Government believes that this Bill will allow and encourage Aborigines in the Northern Territory to give full expression to the affinity with land that characterised their traditional society and gave a unique quality to their life.

“The creation of … Land Trusts will achieve the primary objective of any Land Trust scheme which is the vesting, under Australian law, of rights corresponding with traditional Aboriginal rights, without risk that the rights conferred are not sufficient to cover traditional Aboriginal rights. I cannot over-emphasise the importance of this last mentioned aspect of land rights. It is a fundamental change in social thinking in Australia to recognise that within our community there are some people, the Aborigines, who live by a unique and distinct system of customary law.

“Some people have watched with interest – even suspicion – the statements which have been made by the Government in its intentions to legislate for land rights. Some have expressed surprise that a Liberal-Country Party government should have made the decision to grant land rights to Aborigines in the Northern Territory. Let there be no more surprise. Let there be no more
After months and months of seeing long-serving loyal colleagues leave the Qantas Group because of the mismanage-ment of the CEO and the Qantas Board, the news of a record statutory $2.8 billion loss at Qantas is still a shock.

Many USU/ASU (United Services Union/Australian Services Union) members have expressed their dismay at what has been going on at Qantas – day in and day out they try to do their jobs to the best of their ability and the announcement bears witness to what staff have been thinking and saying for a while – the manage-ment and Board have not been doing the job they should.

Through no fault of their own thousands of staff have left the company this year and many of the 500 staff in telephone sales in Brisbane and Melbourne have been told their jobs have been axed because of poor decisions and directions taken by the company’s leadership. At the same time, in telephone sales for example they see 1,250 offshored call centre jobs in the Qantas Group unbooked by decisions that ignore customer service and the value of Austral-ian workers who have been part of building the once mighty brand.

Over recent months many USU/ASU delegates have been involved in discussions about re-structuring – this is not new. What is new is the long-serving, long-suffering, long-term crooks, Peter Quill/Star-lord, is one of the main characters – quite eclectic.

Certainly, it’s as iconic as those “Star Wars” films of this generation. And it may very well become the latest entry in their rapidly adap-tations, is a good-natured movie. It all adds up to a melting pot of drama with the out-of-left-field comedy that really shapes the whole movie. And it works. It doesn’t really hurt the film, save for one or two corny lines out of an otherwise slick script.

Rocket, the aforementioned loud-mouthed raccoon, is har-mlessly funny enough to please the junior astronomers in the audience, but with his Joe Pesci-like personality, it’s a laugh riot for us older viewers and seasoned comic book readers, as well.

Marvel took a risk with this one, because unlike Iron Man or Captain America, this is not a comic title that many people are familiar with. It paid off, however, and from the box office to almost every major film critic’s website, it’s all good news. On the other hand, I have heard one or two reviewers say that Guardians is formulaic and predict-able. I would counter that with a suggestion: that some viewers have gotten so used to seeing comic book films struggle to push the envelope often becoming increas-ingly convoluted, that they are rather caught off guard when a film comes along that pulls that envelope back instead. Director James Gunn exhibits an honest enthusiasm for simplicity, it’s true, but I think the audience appreciated that. It shows that you don’t have to reinvent the wheel to make a good pop-corn movie, which is exactly what Guardians is.

People’s World

Film Review by Blake Deppe

Guardians of the Galaxy

Marvel’s Guardians of the Galaxy, the latest entry in its rapidly expanding universe of comic book adaptations, is a good-natured movie, full of fast-paced action and utterly ridiculous humour, and it may very well become the “Star Wars” of this generation. Certainly, it’s as iconic as those original films were, and – with a talking raccoon and a compas-sionate alien tree as two of its main characters – quite eclectic.

The plot follows a ragtag group of crooks, Peter Quill/Star-lord (Chris Pratt), Gamora (Zoe Saldana), Rocket (voiced by Brad-ley Cooper), Groot (voiced by Vin Diesel), and Drax (Dave Bautista), who are drawn together in an effort to protect a precious item, an orb that contains an Infinity Stone, from a ruthless heretic/religious zealot named Ronan (Lee Pace). If you’ve seen any of the “Star Wars” films, you’ll already have a good idea of what’s going to happen. That literal-ly comes in the form of a cassette tape called “Awesome Mixtape” and played by main character Star-lord, who at the film’s beginning cruises through galaxies on his pirate space-ship, flirting with female aliens and confusing galactic overlords with wisecracks and outdated cultural references.

In fact, he goes on to chal-lenge an unethical corporate ra-dar to a dance-off toward the film’s climax, cutting through a crescendo of dramatic montage of left-field comedy that really shapes the whole movie. And it works. Guardians knows it’s based on a comic book, and it’s one of the first adaptations that feels like it was properly ripped right from the inked pages to the big screen.

I will say that it’s noticeable, more so here than in some of Mar-vel’s other films that the studio really tried to keep things as family friendly as possible.

