Corporate tax rorts
Offshore parasites

Tom Pearson & Anna Pha

As the saying goes, there are two certainties in an uncertain world: death and taxes. The corporate world, while unable to eliminate the former, is doing everything in its considerable power to eliminate the latter. As recent developments over the past couple of years show, transnationals are determined to not only dodge paying tax, but to pay none at all. The current ructions over the likes of Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton channelling billions through shell companies set up in places such as Singapore and Ireland are the tip of the iceberg.

As professor Pietro Guj of the University of Western Australia, who has been an advisor to that state’s government, puts it, “A company has the right to conduct business wherever it chooses.” Big business knows no borders, recognises no sovereignty. It was in 2005 that the Singapore government registered a new company called BHP Billiton AG Singapore Branch. It was given a special Pioneer Service Company status, which meant it would pay no income tax until 2020. Its Singapore tax-free profit is then sent to Switzerland. BHP Switzerland then pays 2.5% tax. The remaining profit is then paid as dividends to BHP Netherlands and considered tax free. This ruse is called dual-listed companies which function as two separate companies subject to two different tax authorities.

That’s just one of the methods they use. Of course, the system is there for them. As the big audit firm KPMG put it, the tech giants’ tax structures are perfectly legal. That observation came as three of them faced a Senate inquiry this month. Representatives from Microsoft, Google and Apple made clear the class nature of the system: “The tax paid is in full compliance with Australian tax law” – Microsoft; “We are not opposed to paying tax. We are opposed to being uncompetitive” – Google; “We do not avoid tax, we pay all taxes that are due in the Australian market” – Apple.

Politically, it should be recalled that the mining companies spent tens of millions of dollars on advertising against Labor’s 2010 Resources Super Profits Tax. The outcome: both Labor leader and PM Kevin Rudd and Liberal leader Malcolm Turnbull, who also supported the tax, were toppled in coups.

As has been reported in the Guardian, eight of the top 200 companies publicly listed on the Australian stock exchange (ASX 200) paid no taxes on profits averaging $50 million and more than half a billion dollars over the decade to 2013! More than 20 (10 percent) of the top 200 corporations paid an average tax rate of five percent or less. Instead of rectifying the situation the government keeps, telling the people of Australia that there is a “budget crisis”, sacking thousands of public servants and slashing spending on social security, health, education, community, Indigenous and other services.

As a report released in September last year by the Tax Justice Network and the trade union United Voice reveals, “Almost a third of Australia’s largest companies are paying less than 10 cents in the dollar in corporate tax, which has created a gaping hole in government revenues over the past decade.”

The report found that overall the effective tax rate of ASX 200 companies over the last decade is 23%, compared with the official statutory rate of 30%. “If the ASX 200 companies had paid at the statutory rate it would have produced an additional $8.4 billion in annual revenues” or more than $80 billion over those ten years.

Tax havens

Fifty-seven percent reported having subsidiaries in secrecy jurisdictions (most likely zero or very low tax havens), between them a total of 1,678 subsidiaries. How many others there are is anyone’s guess. Subsidiaries “overcharge” parents for goods and services, transferring profits offshore to low tax havens.

Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, British Virgin Islands, Mauritius, Luxembourg, Switzerland and the Channel Islands of Jersey and Guernsey are amongst the most common tax havens. Bermuda and Jersey are home to at least 119 entities belonging to the ASX 200. Their tax rate is zero.

The report also revealed that 60% of the ASX 200 companies reported debt levels in excess of 75%, which is suggestive of tax avoidance set-ups. Otherwise why would they continue running at a “loss”? They also borrow from offshore subsidiaries and between subsidiaries, so the tax deductible interest payments are in countries like Australia and the interest is in a tax haven with zero or close to zero tax rates.

United Voice national secretary David O’Byrne said, “The community will be shocked to learn that many of Australia’s largest corporations can legally eliminate the need to pay tax at all or reduce their tax bill to 10% or less.”

Corporate welfare

At the same time as the government is losing tens of billions of dollars in potential income it is handing out billions of dollars in corporate welfare.
Superannuation: Hands off workers’ retirement funds

The Superannuation Guarantee contribution rate was set to rise in small half-yearly increments to 12 percent by 2019. Following its election the Abbott government wasted no time in freezing the rate at 9.5 percent until July 2021. In the same mean, anti-worker spirit, the government has also tried to abolish the Low Income Super Contribution in 2017. The LISC is a government superannuation payment of $500 for workers on incomes below $38,000 to help those viewing for poor workers.

Hockey is also pushing for new laws to allow people to dip into their super savings for the purchase of a first home and other big budget items such as health or education. “This would only work if it’s cut away at workers’ retirement savings but it would drive up the price of housing as more first home buyers could enter the market or would have larger deposits.”

The financial company Merrill Lynch estimates that on the retirement the superannuation savings of a young home buyer drawing $40,000 from his or her super fund for a home deposit would be reduced by $1-40,000 (at current prices) – $100,000 of that loss being compound interest.

One of the main aims of the introduction by the compulsory superannuation guarantee system was to wind back the age pension. Labor is concerned that not enough people would have an adequate income from their savings, which would put the age pension under pressure.

Housing solution

Housing has become unaffordable for most people. The main reason is the shortage of properties on the market and lack of public housing.

The way to solve this problem is to build more homes, remove‘ rental and mortgage controls. It is almost taken for granted now that rental or mortgage payments could take 50 percent or more of a worker’s income. There was a time when banks limited loan repayments to no more than 30 percent of income.

Super could be used for housing but not by workers dipping into their savings. It should be made obligatory for a certain percentage of superannuation savings (industry, retail or self-managed) to be used for building public housing.

This would be a far better solution than workers eating up their own retirement savings. Higher wages, a reversal of the casualisation of the workforce and abolition of TAFE and university fees would also help. But the Coalition is not concerned whether retired workers can live in comfort and with dignity. After all, what use are they to employers who have a younger workforce to exploit? Their focus is solely on facilitating maximum profits for the corporate sector.

Super rort

While super is hardly likely to provide workers with enough savings to retire on, for the wealthy it is one big rort. They might be paying up to 47 percent (including Medicare levy) on income outside a superannuation fund, but on income on investments in the fund they pay little or no tax at all.

The official rate on income “earned” within a fund is 15 percent but the overwhelming majority of those with self-managed superannuation funds (SMSFs) are on higher incomes. These tax breaks can be avoided by investing in shares delivering franked dividends – where the company has already paid tax on the income. They are credited as paid but the tax and deduct it from tax liable on their other income.

Close to 60 percent of SMSF members are over 55 years old. If they retire and begin drawing on their pension, they are exempt from tax on income from and inside the fund.

In 2013 there were 500,000 SMSFs holding almost $500 billion (net) worth of assets and 28 percent of those held more than $1 million.

Reform of the super system is long overdue. It is time to end the rortings and to stop robbing workers.

Superannuation: Hands off workers’ retirement funds

The Superannuation Guarantee contribution rate was set to rise in small half-yearly increments to 12 percent by 2019. Following its election the Abbott government wasted no time in freezing the rate at 9.5 percent until July 2021. In the same mean, anti-worker spirit, the government has also tried to abolish the Low Income Super Contribution in 2017. The LISC is a government superannuation payment of $500 for workers on incomes below $38,000 to help those viewing for poor workers.

Hockey is also pushing for new laws to allow people to dip into their super savings for the purchase of a first home and other big budget items such as health or education. “This would only work if it’s cut away at workers’ retirement savings but it would drive up the price of housing as more first home buyers could enter the market or would have larger deposits.”

The financial company Merrill Lynch estimates that on the retirement the superannuation savings of a young home buyer drawing $40,000 from his or her super fund for a home deposit would be reduced by $1-40,000 (at current prices) – $100,000 of that loss being compound interest.

One of the main aims of the introduction by the compulsory superannuation guarantee system was to wind back the age pension. Labor is concerned that not enough people would have an adequate income from their savings, which would put the age pension under pressure.

Housing solution

Housing has become unaffordable for most people. The main reason is the shortage of properties on the market and lack of public housing.

The way to solve this problem is to build more homes, remove‘ rental and mortgage controls. It is almost taken for granted now that rental or mortgage payments could take 50 percent or more of a worker’s income. There was a time when banks limited loan repayments to no more than 30 percent of income.

Super could be used for housing but not by workers dipping into their savings. It should be made obligatory for a certain percentage of superannuation savings (industry, retail or self-managed) to be used for building public housing.

This would be a far better solution than workers eating up their own retirement savings. Higher wages, a reversal of the casualisation of the workforce and abolition of TAFE and university fees would also help. But the Coalition is not concerned whether retired workers can live in comfort and with dignity. After all, what use are they to employers who have a younger workforce to exploit? Their focus is solely on facilitating maximum profits for the corporate sector.

Super rort

While super is hardly likely to provide workers with enough savings to retire on, for the wealthy it is one big rort. They might be paying up to 47 percent (including Medicare levy) on income outside a superannuation fund, but on income on investments in the fund they pay little or no tax at all.

The official rate on income “earned” within a fund is 15 percent but the overwhelming majority of those with self-managed superannuation funds (SMSFs) are on higher incomes. These tax breaks can be avoided by investing in shares delivering franked dividends – where the company has already paid tax on the income. They are credited as paid but the tax and deduct it from tax liable on their other income.

Close to 60 percent of SMSF members are over 55 years old. If they retire and begin drawing on their pension, they are exempt from tax on income from and inside the fund.

In 2013 there were 500,000 SMSFs holding almost $500 billion (net) worth of assets and 28 percent of those held more than $1 million.

Reform of the super system is long overdue. It is time to end the rortings and to stop robbing workers.

Corporate tax rorts

Offshore parasites

The federal government pays a fossil fuel subsidy of more than $10 billion per annum. The private health insurance companies receive a direct subsidy of more than $6 billion per annum in the form of the PHI (private health insurance) rebate (30-40%) of cost of premiums. This indirectly subsidises the private hospitals and other private health services.

The only corporate subsidies being axed are the ones that seek to address climate change.

What is the real cost of government? The greatest hit on the environment is being paid for by the people. We need a movement to protect our environment.

The federal government pays a fossil fuel subsidy of more than $10 billion per annum. The private health insurance companies receive a direct subsidy of more than $6 billion per annum in the form of the PHI (private health insurance) rebate (30-40%) of cost of premiums. This indirectly subsidises the private hospitals and other private health services.

The only corporate subsidies being axed are the ones that seek to address climate change.

The greatest hit on the environment is being paid for by the people. We need a movement to protect our environment.

Corporate tax rorts

Offshore parasites

The federal government pays a fossil fuel subsidy of more than $10 billion per annum. The private health insurance companies receive a direct subsidy of more than $6 billion per annum in the form of the PHI (private health insurance) rebate (30-40%) of cost of premiums. This indirectly subsidises the private hospitals and other private health services.

The only corporate subsidies being axed are the ones that seek to address climate change.

The greatest hit on the environment is being paid for by the people. We need a movement to protect our environment.

Corporate tax rorts

Offshore parasites

The federal government pays a fossil fuel subsidy of more than $10 billion per annum. The private health insurance companies receive a direct subsidy of more than $6 billion per annum in the form of the PHI (private health insurance) rebate (30-40%) of cost of premiums. This indirectly subsidises the private hospitals and other private health services.

The only corporate subsidies being axed are the ones that seek to address climate change.

The greatest hit on the environment is being paid for by the people. We need a movement to protect our environment.

Corporate tax rorts

Offshore parasites

The federal government pays a fossil fuel subsidy of more than $10 billion per annum. The private health insurance companies receive a direct subsidy of more than $6 billion per annum in the form of the PHI (private health insurance) rebate (30-40%) of cost of premiums. This indirectly subsidises the private hospitals and other private health services.

The only corporate subsidies being axed are the ones that seek to address climate change.

The greatest hit on the environment is being paid for by the people. We need a movement to protect our environment.
**Perth**

**Homeless camp raided**

Gerry Georgatos

Matagarup was raided again last month by 50 police officers who escorted City of Perth workers and other hired personnel. The City of Perth loaded onto trucks tents, swags, bedding, linen, and other daily essentials. Most of them being chronically homeless camp. There were less than 10 percent of the population on the streets, in congested squats and alleys. The City of Perth and the state government stand disgraced. Their capacity to home families should embarrass the Department of Housing, many well resourced non-government housing mobs and especially the state government.

**What is next?** Move on notices for Matagarup’s homeless?

The Matagarup camp has been a safe space for the homeless who otherwise are vulnerable to the worst of the streets. The City of Perth’s bent to move on the homeless.

The City of Perth should be working to provide a homeless friendly precinct. The City of Perth should provide safe spaces with laundries and showers, storage facilities, treatment centres and other basics. But they do not; this speaks for itself.

In Australia we have 20,000 children under the age of 12 years homeless. In the Kimberley nearly seven percent of the region is homeless. Outside natural disasters and wars this is one of the world’s highest homelessness rates. Nearly 100 percent of the Kimberley’s homelessness is of First Peoples.

Does the City of Perth have the courage to meet with us and talk this through. Well, we know the City of Perth has been reading The Stringer.

**The Stringer**

---

**Venezuela is not alone!**

Bob Briton

US President Barack Obama’s Executive Order declaring Venezuela a threat to US national security and foreign policy objectives must rank as one of the most spectacular political “own goals” of recent times. Since the thinly veiled declaration of war on the Bolivarian Revolution was made on March 9, world opinion has turned against the US government; a statement of solidarity with Venezuela during the offensive of the Communist Party of Venezuela.

‘Comrades, we count on your support and active solidarity. We extend fraternal greeting from the homeland of Bolivar, where the working class and people will continue to advance towards the construction of the socialist society.’

The declaration finishes with a list of demands and goals fully backed by the Communist Party of Australia. We support efforts to: Express our full and active solidarity with the Venezuelan people and called for an international day of action on April 19.

The objectives of this event will be to give a clear and strong message to imperialism: Venezuela is not alone and the rest of the world supports and accompanies us,” a letter from the PCV says. “This initiative is framed within the international and national anti-imperialist offensive of the Communist Party of Venezuela. Comrades, we count on your support and active solidarity. We extend fraternal greetings from the homeland of Bolivar, where the working class and people will continue to advance towards the construction of the socialist society.”

The declaration finishes with a list of demands and goals fully backed by the Communist Party of Venezuela. We support efforts to: Express our full and active solidarity with the

---

**Pete’s Corner**

**Do you favours a monarchy or a republic?**

**Could I have something roughly approximating a democracy?**

---

**Sydney CPA Port Jackson Branch invites comrades and friends to join us for our Port Jackson Discussion Hour**

**Tuesday April 28 (please note change of date)**

*What’s wrong with the ANZAC commemoration?*

Introduction by Comrade Denis

**Tuesday May 5**

*Where did Australian manufacturing go & why?*

Introduction by Comrade Steve

**Tuesday May 19**

*Why you should be afraid of the TPP*

Introduction by Comrade Steve

**Tuesday June 2**

*Should Aborigines be included in the Constitution?*

Introduction by Comrade Hannah

---

**All classes 5:30 pm at 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills**

**Enquiries Hannah 0418 668 098**
Australia is in the middle of an unemployment crisis

Owen Bennett
Youth Unemployment Coalition

Going by the official figures released for January 2015, 795,000 people in Australia are unemployed (6.4%), the highest notional rate of unemployment for 13 years. But this figure does not tell the whole story.

1. It does not show that just under half of those unemployed are below the age of 25 - a 40% increase since 2010.
2. It does not show that over 200,000 unemployed people are over the age of 50 - a 40% increase since 2010.
3. It does not show that there are over 1.2 million underemployed people competing against the unemployed for jobs.
4. It does not show that by the latest figures for job vacancies, there are only 152,700 job vacancies. When you consider that there are over 2 million underemployed and employed people competing for these jobs, this means there are more than 13 vacancies for each job vacancy.
5. It does not show that the rate of unemployment benefit is about half of what is needed to live above the poverty line, or that Newstart has not increased in real terms since 1994.
6. It does not show that one in four people collecting unemployment benefits have a significant disability and has over the last few years been pushed onto Newstart from the Disability Support Pension or that there are 100,000 single parents who have also been forced onto the starvation rate of Newstart.

7. And lastly it does not show that long-term unemployment has, over the last few years, doubled to 500,000 - or that the average time spent unemployed, according to the Australian Council of Social Services, is four years.

So how has the government responded to this unemployment crisis that has been slowly building in Australia over the past decade? Has the Coalition tried to increase the rate of jobs available?