It’s time to go Alan Joyce

CSG: policy makers “in the dark”

The Lock the Gate Alliance has welcomed the refusal by Minister Anthony Roberts of Petroleum Exploration applications in cen-tral New South Wales and called on the gas industry to come clean over gas prices and contracts. This follows revelations in the New South Wales parliament that no policy maker in Australia knows whether or not the east coast gas market will experience domes-tic shortfalls as a result of LNG export contracts in Queensland.

Under questioning in Budget Estimates, Energy Minister Anthony Roberts revealed that the gas industry is leaving Australian policy makers “in the dark” over unsubstantiated claims that export gas contracts have created a supply shortfall, requiring hasty develop-ment of unsafe, unconventional gas fields in regional NSW.

Lock the Gate NSW coordinator Georgina Woods said, “The public must have been bombarded with threats of a looming gas shortage thanks to LNG export contracts vacuuming up the east coast supply and driving up wholesale prices. Yesterday’s bombshell reveals that, in fact, the gas industry has refused to give the government, let alone the public, the information it needs to assess the hysteric-al claims made by gas companies and their boosters, in their urging to hasten the develop-ment of vast invasive gasfields in bushland and farmland in northern NSW.

“The Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association has treated regional communities that dare to stand up to the gas giants and fight to protect their water supplies with contempt, and it seems they’ve done the same to the government.”

Ms Woods said they welcomed Minister Roberts’ rejection of the petroleum exploration applica-tions affecting Dubbo and the Blue Mountains, and his insistence that industry claims over gas shortfalls be transparently tested.

“If the gas giants have overcom-mitted their export contracts and cannot meet their commitments, that is not the fault of farming com-munities in northern New South Wales, and there’s no way that com-munities will allow the groundwater they depend upon for their liveli-hoods to be compromised because gas companies can’t count how many gigajoules they’ve got to sell in Queensland.

The unfinished business in unconventional gas policy is proper protection for water resources – our rivers, aquifers and drinking water catchments – from any kind of drilling.”
Division runs deep in battle for The Block

The Aboriginal Housing Company’s proposed redevelopment of The Block in Sydney has sections of the community up in arms. Amy McGuire investigates the history of the dispute and why many Aboriginal people have such a strong connection to Redfern.

It was raining the day the Koori Mail visited the Redfern Tent Embassy. The sacred fire, its embers transported and rekindled from the Canberra Tent Embassy, was hidden under a tin sheet.

There are only four people manning the site currently, but the tented fortresses that span the grossy space between the iconic Aboriginal Bag mural and the Aboriginal Housing Company (AHC), are a visible reminder that this protest still burns, even if its flames flicker in and out.

The embassy was built earlier this year following community concern over the Pemulwuy Project, the Aboriginal Housing Company’s plan to redevelop The Block. Named after the legendary freedom fighter, the development is being spearheaded by AHC chief executive Mick Mundine, and is split into stages.

Stage one is the development of a commercial precinct, which includes student accommodation, retail and commercial space and a childcare centre. Stage two will build 62 affordable houses for Aboriginal people as well as a new Tony Mundine gym. At the time of press, the Koori Mail was unable to confirm whether the AHC had secured funding. The NSW government granted approval to the application in 2012.

There have been long-running tensions between the AHC and some members of the Redfern community, but the Pemulwuy Project has heightened the division, with protestors outraged that the organisation is giving commercial development precedence over urgently needed social housing, particularly against the backdrop of a gentrifying Redfern.

Wiradjuri Elder Jenny Munro says the AHC’s development plans do not honour the organisation’s original aims, and especially not the legendary Pemulwuy.

“... This land has become a central hub for blackfellas around the country. I’ve grown up knowing Redfern is a place to go when I need to feel comfortable and when I need community. “You can tell the story of the type Redfern has had: You can walk down to The Block and you can see the mural, and the big community centre and you can walk to Redfern station and see the paintings on the walls. “You know there is a strong black presence and that’s something that needs to be maintained, and that people need to know about.

“All of Australia is our land, but Redfern is where we had full control over this area, and it’s where the government pushed us into, and now we are making something positive out of it, it’s being taken away.”

Ms Munro says the fight is about a bigger issue – about the preservation of Aboriginal culture and ideals over the white man’s view of success.

“The basic element that assimilationists don’t really grasp is that to assimilate into another culture is to commit your own cultural genocide – to turn into another culture is to commit your own cultural genocide.”

As the rain falls on The Block, it’s clear this issue will not go away. It’s going to burn, just like the fire of the embassy. Ms Munro says the development application will take two years to progress. There is still no confirmation on funding.

As the rain falls on The Block, she tells the Koori Mail she has a warm bed at home, but that this is about principle, and fighting for Aboriginal people who do not have a roof over their heads.

“We’ve come through the worst of it now. Now that winter is over, summer will be a breeze,” she says with a smile.

Koori Mail
Maria Hilario

Acknowledgement of the traditional custodians of the land where we gather today and I pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

I am not Cuban or a public speaker, neither a qualified university scholar but I do support the Cuban socialist revolution and I talk tonight is based on personal observations and experiences.