No. In fact they have done the opposite and have been systematically slashing jobs in the public service. Since being elected, 100,000 Australians have become unemployed. Even the government’s election promise to create 2 million jobs over the next decade is actually below the expected employment growth!

Has the Coalition tried to take responsibility for its failure to create enough jobs by introducing a fair welfare system?

No. Instead, the Coalition has introduced the most wide-ranging series of attacks ever launched on the Australian welfare state since it was introduced in 1945.

Rather than attempting to fix this unemployment crisis, the federal government has launched an unprecedented range of attacks against the unemployed, pensioners, the disabled and families.

But most of you already knew about this.

The question that confronts us today is WHY and WHAT can we do about it?

Let’s first look at the question of why successive governments – both Labor and Liberal – have been forcing more and more people onto the starvation rate of the Newstart entitlement.

While the government has repeatedly told us that all these cuts are necessary in order to balance the budget, this is a lie.

The real reason is far more sinister.

By forcing hundreds of thousands of people onto the lowest rate of Newstart, what the government is effectively doing is making unemployed people desperate, so impoverished, that they would be willing to accept almost any work at any conditions. Since last two decades, this strategy has placed a strong downward pressure on wages and conditions. As a direct result of this, the growth of real wages has fallen to its lowest rate for 17 years. This downward pressure was 17 years ago when John Howard first introduced the Newstart program.

Dole program and began an ongoing assault against the unemployed and their welfare state.

Seen from this perspective, the ongoing attacks against the unemployed, pensioners and the welfare state are essentially an elaborate form of welfare for business, paving the way for lower wages and conditions.

This brings this to my next point: What can we do about it?

Considering the destructive impact of the ongoing attacks on our welfare system have had on Australian society, the Australian Unemployment Union has been working to unite all Centrelink recipients against these attacks.

Furthermore, we have been, conducting a campaign to reach out to the trade union movement to help us in our common struggle for a fair wage for all and to bring the human- ity back to our welfare state.

If our common struggle is to succeed, we must believe we must show the trade union movement – and the general public more broadly – that to fight for a humane welfare state, for a fair rate of Newstart entitlement, for a fair rate of pension, and more broadly, for a fair opportunity of secure employment, is something that will benefit all Australians.

The Beacon

Call for moratorium on CSG

Lock the Gate Alliance president Drew Hutton says he “supported wholeheartedly” all 20 of the recommendations of the Select Committee on Certain Aspects of Queensland Government Administration related to Commonwealth Government Affairs.

Hutton called on the ALP to reverse its opposition to recommendations calling for a moratorium on new coal seam gas (CSG) approvals, a Royal Commission into the human impacts of CSG mining, and the ban on fracking in Queensland.

“Is it a shame Labor opposed four of the most crucial recommendation of the Lock the Gate Alliance investigation into market transparency and price discovery in the upstream gas market and that it has been clear for some time now, that a number of public statements have been made to financial mar- kets and the community at large in a coordinated scare campaign that there will be gas shortages.

“These public statements have been made by a range of companies who seek to benefit by ramping up CSG and unconventional gas development on the eastern seaboard. “The misinformation, price gouging and cartel-like behaviour detected in this industry goes beyond the revolving door between industry and government.

“Both the new ALP state government and the federal government should be pushing for a Queensland ICAC and a Resources Ombudsman to stamp out corruption and bring transparency back to this state.

The report highlights the harrowing evidence given by people living in the gasfields who have experienced negative impacts on their health, their farming busi- nesses and their land values.

“We are very disappointed that the Liberal Senator issued a dis- seating report and that the Liberal Senators did not even bother turning up at sittings to hear evidence from people living in gasfields.”

Mr Hutton congratulated the members of the committee, par- ticularly Queensland Senators Larissa Waters and Glenn Lazarus who acted in an exemplary manner despite the appalling behaviour of Coalition committee members who constantly tried to undermine the proceedings.

The federal government Energy Whitepaper released last week is another missed opportunity to reassess the community on unconventional gas says the Lock the Gate Alliance.

“The federal government Energy Whitepaper released last week is another missed opportunity to reassess the community on unconventional gas says the Lock the Gate Alliance.

“After the issue playing out in the Victorian and NSW state elec- tions, Energy Minister Mark Far- lane has failed to take community concerns seriously on this National Coordinating, Phil Laird.

“Legitimate concerns raised by the NSW Chief Scientist were not referred to at all by the Energy White Paper, nor the recommen- dations of the NSW Gas Supply In- quiry.

“The government has taken the simplistic hands off approach of leaving gas regulation to the market. The Whitepaper does not provide a framework to ensure rigorous environmental protection but seeks to streamline environmental approvals via a one stop shop. Further there is no process to deter- mine the existing gas supply vol- umes, domestic and export demand and future gas commitments so that government planning decisions are made in Australia’s long-term national interest.”

He said the Alliance does wel- come a proposal for an Australian Competition and Consumer Com- mission investigation into market transparency and price discovery in the upstream gas market and that it has been clear for some time now, that a number of public statements have been made to financial mar- kets and the community at large in a coordinated scare campaign that there will be gas shortages.

“The question that confronts us today is WHY and WHAT can we do about it?

Lock the Gate Alliance president Drew Hutton says he “supported wholeheartedly” all 20 of the recommendations of the Select Committee on Certain Aspects of Queensland Government Administration related to Commonwealth Government Affairs.

Hutton called on the ALP to reverse its opposition to recommendations calling for a moratorium on new coal seam gas (CSG) approv- als, a Royal Commission into the human impacts of CSG mining, and the ban on fracking in Queensland.

“Is it a shame Labor opposed four of the most crucial recommen- dations of the Lock the Gate Alliance investigation into market transparency and price discovery in the upstream gas market and that it has been clear for some time now, that a number of public statements have been made to financial mar- kets and the community at large in a coordinated scare campaign that there will be gas shortages.

“These public statements have been made by a range of companies who seek to benefit by ramping up CSG and unconventional gas development on the eastern seaboard. “The misinformation, price gouging and cartel-like behaviour detected in this industry goes beyond the revolving door between industry and government.

“Both the new ALP state government and the federal government should be pushing for a Queensland ICAC and a Resources Ombudsman to stamp out corruption and bring transparency back to this state.

“The report highlights the har- rowing evidence given by people living in the gasfields who have experienced negative impacts on their health, their farming busi- nesses and their land values.

“We are very disappointed that the Liberal Senator issued a dis- seating report and that the Liberal Senators did not even bother turning up at sittings to hear evidence from people living in gasfields.”

Mr Hutton congratulated the members of the committee, par- ticularly Queensland Senators Larissa Waters and Glenn Lazarus who acted in an exemplary manner despite the appalling behaviour of Coalition committee members who constantly tried to undermine the proceedings.

The federal government Energy Whitepaper released last week is another missed opportunity to reassess the community on unconventional gas says the Lock the Gate Alliance.

“The question that confronts us today is WHY and WHAT can we do about it?

Lock the Gate Alliance president Drew Hutton says he “supported wholeheartedly” all 20 of the recommendations of the Select Committee on Certain Aspects of Queensland Government Administration related to Commonwealth Government Affairs.

Hutton called on the ALP to reverse its opposition to recommendations calling for a moratorium on new coal seam gas (CSG) approv- als, a Royal Commission into the human impacts of CSG mining, and the ban on fracking in Queensland.

“Is it a shame Labor opposed four of the most crucial recommen- dations of the Lock the Gate Alliance investigation into market transparency and price discovery in the upstream gas market and that it has been clear for some time now, that a number of public statements have been made to financial mar- kets and the community at large in a coordinated scare campaign that there will be gas shortages.

“These public statements have been made by a range of companies who seek to benefit by ramping up CSG and unconventional gas development on the eastern seaboard. “The misinformation, price gouging and cartel-like behaviour detected in this industry goes beyond the revolving door between industry and government.

“Both the new ALP state government and the federal government should be pushing for a Queensland ICAC and a Resources Ombudsman to stamp out corruption and bring transparency back to this state.

“The report highlights the har- rowing evidence given by people living in the gasfields who have experienced negative impacts on their health, their farming busi- nesses and their land values.

“We are very disappointed that the Liberal Senator issued a dis- seating report and that the Liberal Senators did not even bother turning up at sittings to hear evidence from people living in gasfields.”

Mr Hutton congratulated the members of the committee, par- ticularly Queensland Senators Larissa Waters and Glenn Lazarus who acted in an exemplary manner despite the appalling behaviour of Coalition committee members who constantly tried to undermine the proceedings.