I am grateful for this opportunity to speak tonight, also grateful to Asociación Cubana following me to study Civil Engineering for free at TAFE many years ago.

Why do I support Cuba socialists? The main reasons are my poor peasant background, my experiences working and helping homeless people in Sydney for around nine years and the great experience of visiting Cuba with the brigade in January this year.

My interest in Cuba and its revolution began when I was very young working in the dry fields of Castilla alongside my granddad listening to his stories of the Spanish Civil War and how he never surrendered his ideas.

My grandfather admired Fidel and heard on the Spanish radio daily news of the Cuban revolution and Fidel’s men with their long beards teaching poor Cuban peasants to read and write in conservative fascist Spain where beards were a sign of demons. It used to make my grandad very happy and he often wished he was one of those peasants learning and that Fidel’s men would soon reach his poor village.

In Spain before the 2nd Republic in 1931 in the rural areas the illiteracy rate would have been more than 90% or more if living in a village.

Between 1932 and 1933, in just one year with the new left-wing government opened more than 3,000 public libraries in the rural areas. Also they created the pedagogy missions with a group of university students teaching everyone in rural villages about culture and traditions would help the poor learn to read and write. They put a lot of emphasis on the culture of theatre because they recognised the link between education and entertainment. They thought that the representation of their culture and traditions would help the poor learn and they took on board the classical idea of educating, having fun or being entertained and learning (as we do today).

Garcia Lorca was one of the university student initiators of the program La Barraca. But the program was short lived; the fascists killed 30,000 people in six months alone at the beginning of the October revolution.

We also visited a cooperative of agriculture near Julio Antonio Mella camp. The cooperative was established in 1959, 57% of the population was illiterate.

They had 544 schools, 2,832 teachers and 19,075 people.

In one year, 1960-61, they created 15,000 new schools in the rural areas they reduced the illiteracy rate to a 3.9% educated. They separated women and disabled people including 25,000 Haitians who didn’t speak Spanish.

The Cuban method Yo si Puedo “Yes I can” has taught reading and writing to more than six million persons in 29 countries including Spain and there is a similar program in Colombia called Good Weekend recently by Chris Ray about the literacy program in Bourke and Wollongong.

In Spain the Fundacion Sevilla took on the problem of bilingual and bicultural education. The TVC did not want to run a program after one of the smaller TV channels did. In Spain they are ashamed that a rich country from Europe does not access a program created in a developing country.

The idea of the program was a sign of demons. It used to make my grandfather happy and he often wished he was one of those peasants learning and that Fidel’s men would soon reach his poor village.

I met Dalia from the Federation of Cuban women while on the brigade. It is a grass roots people’s organisation with programs and policies that their aim is to achieve equal rights and full emancipation in all the aspects and levels of Cuban society.

Cuba is fourth in the world for women represented in parliament – 43.2%. Ahead of countries like Norway and Finland.

We also visited a cooperative of agricultural production near Julio Antonio Mella camp. We visited them and they told us how diseases and pests that are killing their crops.

One of the problems arises due to the lack of enough fertilisers. They don’t use transgenic seeds and they always promote the local product rather than imports. It is a key to the survival of local economies and since 2000 they are trying harder for their agricultural products to be organic.

Cuba is now part of the economic groups ALBA, CELAC and the TCP (Treatado de Comercio de los Pueblos). Their aim is to end poverty and social exclusion, end illiteracy and support human rights, to improve the working conditions of women, to care for the environment, economic integration and the formation of grand-national enterprises to create a front to the transnationals.

I would now like to turn to the Cuban 5 [see also Cuban 5 background facing page]. Two weeks ago the daughter of one of the Cuban 5 Aili Labalino in Sydney. I assume most of you have heard of the Cuban 5. They were on a mission in Miami to monitor the actions of Miami-based terrorist groups, in order to prevent those groups from carrying out attacks on their country of Cuba. Everyone should know about the hypocrisy of the US system and why this is a political case.

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Cuban women

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Sydney

Support event outside US Consulate

Support the Cuban 5

5pm Friday September 5

Martin Place Sydney

Organised by Sydney Committee to Lift the Embargo on Cuba

Further info Maria 0433 275 434

September 3, 2014

Magazine

Guardian

More than 500 Medical centres in remote areas powered by solar systems, 2,364 schools and 1,945 are munitions television stations.

They had 844 schools, 2,832 teachers and 19,075 people.

In one year, 1960-61, they created 15,000 new schools in the rural areas they reduced the illiteracy rate to a 3.9% educated. They separated women and disabled people including 25,000 Haitians who didn’t speak Spanish.

The Cuban method Yo si Puedo “Yes I can” has taught reading and writing to more than six million persons in 29 countries including Spain and there is a similar program in Colombia called Good Weekend recently by Chris Ray about the literacy program in Bourke and Wollongong.

In Spain the Fundacion Sevilla took on the problem of bilingual and bicultural education. The TVC did not want to run a program after one of the smaller TV channels did. In Spain they are ashamed that a rich country from Europe does not access a program created in a developing country.

The idea of the program was a sign of demons. It used to make my grandfather happy and he often wished he was one of those peasants learning and that Fidel’s men would soon reach his poor village.

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Cuba is fourth in the world for women represented in parliament – 43.2%. Ahead of countries like Norway and Finland.

We also visited a cooperative of agricultural production near Julio Antonio Mella camp. We visited them and they told us how diseases and pests that are killing their crops.

One of the problems arises due to the lack of enough fertilisers. They don’t use transgenic seeds and they always promote the local product rather than imports. It is a key to the survival of local economies and since 2000 they are trying harder for their agricultural products to be organic.

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help with different problems like domestic or inter-family violence or alcohol issues. They provide also help to families affected by divorce, like counselling for children or older people. They have a weekly publication “Mujeres” with the aim not to provide a sexist image of women but more to do with information and documentation. They coordinate educational programs directed at children for parents who don’t work and look after their children at home. The social workers work with the mums or family members in activities to prepare the child for school. 

It was interesting to compare their programs and progress with my experience in Australia. I work with abused homeless women and children in Sydney. I often complain about the lack of services, like refuges for women and children experiencing domestic violence and more affordable houses for low income people to rent.

Women’s advocacy centre’s Casas de Orientación coordinate and provide support for 82,000 social workers and 78,000 health professionals who work in the barrios to prevent diseases like dengue fever, influenza or HIV/AIDS. They also provide advice and support to thousands of people going through legal services, dealing with Family Courts.

Cuba is poor, the blockade has taken a huge toll on the country, but the people have the essentials in life.

To conclude:

There are many things we can learn from Cuba socialisti, the free health and education, the way towards food efficiency and organic product not transgenic, food gardens in city parks, the practical use of renewable energy for public buildings and the solidarity with the peoples of the world rather than war, and the work of the Women’s Federation.

It is very important to keep the pressure on to lift the economic blockade on Cuba and to demand the removal of Cuba from the US list of terrorist nations. Also to apply pressure on President Obama to release the Cuban 5 – the last three left in jail Antonio, Gerardo and Ramon. And that Guantánamo Bay be returned to Cuba and that the prisoners held there be given a proper trial or be released.

I will end with a few words from the Cuban national hero, José Martí: “to be educated is the national hero, Jose Marti: “to be educated is the

Fayez Khan

"But I have only one life to give for my country". These were the words spoken by Gerardo Hernández when he heard his conviction of two life sentences plus 15 years handed down by a biased and influenced jury in a Miami court on June 8, 2001.

After being arrested on false charges, and enduring imprisonment in isolation for 17 months (while the maximum legal time allowed in isolation is three months), Gerardo and four other Cuban nationals were convicted that day over charges of conspiracy to commit espionage and Gerardo of conspiracy to commit murder. Their sentences ranged from 15 years to two life sentences plus 15 years by a Miami court. Since then it has been revealed the jury was heavily influenced by covert government funding of anti-Cuba propaganda.

Background

For more than 50 years, anti-Cuban terrorist organisations based in Miami have engaged in hundreds of terrorist activities against Cuba, and against anyone who advocates a normalisation of relations between the US and Cuba. A total of 3,478 Cubans have died as a result of terrorist violence, and 2,099 have been injured.

Violent organisations like Alpha 66, Brothers to the Rescue, Cuban American National Foundation’s armed wing, and individuals like Luis Posada Carriles, have operated with complete impunity from within the United States to attack Cuba – with the knowledge and support of the FBI and CIA.

The US government refused to act to arrest or prosecute well-known, notorious terrorists in Miami, despite overwhelming evidence of their crimes.

The Cuban Five infiltrated the terrorist organisations in Miami to inform Cuba of imminent attack and to thwart the terrorists’ plots. Cuba handed over the information of these groups to the FBI. But instead of arresting the terrorists, the FBI arrested the Cuban Five anti-terrorists on September 12, 1998.1

These five men of integrity and bravery have become well known as the Cuban Five. Within days of their unjust conviction, the National Committee to Free the Cuban Five was formed in the United States. Now over 350 committees exist worldwide that demand the freedom of the Cuban Five.

Recently, I had the privilege of hearing Aili Labalbin speak about the Cuban Five and the ordeal of their families in the Trades Hall building of Perth. Aili is the daughter of Ramón Labalbin, one of the Cuban Five. She was 11 when her father was arrested. Aili continued her speaking tour of Australia, which was arranged by two large workers’ unions of Australia (CFMEU and MUA) and supported by the Australia Cuba Friendship Society (ACFS).

Aili spoke of the injustice towards her father, her family, the rest of the Cuban Five and their families, and of injustice towards her country. She told us how her younger sister couldn’t imagine their father in any other way except in prison clothes. She told us how the wife of one of the Cuban Five has never been granted a visa by the US, and thus has not seen her husband in 16 years.