The federal government Energy Whitepaper released(5,4),(994,993)
Asylum seekers
Labor, Liberals
legacy

Peter Mac

A few weeks ago when federal Labor MP Janet King appeared on the ABC’s Q&A program she acknowledged that governments of both Australia’s major political parties have mistreated asylum seekers who arrive unannounced by boat.

That’s the first admission of any fault with regard to asylum seeker policy by a representative of either party since a small group of coalition senators courageously voiced their objection to the policies of the former Howard government.

As a result of this grossly biased process of asylum seekers may be sent back to Iran, a country from which they had fled because of serious danger of persecution, injury or death.

Reversing cruel policies

The competition between Labor and the Liberals to appear more “tough” on unauthorized arrivals has resulted in both parties adopting almost neo-fascist policies in which asylum seekers are, in effect, treated not only as criminals but as an infe-

Barrister and human rights activ-

ist Julian Burnside has previously suggested that in order to reduce the number of asylum seekers risking their lives at sea, the government should establish an office in Indo-

Australia policy and the vast tragedy of

There are jokes and there are idioms who think they are funny – usually at somebody else’s expense. Dozens of Commonwealth public servants were told by their bosses that their jobs were to be axed in an April Fool’s day in Canberra. More than 30 low-ranking workers at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade were greeted by a message on a big TV screen in the office that their workplace was being broken up and moved to Melbourne. Many of the public servants are on temporary contracts and they were advised to submit expressions of inter-

Embassy of the
Federal Republic of West Papua

Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade & Immigration
Suite 211 – 838 Collins St. Docklands Vic 3008

Tel: 03 9094 9590; 03 9094 9591
www.dfait.federalrepublicofwestpapua.org
Office Manager Amos Waingai
0431 284 731
waingai@dfait.federalrepublicofwestpapua.org

April 15, 2015

For more information call 1300 724 010

An Australian government advertisement that is targeting asylum seekers.
Simon Trinidad, imprisoned, connects with Colombian peace process

WT Whitney

Ricardo Palmera, alias “Simon Trinidad,” is a member of Colombia’s elite. He was sentenced to 60 years in prison for his role in the 1997 killing of three US military contractors. The FARC, Colombia’s largest leftist guerrilla group, commandeered a cattle truck to Barranquilla in a hostage-taking. Trinidad personifies a new kind of warfare: a combination of drug-running and guerrilla campaign.

Trinidad’s background is as follows. His father was a respected lawyer, law professor, and Colombian senator for the Liberal Party. His maternal grandfather had served as governor of the Cesar department. Trinidad was a member of Colombia’s elite. He attended a private university in Bogota and obtained a master’s degree in business economics from Harvard University in the United States.

International law was never questioned by international law, which recognises the right of revolution. If a peace settlement accepts that notion, then peace will be achieved. The scenario would be particularly unfavourable.

The Colombian Army cracked down on the Patriotic Union (UP by its Spanish initials) which emerged following a peace agreement between the government and the FARC. Demonstrations and protests by other leftists invaded electoral politics as UP contested the next election. They achieved victories, and then in 1977 two parties were nationwide. In Valledupar in 1987, many of Trinidad’s Common Cause comrades died, one by one. Others went into exile. Of them, in her published recollections, described the climate of fear and desperation. Trinidad says:

The Colombian Army cracked down on Common Cause members in 1982. With others, Palmera was arrested, “harassed.” The FARC targeted Barranquilla in a cattle truck, deprived of sleep, food, and water for three days, subjected to severe physical, mental, and emotional torture. At his first trial Trinidad identified the murder of charismatic UP peace activist candidate Jaime Pando Leal on October 11, 1987 as a watershed moment. He had a meeting with Pando and talked about peace.

All of this is Trinidad’s story. His case is never questioned by international law, which recognises the right of revolution. If a peace settlement accepts that notion, then peace will be achieved. The scenario would be particularly unfavourable.

The Colombian military took on leftist guerrillas in Colombia, and then on December 31, 2004 he was yet not Simon Trinidad – left his home city of Valledupar, in Cesar department, to join the Caribbean Bloc of the FARC, left behind a family, bank-managing job, and the professorship at a local university, and family assets which he managed – a cattle ranch and cotton and fruit-growing properties.

His family had been a respected lawyer, law professor, and Colombian senator for the Liberal Party. His maternal grandfather had served as governor of the Cesar department. Trinidad was a member of Colombia’s elite. On December 5, 1987 Ricardo Palmera – he was sentenced to 60 years in prison for his role in the 1997 killing of three US military contractors. The FARC, Colombia’s largest leftist guerrilla group, commandeered a cattle truck to Barranquilla in a hostage-taking.

The FARC has repeatedly demanded his release from prison so he can serve as a negotiator. Rumours circulated recently that Colombian officials, listening to the FARC, are asking US counterparts for Trinidad’s release.

Negotiations now dealing with the post-conflict fate of guerrilla leaders are discussing issues having to do with imprisonment and extradition. Critics say Colombia’s tendency to extradite prisoners to the United States State is problematic for Colombian sovereignty. Simon Trinidad is a case in point.

Mark Burton

Simon Trinidad, imprisoned, connects with Colombian peace process

El Espectador

Interviewed him in Bogota. Burton discusses Trinidad’s possible release from prison in relation to the peace negotiations.

EE: Is it actually possible the US government might free “Simon Trinidad”?

MB: I think it’s really feasible, because the decision to put him at liberty is in the hands of President Barack Obama. Colombia needs Trinidad at the peace talks; he is a well-informed man, capable, and brings his experience of having been a negotiator at the Caguán [peace talks] during the government of Andrés Pastrana. The FARC has acceded him as one of its representatives and it’s crucial that he be in Havana.

EE: Is there a favourable atmosphere within the Obama administration for dealing with an eventual release?

MB: I can’t speak for the US government, but I can certainly tell you in this regard that for Obama to have designated Bernard Aronson as a delegate to the peace process is very important. It’s a clear sign that the President of the United States supports the talks and to that extent I think there are great possibilities. Legally, just as Obama has the power to pardon somebody, he can also reduce a sentence. That would be the most effective way, although everything depends on overtures the Santos government makes.

EE: Have they looked at possible opposition from civil society in the United States?

MB: Look, last December, when the United States freed the three Cuban agents, there was a lot of noise, because the Cuban exile community in Florida is very strong. But Colombia is different. In that sense, I don’t think the scenario would be particularly unfavourable.

EE: What possibilities might “Trinidad” expect in US courts?

MB: He was sentenced to 60 years in prison thanks to pressure at the time from the Colombian government. Later he lost his appeal. But we are reviewing the case and looking at alternatives. I want to make it clear that it’s been very difficult for him to pursue his defence, because at key times there was no lawyer available for him to rely on. The public defender he had during the trial has maintained contact with him strictly on a basis of friendship and human rights. Beyond that, he’s been kept in absolute isolation now for 11 years. That violates the [United Nations] Convention against Torture.

EE: Do you share the theory that his trial in the United States had a political tinge?

MB: I think it was a set-up, of course. [Colombian President] Alvaro Uribe requested the US extradition of the three Cuban agents. In December 2014, the Obama administration for dealing with the United States had a political tinge?

EE: Aren’t you exaggerating to suggest that US justice lent itself to fashioning a “set-up” for a guerrilla chief?

MB: George Bush and Alvaro Uribe were good friends. One couldn’t say they talked about all this over a cup of coffee, but there was an understanding between the two governments. Besides, no one can be extradited for political reasons.

EE: In Colombia people wondering about a possible settlement make the point that victims deserve justice. How do you respond?

MB: In this country there are many kinds of victims. It’s been brought up in the negotiations, for example, that political prisoners also have to be recognised as victims. The peace process is justifiably looking toward an end to armed conflict and to the possibility of social peace so that no one will be victimised any longer. Political considerations do exist that some want settled in the courts. Even though there are sectors in Colombia who want to continue the war, we believe Colombians support the process and that, in the end, Uribe and his friends will be in the minority. If you weigh the choice for a country like Colombia between having peace and having a prisoner in the United States, anyone can definitely see that peace is more important.