She told us how the man, Posada Carriles, who actually planned many terrorist attacks on Cuba walks free in the US. And yet, she spoke with warmth, with calmness and with love. She informed the roughly 70 people in her audience of the background of the Cuban Five and the events surrounding their trial. She shared heart-warming anecdotes of her visits to her father in prison. We learnt that it was the brave smiles and optimism of the Cuban Five that gave strength to their families when they felt weak. She said that the white hair of one of the Cuban Five’s mother, who waits to see her husband in 16 years.

Cubas Five

The Cuban Five

Closing the evening, Jorge Trujillo, who as the interpreter for Aili, read a letter by Ramon on behalf of the Cuban Five that was written on July 31, 2014. The letter expressed deep gratitude and love for the people of Australia who support their cause. It also expressed solidarity with the Palestinian people and called for an independent and peaceful Palestinian state. Representatives of the CFMEU, MUA and ACFS expressed their solidarity with the Cuban Five, and were greeted with cheers and clapping for their work in international solidarity.

An independent two-day inquiry into the case of the Cuban Five was held in March 2014, at the Law Society in London. It had a panel of distinguished judges from various countries, including India, France and South Africa. After reviewing the entire trial, reading related documents, and hearing testimonies, they found the entire case unjust: starting from the unwarranted arrest, the absence of convincing evidence, unusually harsh convictions, to the selection of juror and revelations of large sums of monies paid to journalists in Miami to influence the jury. They concluded it was a political case, motivated by the policy of the US towards Cuba.

It is a political case and one, as Aili pointed out, which will not receive a fair coverage in the mainstream media. Hence, it becomes even more important to spread the word, especially amongst US citizens, to make them aware of this injustice. Barack Obama, as president of the US, holds the power to pardon the Cuban Five. This has given birth to the slogan, “Hey Obama, give me five!”. And this is the focal point of all demonstrations and petitions for their cause. If enough pressure can be generated, this travesty of justice can come to an end, albeit late.

For more information on the case visit:
www.freethecuban5.org

References:
1 http://www.freethecuban5.org/whowearefreecuban.htm
2 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LG5VW4LZ9q0

The Cuban Five

Para los 5 patriotas cubanos.

Viva Cuba! Long live Cuba Socialista!
NATO has never been a defensive organisation, as it was set up six years before the Warsaw Pact. And he derided the “spatchcock of a history” being fed to people in Britain about NATO, arguing that the 28-state alliance constantly reinvents itself to manufacture “new reasons for going to war.”

Plaid Cymru AM Behan Jenkins said she took no pride in this week’s sitting of the NATO summit in south Wales, calling it the “armed wing of the neo-liberal economic consensus.”

She took issue with Welsh suggestions that economic benefits would flow to Wales because of the summit, citing “the massive disruption it will cause as well as its cost.”

Many local companies have already complained about the effect on their businesses, especially in central Cardiff where steel and concrete obstructions, together with closed roads, are playing havoc with normal life and confusing visitors.

Cardiff Council Deputy Lord Mayor Ali Ahmed told the rally: “We all know what is happening with steel fencing, concrete blocks, cement obstructions, together with chopper and helicopter surveillance. Despite opposition from the majority of Cardiff residents, the National Education Association.

Formerly the 3,000 marchers.

When Mr Ahmed was not officially representing the council, it has associated itself with an alternative summit taking place this week. Irish Senator David Cullinane of Sinn Fein said that Ireland was officially NATO-free, but, to the shame of successive Dublin governments, Shannon airport had been used as a staging post for US military forces flying to Afghanistan and Iraq, despite opposition from the majority of Irish people.

NATO had “no strategies to deal with hunger, poverty and injustice and as long as we have occupation and imperialism there will be resistance,” he declared. Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament vice-president Bruce Kent said NATO was “stupid” to come to Wales.”

Wales has a long history of non-violence and peacemaking,” he said. That spirit was evident from the welcome given by Newport residents to the 3,000 marchers.

Thumbs up, clenched fists and peace signs were offered to welcome the protesters for peace. Some minor communities had clearly been intimidated from marching by the militarisation of policing, with steel fencing, concrete blocks, police at every roundabout and crossroad and constant helicopter surveillance.

Newport held an alternative summit at Pill Mill in the city’s most economically deprived parish, Pillgwenlly.

Morning Star
Israel’s “unjustifiable” actions

Hundreds of Holocaust survivors and their children have signed a letter, published as an advertisement in the New Times, condemning “the massacre of Palestinians in Gaza” and calling for a complete boycott of Israel.

According to the letter, the condemnation was prompted by an advertisement written by Elie Wiesel and published in major news outlets worldwide, accusing Hamas of “child sacrifice” and comparing it to the Nazis. The letter was signed by 327 Jewish Holocaust survivors and descendants of survivors and sponsored by the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network, accuses Wiesel of “abuse of history” in order to justify Israel’s occupation of the Gaza Strip. “We are disgusted and outraged by Elie Wiesel’s abuse of our history in these pages to justify the unjustifiable: Israel’s wholesale destruction of Gaza and the murder of more than 2,000 Palestinians, including many children of children. Nothing can justify bombing, shelling, homes, hospitals and universities. Nothing can justify depriving people of electricity and water.”

The letter also blames the United Nations for assisting Israel in its Gaza operation, and the Western general of protecting Israel from condemnation.

“Genocide begins with the silence of the world,” the letter reads.

The letter ends with a call to bring the blockade of Gaza to an immediate end, and for a full boycott of Israel. “Never again” must mean “NEVER AGAIN FOR US ANYONE!”, the letter concludes.

Full text of letter:

Jewish survivors and descendants of survivors and victims of Nazi genocide unequivocally condemn the massacre of Palestinians in Gaza.

As Jewish survivors and descendants of survivors and victims of the Nazi genocide we unequivocally condemn the massacre of Palestinians in Gaza.

“Genocide begins with the silence of the world,” the letter concludes.

The brutal war on Afghanistan which followed, and which is still not concluded, did nothing to bring the terrorists responsible for the September 11 attacks to justice.

The crimes NATO leaders will flag up in Wales are crises of their own making. The so-called “war on terror,” which has seen the US make liberal use of kidnap, torture and assassination by drone, has only swelled the ranks of Islamist extremism.

The Islamic State fanatics (formerly known as ISIS or ISIL), spreading murder and mayhem in Iraq and Syria are the product of the sectarian bloodshed unleashed by the US invasion of the former and backing for “regime change” in the latter.

The Amurak generals in the mainstream media say that if the US had invaded Syria, or “properly” supported “moderate” opposition to Assad, Islamic State would never have got as far as it has.

This is rubbish. The Islamic State has flourished in Iraq as a result of the suicide bombings carried out by the US invasion. Arms ploughed to “moderates” in Syria, mostly by non-moderate US allies such as the fundamentalist dictatorship in Saudi Arabia, were never lacking – this is why the civil war drags on – and have ended up in Islamic State hands.

In any case it was the “moderates” the Syrian army that had been US journalist James Foley to Islamic State, which later murdered him. Some moderates.

NATO chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen’s retention that the alliance would welcome membership for war-torn Ukraine emphasises its reckless drive to war. NATO is among those who welcomed the news when gun-toting fanatics overthrew the elected Ukrainian government.

It has not lifted a finger in response to the massacres of trade unionists and socialists carried out on Kiev’s behalf by Nazi thugs. Rather than advise its new ally to negotiate with regions unwilling to acknowledge the coup d’état, it has encouraged it to launch an all-out war against its own people.

In Newport, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko will go in hand to hand for more help from the world’s top warmongers.

Only pressure from the millions in the UK, Britain, France and other countries who are sick of the endless fighting will stop him getting it.

Morning Star

A protest in Newport against NATO prior to the summit.

On August 27, former Politburo member Le Hong Anh, acting as special envoy of the Communist Party of Vietnam’s General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, visited Beijing for formal talks with the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping and Politburo Standing Committee member, Liu Yunshan. Le Hong Anh suggested that the top leadership of the two states and two Parties should give direct instructions to ministries to develop bilateral talks and relations and resolve disagreements. He also invited General Secretary Xi to visit Vietnam. General Secretary Xi agreed with Le Hong Anh’s suggestion and said China and Vietnam both shared socialist ideology under the leadership of their communist parties. He said China valued the traditional friendship and cooperation with Vietnam, and would continue to develop a healthy, comprehensive strategic partnership with Vietnam. Both countries agreed to developing bilateral ties, promote exchange visits and resolve disagreements for long-term mutual benefit.

On August 25, China’s state legislature began a review of an amendment to the 20-year-old Advertisement Law. The amendment suggests that direct and indirect tobacco advertisements be banned in any form and in public areas. Scholars, legal and health professionals sent a joint letter to the National Legislative June, asking for tobacco advertising to be banned.

On August 27, Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo sent a supporting message to a ceremony, in which he expressed his admiration of World War II Japanese war criminals, calling them the “foundation of the new Japan”. The ceremony was held at a temple in the country’s west. In front of the inscribed cenotaphs, 220 people attended and prayed for Japan’s 1,180 convicted World War II war criminals, including 14 Class-A war criminals. Abe sent his letter under the name of the President of the Liberal Democratic Party. This letter, which was read at the ceremony, said, “I express my grief at the death of martyrs who sacrificed their lives to form the foundation of peace and prosperity in Japan today.” Abe is the only Prime Minister who has sent such a message to this ceremony in the past 20 years.

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The evidence that Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 was shot down by an aircraft, pre- sumed to be Ukrainian, rather than brought down by a Russian missile as claimed by the Kiev junta has been allowed to quietly slip away into silence and obscurity. Even Tony Abbott seems to have stopped spotlighting the world stage demanding that Russia be brought to book for it.

Embarassing, or what?