Interviewed him in Bogota. Burton discusses Trinidad’s possible release from prison in relation to the peace negotiations.
Farming was the only life that Dhanraj Pawar, a farmer from Maharashtra in central India, ever knew. His farm had been handed down through several generations, and his hopes for a better life and aspirations were firmly rooted in his land. But last year, worn out and mired in debt, he hewed down his plots, sold his ancestral land and quit.

Every sowing season, he had put his faith in the promise that Bt cotton would mean bumper harvests by guaranteeing protection from the deadly pest called the bollworm that can ravage the crop. But these seeds were a bitter disappointment—far from Dhanraj. “After 10 straight years of losses, I had to sell my buffalo and all my land,” he says. “When I started using Bt seeds, expectations were built up and hopes soared. And the price of cotton is too low to make any profit.”

Dhanraj has the money to uproot his family and move to a nearby city to work as a daily wage labourer. Dhanraj may be bankrupt and landless but, for him, this is enough. In what is the worst agricultural crisis in modern India’s history, more than 296,400 cotton farmers have killed themselves in the past 20 years, according to National Crime Bureau Records.

Some have swallowed a bottle of pesticide, others hanged themselves. A number of factors are at work in this heartbreakening story of farmer suicides—including the failure of agricultural banking, the loan sharks that take that place, and the unfair international trade regime. While Bt cotton seeds are not solely responsible for the rise in suicides in India, they are far from the magic solution they are touted to be. “There is a multiplicity of policies working against Indian cotton farmers, such as low prices, high costs, subsidised agriculture in the West, and the growth of seed monopolies,” says Vijay Jawandhia, a farmer’s leader from Maharashtra.

“Even though yields have increased, farm- ers are making losses, because the price they get for their cotton is lower than it was 16 years ago, when Bt seeds were introduced,” he says. He points out that Bt cotton seeds are meant for irrigated farms. But more than 80 percent of Indian agriculture is non-irrigated, so the seeds don’t deliver the yields promised. “This high- cost GM technology is only making agriculture more risky and farmers more vulnerable,” he says.

Bullied and shortchanged

GM seeds are created by merging DNA from different species. The foreign genes may come from bacteria, viruses or other sources. The purpose of genetically modifying seeds is to create herbicide-, insect- and drought-tolerance, or crops with enhanced nutritional qualities.

Some GM seeds, like Bt cotton, contain toxins that kill bugs without having to spray pesticides that disturb the entire farm. However, pests have developed resistance, leading to increased use of pesticides and herbicides, and greater damage to the environment.

Monsanto, which pioneered the use of genetically modified seeds, describes itself as a “R&D-driven, farmer-focused” company. But activists claim: “We are focused on empowering farm- ers – large and small – to produce more from their land and increase the world’s natural resources such as water and energy.”

But farmers across the world have a strikingly similar story to tell. They felt their dreams of being empowered or sustained, they feel bullied and shortchanged by Monsanto’s products and its aggressive methods to enforce those contracts. Farmers in Guatemala, Mexico and Ghana are part of growing resistance to Monsanto and its biotech GM. Organic growers in the US, Canada and Australia are fighting against contamination of their fields and destruction of biodiversity as GM crops from neighbouring farms or wind drift. So, why don’t farmers boycott Bt? Why does GM cotton dominate the market? As Monsanto itself points out, “If Bt cotton were a root cause of suicidal tendencies, why do Indian farmers represent the fastest-growing users of biotech crops in the world?”

Farmer Dhanraj Pawar has an answer: “There is no other seed available in the market. Before Bt seeds, we used hybrid seeds. But we can’t find the old seeds in the shops any more.”

Monsanto has tied up with state govern- ments and local seed companies that distribute its patented seeds, while they collect the royalties it earns through the Alliance for Sustainable & Holistic Agriculture (ASHA). “That’s how they have monopolised the seed market.”

Having friends in high places helps. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Clin- ical Global Initiative, and the US Agency for International Development, all partner with Monsanto and encourage the use of their seeds in the Global South, especially in Africa. But farmers’ organisations are not easily taken in.

In Burkina Faso, the National Union of Agricultural Workers (Syntapa) launched a campaign against Bt cotton and biofortified sorghum because they have impoverished farmers and had adverse effects on the environment. While the cost of Bt cotton seed in Burkina Faso has tripled, there has been no increase in yields, according to Syntapa leader Ousmane Tiendrébéogo.

“The government has every interest in encouraging GM in order to continue to attract funders and international donors like the US, which make their development aid conditional on the adoption of GMOS,” says Tiendrébéogo.

Several governments have proposed new laws that restrict farmers from saving, breeding and bartering seeds on which they rely. Some, including Ghana and Canada, are attempting to do so in line with the 1978 Plant Council of the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants.

This is supposed to help protect plant vari- ety and to encourage plant breeders to develop new varieties. However, farmers and campaign- ers see this as strengthening corporate control over seed patents, while disempowering the rights of farmers to save seeds. farmers that may result in further losses of biodiversity.

Around 75 percent of plant genetic diver- sity has vanished since the 1900s, as farmers have abandoned their local seed varieties for genetically uniform, high-yielding varieties, according to the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation.

Taking farmers to court

In the West, pro-corporate patent laws have been used against several family-run farmers. The Canadian farmer couple Percy and Louise Sluismeier became icons of the anti-GM movement when they received a lawsuit notice from Monsanto in 1998 accusing them of patent infringement for cultivating Monsanto’s Roundup Ready canola (rapeseed) without a licence.

They said that they had never bought Mon- santo’s seeds and模范ed them from the field. “We are a ‘patent infringer’ who knowingly planted this seed in his field and used Mon- santo’s patented technology without permission or licence.”

When Monsanto sued the Schweimers for damages of up to $400,000, the couple fought the case in the Canadian Supreme Court. Even- tually, the court ruled that while the Schweimers had infringed on Monsanto’s patent, they did not have to pay damages since they had not in any way benefited from the seeds.

Monsanto has filed 145 lawsuits against farmers since 1997 in the United States alone. The company says filing these cases is necessary because the loss of revenue hinders invest- ment in research and development to create new products to help farmers.

In order to prevent further litigation against small farmers, the Organic Seed Growers & Trade Association filed a case against Mon- santo in 2011 to prohibit Monsanto from filing lawsuits against organic farmers whose farms may have been contaminated by Monsanto’s seeds.

The court rejected the organic growers’ case, stating they had no reason to try to block Monsanto from suing them because the company had given its assurance that it would not file lawsuits against organic growers if GM seeds accidentally mix in with organics. Monsanto states that two separate courts in 2012-13 acknowledged that Monsanto took no action against organic growers for crosspollination.

Though Monsanto often appears to have the law on its side, in Brazil there have been rulings against it. Around five million Brazilian soy- bean farmers sued the agrochemical giant for charging excessive royalties on crops planted using seed from the previous year’s harvest. The company justifies its royalties by saying it reinvests US$2.6 million a day in research and development “that ultimately benefits farmers and consumers”.

But in 2012, the court ruled in favour of the Brazilian farmers, saying Monsanto owes farm- ers arrears of around US$2 billion in lieu of the excess royalty charged to them since 2004. Monsanto signed a settlement agreement with the farm- ers to end the litigation.

Later, however, Monsanto asked soy exporters in Brazil to collect royalties on the company’s behalf so that it did not miss out on royalties from seeds that are being reused. Brazilian traders have been reluctant to do so, leading to growing tension between them and Monsanto.

When farmers lost their crop to a pest attack despite using Monsanto’s pest-resistant corn seeds, the Association of Soybean and Corn Producers of Mato Grosso region asked Mon- santo and other seed producers to reimburse them for money spent on additional pesticides.

Mai buffers back

The most impressive victory against Mon- santo has been in Maui, Hawaii, in November 2014, when residents voted in favour of a tempo- rary ban on the farming of GM crops. This will hold until Maui county conducts an analy- sis of the health effects of genetically modified farming and foods.

Monsanto and Dow Chemical conduct field trials of genetically modified crops in Maui and also grow engineer seed for commercial purposes.

This has created several problems, including chemical pollution, birth defects, surface water contamination and glyphosate (the active ingredient in Monsanto’s Roundup weedkillers) tox- icity in residents, according to the website of the Sustainable Hawaiian Agriculture for the Keiki and the Anna (SHAKA) Movement which led the campaign for the moratorium.

Monsanto and Dow Chemicals spray over 80 chemicals on their GMO fields in Maui, which is unregulated by the US Environment Protection Agency, according to the SHAKA Movement.