Now The New Straits Times, Malaysia’s flagship English-language newspaper, with close connections to the Malaysian government, has come out and openly accused Kiev of shooting the plane down. Citing "US analysts," the paper laid out evidence that Ukrainian fighter aircraft attacked the airliner with an air-to-air missile followed by bursts of cannon’ fire. It cited “experts who had said that the supposed need to protect kindergarten children from ‘extremist views’. Because that is what the Tories are doing in Britain.

Nicky Morgan, only recently appointed to the post of Education Secretary, has gone so far as to threaten to withhold state funding from kindergartens that fail to promote what she calls "fundamental British values". Now, I wonder what they could be? Exiling agricultural labourers to Botany Bay for trying to form a trade union, perhaps. Or joining in the invasion of Iraq on the excuse of finding "weapons of mass destruction" that were in fact "fundamental values". And if you still don’t think the threat to the people of Donetsk and other eastern regions is real, listen to pro-Kiev journalist Bogdan Boutkevich: "The biggest problem [in Donetsk] is that it is overpopulated with people, nobody has any use for… Donetsk must be exploited as a resource [but] the most important thing that must be done is that there is a certain category of people that must be exterminated."
set in the early ‘fifties, The Bletchley Circle is a series of dramas involving women who worked in the top-secret Bletchley Park code-breaking centre in WW2 and who now put their analytical skills, intuition and detective sense to work to solve new puzzles. Star- ing Hatye Morahan, Anna Maxwell Martin, Rachael Stirling, Sophie Rundle and Julie Graham, this second series (ABC1 from Sunday August 31 at 9.30pm) comprises two self-contained stories – played out over two episodes each. Both are written by series creator Guy Burt.

The resourceful ladies are reunited for their second case when former Bletchley Park colleague, Alice Merrin (Hatye Morahan) is accused of murder. Jean (Julie Graham) methodically sets to work examining the evidence and is intent on helping Alice after a distinguished scientist is discovered shot through the heart in Alice’s home with Alice, gun in hand standing over him.

The evidence is stacked against her but Jean’s instincts tell her differently and she pays a visit to Alice in Holloway Prison. Alice is quickly resighted to the fact that she will hang and there are disturbing scenes recreating the methodology of carrying out a fumigating (weighing the prisoner, treating the methodology of carrying out a fumigating (weighing the prisoner, treating

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lue Zo

o (ABC3 from Monday September 8 at 8.35pm) is a 13-part observational documentary for children that follows eight young marine animal enthusiasts as they embark on an intense six-week training mission working with dolphins, seals, penguins and turtles. There are those who think that training captured marine mammals to do tricks and stunts in a “Sea World” type aquarium is more exploitation than conservation, but using rescued animals rather than wild-caught ones seems to overcome most of the objections. At any rate, more than 500 hopefuls in Australia and Ireland vied to become Rookies for the six-week course at Blue Zoo at Coffs Harbour. The chosen eight Blue Zoo Rookies (it’s a co-production with Irish TV so half the rookies are Irish) are thrown in the deep end to learn how to feed and train rescued marine animals. Their hard work culminates in the creation of a brand new dol-phin and seal performance that show-cases the Rookies’ own conservation messages.

The Rookies experience the highs and lows of working with marine ani-mals: from assisting with emergency seal, turtle and dolphin rescues and releases, to witnessing the birth of a baby dolphin, and redesigning and building better animal homes. They also get stuck into the not so glamour-ous jobs like fish prep and cleaning up stinky seal poop each morning!

A new four-part documentary series on SBS, The Real History Of Science Fiction (SBS ONE Mondays from September 15 at 8.35pm) examines four enduring themes of science fiction: time travel; the exploration of space; robots and artificial intelligence; and aliens. Narrated by Mark Gatiss, Doctor Who writer, the series examines sci-fi’s impact on cinema, television and literature. Some contributors include William Shatner (Star Trek), Nathan Fillion (Firefly), Zoe Saldana (Avatar, Star Trek), Steven Moffat (Doctor Who), Richard Dreyfuss (Close Encounters of the Third Kind) and many more.

Personally, although I am a long-time fan of the genre, it seems to me that the series credits science-fiction with more significance than is strictly warranted. Most sci-fi is after all pretty forgettable. Cross Stage, the third and final episode of the BBC series Life And Death Row (ABC1 Monday September 8 at 9.30pm) deals with attempts by students from the University of Texas Law School to win appeals or at least a stay of execution for prisoners on death row. It’s a heavy responsibility for a student, knowing that failure means his or her client will be executed by lethal injection. And most of the last ditch appeals do fail.

It’s good to see that even in such a red-neck stronghold as Texas there are people who get out in front of the law and defy the prevailing attitudes and protest against the death penalty. The futility of the death penalty as a deterrent, and its essential nature as an admission of defeat by society, are painfully evident here. One of the killers at the centre of the program comes from one of the most dismal “trailer parks” I have ever seen. One is left to ponder just how long can the US government (state and fed-eral) go on locking up – and killing – the poor?

Some observational documentaries are inherently watchable simply because their subjects are real people being themselves. Such should have been the case with Crash Test Mummies & Daddies (ABC2 from Wednesday September 10 at 9.30pm) the six-part series that follows five Australian couples as they experience the first four months at home with a new baby. As the parents’ needs are put on hold to cope with the demands of their newborn, the series explores the stresses and strains this in turn puts on relationships. Priorities and values shift and compromises are negotiated as the couples share their unique and intimate experiences of life after birth within the context of broader issues such as breastfeeding, financial pressures, changing roles, familial obligations, self-esteem, body image and the elusive work-life balance. I just found it dull. Perhaps if you had a newborn it would strike a chord, but it just seemed tedious to me. The whole-hearted way Rhonda (the character in Utopia (ABC1 Wednesdays at 8.30pm) played by Kitty Flanagan has embraced jargon to replace common sense and even actual ideas is so spot-on that it puts your teeth on edge. Forever adjuring people mean-while to “get the conversation going”, she is a priceless concoction, and one clearly drawn from life (or a nightmare).
Sydney District Committee:

Queensland businesses are being hit with service charges of more than $500 a day on their electricity bills, in a move the solar industry says is designed to kill the roll-out of commercial-scale rooftop solar across the state.

The charges were quietly unveiled by the Queensland Competition Authority (QCA) and the state government in July. But their implications are only now being absorbed as business operators do the numbers on proposed solar installations.

The new tariffs affect a range of businesses, but the worst hit are those that use more than 100kW/h of electricity a year, and are deemed to be “large energy” users.

In tariff 46, for instance, those daily charges for “service” — originally a charge for reading the meter — have jumped to $488 a day from $42 a day. The “energy” price on consumption is dropped to 10.4c/kWh from 11.6c/kWh.

The fixed service charge replaces a “demand charge”, which could vary according to consumption. There is still a demand charge, but only if a customer uses more than a 400kW threshold in any 30 minute interval.

This is how Ergon Energy has structured its tariff 46. With GST, the service charge rises to $537 a day.

The changes have horrified members of the solar industry, businesses looking to install solar, and those who have invested tens of thousands of dollars in energy efficiency measures such as LEDs or upgraded machinery.

That’s because, according to Steve Madson, director of Country Solar, one of the country’s largest installers of commercial-scale solar, the new tariffs reduce any incentive for businesses to lower consumption from the grid, either by installing solar panels for their own use, or by investing in more efficiency machinery and lighting.

It is not the first move by Queensland authorities against rooftop solar. In June, new rules were imposed that allow the network operators to stop businesses and homes from exporting excess electricity from rooftop solar systems back into the grid.

Ergon Energy, which operates in the regional areas that cover 97 percent of the grid, has admitted that the move could encourage more battery storage — and ultimately consumers to leave the grid, which would not be the most efficient social outcome.

John Grimes, from the Australian Solar Council, says the QCA ruling is discriminatory, and aimed squarely at shutting down solar PV in Queensland.

“It is also really dumb,” Grimes told RenewEconomy. “Commercial and industrial solar is exactly where we should be supporting solar, not locking it out.

“That is because when the sun shines, business is hard at work. Solar is feeding electricity into businesses at exactly the right time, when the machines spin and the computers run. There is a direct correlation between the production and demand curves for electricity in this sector.

“In turn, this reduces peak demand, bringing wholesale prices down, and delaying or eliminating the need for expensive infrastructure upgrades. Queenslanders are already playing a heavy price for past unneeded infrastructure spending. Now a shortsighted government wants to double up and compound the problem further.”

Madson has crunched the numbers for a number of clients in Queensland on various tariff structures, and how they will be impacted by the changes.

For those transitioning from tariff 20, and using 300kWh a day, the new structure and fixed service fee means the benefits of cutting consumption by one third will narrow from a 30 percent reduction in the annual electricity bill to just a 10 per cent reduction. To those using more energy, the benefits of reducing consumption by one third will fall to just a 4 percent reduction in the bill.

These will affect businesses such as motel owners, and any other business with large amounts of air conditioning or refrigeration needs.

“This is a blatant cash grab by the Newman government,” Madson said.

“The Queensland government is in such a financial mess because of coal, and the forecast royalties from coal in particular that never eventuated.

“Small and medium businesses employ the majority of people in our state and yet small and medium businesses are the ones constantly being slammed to provide for the short falls in coal revenue. Electricity prices have doubled in five years, gas prices are set to triple.

“With battery storage coming online in multiple forms we have the opportunity to level our demand which means that no capital will need to be spent on upgrading our network until our population doubles in 140 years! This is evident by the huge surge in profits by the networks.

“By preventing businesses investing in renewables and energy efficiency, this government is killing Queensland.

“Businesses are spending their money in improving the state-owned assets, creating jobs, improving the environment and upgrading in efficient infrastructure.

“We see that renewables are the push to teach these people that there are better ways and these are measurable, once a business sees the results of going solar they soon reinvest their savings into extra measures to get further reductions which creates more jobs.”

RenewEconomy