“The moratorium protects small farmers from having to use more and stronger chemi- cals to control the newly resistant weeds and insects being created in and around neigh- bouring GMO fields,” says the website of the SHAKA Movement. Crops were contaminated by unwanted GM crops and the farmers were sued for patent infringement. Monsanto and Dow are fighting the ban.

Across the world, farmers who have felt the fallout of GM seeds have staged valiant lawsuits against Monsanto and other biotech giants, demanding that the world’s traditional foods and seeds be safeguarded from genetic tampering.

“Why do people still buy the lottery? We are always hoping.”

New Internationalist

The farmers’ friend?
Marines go to Honduras

WT Whitney

Honduran military authorities announced March 27 that some 250 US Marines will soon be based at the US airbase at Soto Cano. Equipped with a high-speed "MEF" (Marine Expeditionary Force) capability at least four "CH-53E Super Stallion" helicopters, and possibly "MV-22 Osprey tilt rotors and KC-130 Hercules tankers," they are part of the "Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force South (SPMAGTF)."

The official version of their mission is to carry out "training for forces in the region, humanitarian assistance missions, and anti-drug operations."

The SPMAGTF, based at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, is part of Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) II. According to the Marine Corps' website, a "MEF possesses the capability for projecting offensive combat power ashore while sustaining itself in combat without external assistance for a period of 60 days. A similar [Marine Corp] expeditionary force is based at Moron Air Base in Spain as support for the US Africa Command."

The announcement of the Marines' arrival coincided with the opening in Tegucigalpa of the Central American Regional Security Conference. The official purpose was to build a "shield against organised crime." Honduras' President Juan Orlando Hernandez welcomed the gathering of military, intelligence and drug-war officials from 14 nations. US Marine General John Kelly, commander of the US Southern Command, told attendants that "there is a large contingent of US officials here ... Ms Erin Logan is here from the State Department."

The agreement among President Obama's "top four national security and national policy officials from 14 nations. US Marine General John Kelly, commander of the US Southern Command, told attendants that "there is a large contingent of US officials here ... Ms Erin Logan is here from the State Department."

The Soto Cano airbase has been emblematic of the US military's long presence in Honduras. It's home-base for 500 US troops and was the organisational centre for US support for the anti-Sandinista Nicaraguan Contras in the 1980s. Critics of a US role in the 2009 military coup that overthrow elected President Manuel Zelaya often cite the Soto-Cano base. They point to the stopover there of the plane carrying Zelaya from the capital to exile in Costa Rica.

Others displeased with the US military presence in Honduras note the recent construction there of three Navy bases costing millions of dollars. Defense Department officials have identified Honduras as the centre for US military communications in Central America and drug-interdiction efforts. The country, which claims one of the highest murder rates in the world, is in fact a way station for illicit drugs moving from south to north.

The opening of the outsized US military presence in Latin America and the Caribbean is not new. In that vein, former Colombian President Ernesto Samper, no radical, recently proposed the elimination of all US military bases in the region; they are a left-over of "the cold war epoch," he said. Samper was speaking on behalf of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), established in 2008 to promote continental unity and political and economic cooperation. Samper is the UNASUR's secretary general. He wants his proposal on the agenda of the upcoming Summit of the Americans set for Panama on April 10-11.

He could have been thinking of the report in mid-February that some 3,500 US Marines will be deployed to Peru over the next year for either short or long stays. Peruvian spokespeople say they will be training Peruvian counterparts for drug-war missions. There are hints however, as to counter-insurgency purposes for the US troops and references to Peru's recently concluded anti-drug cooperation with Bolivia and Ecuador, each with a leftist government.

These recent developments will hardly smooth the way for President Obama at the upcoming Summit of the Americas. He's already feeling off criticism of the US sanctions against Venezuela that he announced on March 9.

And to have old-timers in US governing circles speculating about Colombia's future military needs, especially as regards Venezuela, complicates matters for the president. Former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and former State Department, CIA, and NSA official Mary Beth Long recently attended a meeting in Bogota called by the Colombian Defence Minister Pinzon and attended by President Juan Manuel Santos. Ostensibly they were helping the Colombians plan a role for their military after any peace agreement with FARC insurgents takes effect.

At a press conference on March 28, Long said she was pleased the Colombian "military is studying other threats in the region represented by their neighbours, like Venezuela." Giuliani opined that, "local crime is terrible but it’s much better than to have to be concerned about the FARC and drug-traffickers taking over the government."

Interviewed later, Giuliani foresaw the Army fighting "other lawless groups." He advised that neither the size nor the budget of Colombia's military be reduced. Venezuela, he said, "is like a true tragedy [with things] going from bad to worse."

People's World

Houses of Saud playing dirty in Yemen

The US-backed House of Saud has long been a target of different Yemeni governments, the Houthis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Al-Qaeda, all against one another in a real life version of Game of Thrones. While Yemen is currently being bombed into accepting the US-Saudi authoritarian order, one could hardly imagine that the House of Saud has previously worked with the Houthi, supporting the states of a Zaidi imamate and exploiting the sectarian group as a counterbalance to the Houthis, supporting the idea of the Houthis, nor the Yemeni General People's Congress can accept this. The ultimate goal of the House of Saud is suzerainty [feudal control] over Yemen. So far, the US-backed House of Saud opted to bomb the Yemen state into submission, the analyst emphasised.

The Saudi-led aggression has already claimed the lives of nearly 1,000 Yemenis, including women and children. Although Riyadh asserts it is attacking the positions of Houthi insurgents, in reality it is bombing residential areas and civil infrastructure.

Thus, Riyadh is trying to bomb one of the poorest Arab states into accepting an authoritarian regime of ousted Yemeni president Abd Rabbo Mansur Hadi, a loyal vassal of Saudi Arabia and the US.

Long said she was pleased the Colombian "military is studying other threats in the region represented by their neighbours, like Venezuela." Giuliani opined that, "local crime is terrible but it’s much better than to have to be concerned about the FARC and drug-traffickers taking over the government."

Interviewed later, Giuliani foresaw the Army fighting "other lawless groups." He advised that neither the size nor the budget of Colombia’s military be reduced. Venezuela, he said, “is like a true tragedy [with things] going from bad to worse.”

People’s World

Smoke rises from Yemen's Defense Ministry's compound in Sanaa on March 10. The Defense Ministry said an attack had targeted a hospital inside the complex.
Jennifer Nauright

My brother-in-law is black. Until yesterday, the fact that his skin colour is more than a few shades darker than mine was never significant. Until yesterday, my brother-in-law was simply my sister’s husband.

Until yesterday, my brother-in-law is kind and loving and giving. He has a heart as big as his booming resonant voice. His laughter is contagious. He adores my sister and dotes on her sons. He checks on his parents and our mother daily. He works long, brutally physical hours as a labourer. He has a strong work ethic and more times than not works overtime. He owns a home and a car. Two out of their four collective children are graduating from college this spring, and the other two begin higher education in the fall.

My brother-in-law is new to our family, having only married my sister two years ago. He came into our lives with a refreshing sincerity and exuberant joy. Sure, we were nervous and wondered if they would navigate the complexities of their interracial relationship in the Deep South. We worried they would find themselves ostracised simply because of their colour. We worried that small town South Carolina wasn’t quite ready for them.

My sister and now brother-in-law decided to marry. We are fortunate to belong to a truly loving and supportive church where they have been welcomed with sincere love and kindness. They made a home. They continued to raise their children. We all allowed ourselves to forget the differences in our skin colour.

Until yesterday.

Racial discrimination and profiling are not new. We are aware and watched in horror as the events unfolded in Ferguson and New York. We discussed Trayvon Martin.

We tried to ignore the obviously racial slur against our President. We assured ourselves that this was an isolated incident. It was simply because of their colour. We watched, as increasingly the word race became an obvious slur. This was easily excused any of my own behaviour that was less than acceptable. I was part of the problem.

Until yesterday.

I bought in to the stories about Martin Luther King not being perfect as if this somehow diminished his remarkable legacy. Those who hated him didn’t go out much. King for marital infidelity, seemed to accept Jefferson, Roosevelt and more recently Mark Sanford. I stood by quietly as increasingly police men are seen as automatic heroes simply because of their occupation. I watched, as increasingly the word of the policeman is law, whether or not they follow the law itself. I didn’t question enough. I didn’t push back enough. I didn’t scream at the top of my lungs that we need to stop this madness.

Until yesterday.

I realised yesterday the rules are different for my brother-in-law and my husband. If my husband decides to go out in public in an undershirt or unshaven, he is allowed his Wall Mart moment of indiscretion. If my brother-in-law goes out in public dressed similarly, he is a thug. If my husband misuses language or makes a grammatical error, we can chalk it up to being cute or funny. If my brother-in-law uses less than perfect English, he is ghetto. If my husband was at a gas station at 3am, no one would give him a second look. My brother-in-law would be observed with suspicion and even fear.

Until yesterday, we didn’t give my brother-in-law’s work appearance a second thought. After yesterday, we realised his hoodie or knit cap worn to keep warm on his job could pose a problem for him as a black man. We worried about him being out at 3am or midnight. He works swing shifts. We wondered what would happen if he had car trouble in the middle of the night. Would he be safe as he continued to drive himself to and from work? We wondered to what extent we must think of him as a white man.

In my hometown.

Surely this could not happen where I was brought up. One of the articles I read while talking to my sister mentioned another case being brought to the courts from my own hometown. I simply could not believe it. Apparently on the same day the policeman in North Charleston was arrested and charged with murder, a white public safety officer of the local police department in my hometown was arrested and charged with a felony charge of discharging a firearm into a vehicle, killing the occupant. The occupant was an unarmed 68-year-old black man.

In my hometown.

Until yesterday I dealt with racial comments and slurs on social media by simply un-friending the worst of the culprits and ignoring those I felt were not as offensive. I made sure my news feed was cleared of the worst offenders. I would not engage with those who said offensive comments about my husband and smile and walk away or change the subject. I did not forward posts or “like” comments expressing the necessity of continually promoting a friendly, productive, and stable relationship and maintaining a high-level of close contact between the two parties and two states in all areas.

Yesterday, I believed the problem was blown out of proportion. I finished any time the “race card” was being used. I wanted so badly to believe that our country, in the year 2015, had evolved enough that men did not need to fear for their lives simply because of the colour of their skin. I will not sit idly by anymore.

Martin Luther King Jr had a dream. In his most famous speech he said, “my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character”.

It is time to stop dreaming and start doing something. If we “go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed” He asked that we “not wallow in the valley of despair.”

To conclude.

Jennifer Nauright

April 15, 2015

Information Clearing House

Cuba Call for the 10th International May Day Brigade

April 27 to May 10, 2015

The Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples and its travel Agency Amistur Cuba invites mobiles for the 10th edition of the international brigade, on the occasion of the international workers’ day.

For full program see www.cpa.org.au/whats-on

Racial discrimination and profiling are not new. We were aware and watched in horror as the events unfolded in Ferguson and New York.

A Vietnamese delegation arrived in Beijing on April 7 for a three-day high-level party to party visit to China. The delegation was headed by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) General Secretary, Nguyen Phu Trong with one third of the CPV Central Committee members. The delegation received the highest welcoming reception from China, and it had fruitful meetings with the Communist Party of China (CPC) General Secretary, Chinese Premier, National People’s Congress Chairman, Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference Chairman, representatives from the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, and other Party members and State officials. The two countries issued a joint communiqué, stressing socialist achievement in their countries under the lead of the CPV and the CPC, expressing the necessity of continually promoting a friendly, productive, and stable relationship and maintaining a high-level of close contact between the two parties and two states in all areas.

Vietnam invested more than A$134,000 to build another 10 houses (20 square metres each for this month) for a youth friendship camp located in the border of Laos and Vietnam. Twenty Vietnamese medical personnel, from central Ha Tinh province, also gave free medical examinations to 300 local villagers and they offered medical trainings to local young people. The construction of the village started in 2012 with the help of a more than A$1.9 million investment from Vietnam. The village included a community centre, a medical station, accommodation and other facilities. It also offered training courses and long-term settlement for Lao youths.

A Chinese fridge helped evacuate 225 foreign nationals from 10 countries (mostly from Pakistan) for humanitarian reasons, helping them to flee from Yemen and a civil war. This was the second time that the Chinese navy evacuated civilians since the war had broken out, and evacuees praised China’s humanitarian assistance. The Chinese navy started its regular patrol in the Gulf of Aden (Northwest Indian Ocean) in 2008, counter-terrorist assistance. The Chinese navy started its regular patrol in the Gulf of Aden (Northwest Indian Ocean) in 2008, counter-

The US has a strong military presence in the area. However, a US State Department spokesman stated that there was no government-sponsored evacuation for its citizens in Yemen.

One Japanese university medical museum recently admitted that evidence had shown that the prestigious Kyoto University had conducted wartime vivisection on eight captured American bomber pilots in May 1945. Thirty Japanese doctors and university staffs were convicted of war crimes (vivisection and cannibalism) by the Allied War Crimes tribunal in 1948. However, they walked free from prison as US General McArthur dropped the charges in 1950, in order to persuade Japan to become the US’s military ally against the liberation of Korea and the spread of communism.
Early intervention in youth homelessness

It was Youth Homelessness Matters Day is early intervention and I believe that a major part of early intervention is education. Recently, I read a study titled “The Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia” by the UWA Centre for Social Impact, Swinburne University of Technology and Charles Sturt University, published February 17, 2015.

The study found that young homeless people over the age of 18 had experienced homelessness, or sleeping rough, at a younger age. This has a devastating effect on their future, as they often leave school and drop out of their communities. Not receiving a proper education leads to unemployment and future homelessness. This is why I consider education a form of early intervention.

The mainstream schooling system isn’t always the best option for these young people. This is where a flexible learning becomes important.

At Youth Off The Streets’ independent schools we focus on flexible learning and a holistic approach to education to help disadvantaged and homeless young people. Due to their current circumstances our schools provide them with breakfast, lunch and snacks throughout the day. This ensures that they have had enough food for their learning for the day. For some of the young people, this is the only food they’ll get that day.

As well as providing essential nutrition, our schools offer an environment that caters to the needs of young people. Making sure that homeless young people get the education they need equips them with the tools to live independently. The level of education attained by a young person is a key factor when determining the future employability of the young person. The study revealed that over 50 percent of the young homeless people faced difficulty in finding work because they lacked the necessary skills or education.

In 2014, our schools helped 38 young people graduate from year 10, nine young people completed year 11 and six young people completed year 12 and gained their HSC. Youth Off The Streets’ schools are a great example of equipping disadvantaged young people with the tools they need to secure future employment and break free from the cycle of poverty.

On Youth Homelessness Matters Day, think of the 44,000 young people that are homeless around Australia and support the different events, initiatives and organisations that are working to get young people off the streets.

Father Chris Riley
CEO and Founder at Youth Off The Streets

Act as well as admire

“There comes a time when silence is betrayal.” Martin Luther King Jr.

My son and I recently went to see the movie Selma; it’s about Martin Luther King Jr and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. It was an exceptionally moving film, very sad but also incredibly uplifting. At the end of the movie everyone there was so touched that the whole audience clapped enthusiastically. Most people stood up still clapping and many of us were in tears. I’ve met and read of lots of people over the years who express such deep appreciation for such outstanding heroes like Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi and others who have fought repression, inhumanity, and prejudice and sacrificed so much to make the world a better place.

Yet, I find it surprising and perplexing that many of these same people say and do nothing or very little, even in the most minor of ways to combat the many gross human rights abuses, inequality and prejudice that we all see in our community, our society and in the world. I consider that a lot of these injustices continue to persist primarily because most people turn a blind eye to them, just ignoring and neglecting them and don’t take a stand, even in instances of small abuses, let alone glaring cases of obvious mistreatment, brutality and oppression.

The Australian government’s treatment of asylum-seekers is deeply and disgracefully, its First Peoples, refugees, the poor, homeless and unemployed is appalling and unfair. These people need our empathy and solidarity. We need to help them and transform the way the authorities act towards them.

Just talking to friends and workmates, adding your voices to radio and social media sites, writing to newspapers, magazines and politicians can bring significant pressure and have a very beneficial effect in these small and sometimes not so small conflicts. Take a stand for civil, human and animal rights, freedom, democracy, equality and justice. Together we can make a difference. So let’s do at least our bit to change the world.

“... injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere...” Martin Luther King Jr.

Steven Katsinis
Vic
Australians' role in WW1 was essentially supplementary, to provide Britain with additional soldiers. We joined Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, India and other parts of the “British Empire” in providing the “lost cause to the Mother Country”. In the course of the war thousands from each British colonial possession (e.g. “the Lost Coundrey”). However, despite our basically peripheral role, over the next four years we’ll spend over $30 million to remember the First World War – more than any other nation.

The ruling class in Australia is determined to make the centenary of the carnage was that the War Great to be an opportunity for “celebrating” war and militarism.

To aid in this obscene endeavour, they have launched a propaganda blitz, which the ABC has embraced enthusiastically.

Over 130,000 Australian horses, popularly known as “Wales”, served in the Great War. Treportedly none of them came home – it was judged too expensive. The soldiers’ mounts were shot and the parts (skin, horse-hair) salvaged for sale.

Australia's Great War Horse (ABC Sunday April 19 at 7.40pm) is the story of the role of these horses in the desert campaign in the Middle East. The program is meant not to forget. It is a bit bitter and the historical narrative of their strength to return home to their land by the Australian army.

The Crater: A Vietnam War Story (ABC TV Thursday April 23 at 9.30pm) explores the story of the making of The Crater. A Vietnam War Story (ABC TV 21, 8.30pm), actor Sam Neil goes from the Gallipoli Peninsula back to the Otago Peninsula, New Zealand, where he grew up; across the Tasman to Australia where he has lived for 35 years; and over to the killing fields of Belgium, France, Crete and Italy. On the centenary of the disastrous Gallipoli landing, Neil looks for answers as to why that particular event “has become symbolic and is remembered more than any other in the two nations’ shared history”. That the ruling class might have a vested interest in promoting it does not get a look in, however.

The story of the making of The Crater: A Vietnam War Story. This program needed humour and especially charm. I found little of either (although the love-struck Asian policeman Bill Wong is played rather endearingly by Matt McCoey).

The program is based on the crime novel The Crater of Death by MC Beaton.

A War of Hope (NITV Saturday April 25 at 8.30pm) tells the story of 235 Guugu Yimithirr people of North Queensland who, in 1942, in the midst of World War Two, were forcibly removed 1,500 kilometres from their land by the Australian army. Treated as prisoners of war, they witnessed a third of their people die to disease, exposure to cold weather and malnutrition, only returning home to Hopevale after seven years in exile. Through the eyes of Roi McIver, seven at the time, now an artist and story-teller, this documentary tells of their strength to return home to rebuild their families, their community and their culture.

The Guardian

Sunday April 19 – Saturday April 25

Lest We Forget What?ABC2 Sunday April 19 at 8.40pm, repeated ABC Wednesday April 22 at 9.30pm) Major General (Ret) Jim Molan makes the point that “the real failure of any military is to believe in the bomb-crater grave so that the bodies of the 42 missing men can be searched for. In action team to try to locate the bomb-crater grave so that the bodies of the 42 missing men can be searched for the bodies of 42 missing North Vietnamese soldiers he helped kill in the 1968 battles of Coral and Balmoral. Their bodies were tossed into a huge bomb crater, one of many acts that helped traumatise Brian. For the last ten years he has sought to deal with his post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) by making frequent trips to Vietnam to work with their Missing In Action team to try to locate the bomb crater grave so that the bodies of the 42 missing men can be returned to their families and “their spirits find rest”.

The Crater uses a mixture of contemporary interviews with both Australians and Vietnamese war veterans, verité material, archival footage and reenactment to connect modern viewers with the reality of battle and the historical narrative of Australian soldiers survey body bags after Battle of Coral – The Crater: A Vietnam War Story (ABC TV Thursday April 23 at 9.30pm) the men behind it. It shines a light on the psychological effects the Vietnam War had on veterans right up until the present day. Bradbury has also captured interviews with North Vietnameseese veterans who fought in the battle and the families of the martyrs whose “souls are still wandering”.

A War of Hope (NITV Saturday April 25 at 8.30pm) seems an odd choice for Anzac Day. It is presumably meant to be a bit of light relief. And that is clearly the tone the film-makers were after. As far as I am concerned, however, they missed their target.

The story of a high-flying London PR woman who decides she’s had enough of the cutthroat world of public relations, and opts for early retirement in the picturesque Cotswolds, only to be caught up in the murder of the judge of a village quiche-making competition (as one invariably is in this kind of program), this program needed humour and especially charm. I found little of either (although the love-struck Asian policeman Bill Wong is played rather endearingly by Matt McCoey).
A criminal calamity in Iraq

Hans von Sponeck

The books of the UN contain no reference to “regime change”, nor is it in the law books. Regime change is a term coined by western governments, especially the US, to describe a policy that has no basis in international law.

Externally induced regime change has never solved international conflicts. On the contrary, it has intensified them wherever they have been attempted. Innocent civilians are invariably the victims. There are many examples, with Iraq being the most prominent.

Following years of clandestine co-operation between US spics and Iraqi opposition groups, the US Congress came into the open by approving the Iraq Liberation Act, which stated that US policy should approving the Iraq Liberation Act, been attempted. Innocent civilians intensified them wherever they have been attempted. Innocent civilians are invariably the victims. There are many examples, with Iraq being the most prominent.

Following years of clandestine co-operation between US spics and Iraqi opposition groups, the US Congress came into the open by approving the Iraq Liberation Act, which stated that US policy should approving the Iraq Liberation Act, been attempted. Innocent civilians intensified them wherever they have been attempted. Innocent civilians are invariably the victims. There are many examples, with Iraq being the most prominent.

The politics of fear

US think-tanks promoted fear. Statements released to the public included:

“Because of the limited capability of Iraqi conventional military forces, its WMD programs loom even larger, and “there is... a general suspicion that Iraq is working on a variety of terrorist contingency plans in case Saddam finds it necessary to strike the United States.”

The Bush administration welcomed wholeheartedly such insinuations advanced by alleged scholars including Kenneth Pollack, a fellow for the US Council on Foreign Relations, who is identified on the cover of his 2002 book, *The Thwarting of Iraq: One of the world’s leading experts on Iraq*. It is now a fact of history that Iraq had no WMD, as Italy’s deputy prime minister, Tarq Aziz, told various UN chemical weapons inspectors including Richard Butler and Hans Blix, UN support for a henchman for US interests. Some UN arms inspectors had indeed confirmed that since 1995 Iraq was not a threat.

Link with terrorist groups was well-unproven, and many knew the claims to be false even before the invasion. Iraq, a secular republic, had no interest in allying with fundamentalist groups like Al-Qaeda.

Acts are stubborn things. Thirteen years of sanctions had kept the government of Saddam firmly in place, the UN “oil-for-food program” had become a political tool and the people of Iraq were being exposed to “unavoidable collateral damage”. Without these WMD and terrorist fabrications, there would not have been any basis for US authorities to argue that Iraq posed “a threat to many of its neighbours in the absence of its forces”.

John Negroponte, the US ambassador, did not hesitate to confirm this to the US Senate in April 2004: “Although the flow of humanitarian and civilian goods to Iraq was a matter of strong interest to the US government, it should be emphasised that an even greater pre-occupation throughout the period of sanctions was to ensure that no items be permitted for import which could contribute to Iraq’s WMD program.”

Following the 2003 invasion and the lifting of sanctions, the full scale of human misery became known. In 2002, 132 of every 1,000 Iraqi babies died before the age of five, according to UNICEF – second only to Afghanistan.

Entire goods were ordered for Iraq in the oil-for-food program, which ran from 1996 to 2003, amounted to a mere 3.3815 per person a year.

The UN estimated at the time that about 50 percent of the population had been dependent on this support.

Warnings ignored

The tragedy for the Iraqi people, international law and the standing of the UN, that the voices from the UN secretariat in both Baghdad and New York, as well as some members of the UN Security Council, had been warning of the consequences of such policies.

They were drowned out by Washington and London in favour of an uncompromising bilateral regime change policy, by pure and simple propaganda.

To ensure as tight a cover-up as possible, no means were spared:

• The falsification of facts was encouraged, a severe hindrance for the UN’s operations.

• Political support was often bought with bribes;

• Obtaining supplies was turned into a tortuous bureaucratic process to ensure long delays;

• Ordered goods were often blocked on spurious grounds;

• Agents were sent to infiltrate the UN Iraq operations;

• UN staff who opposed US/UK policies were threatened.

Brazil’s courageous ambassador to the UN in New York, Celso Amorim, used Brazil’s presidency of the Security Council to review the human conditions in Iraq.

He commented in 1999 on an Iraq panel on the adequacy of the oil-for-food program. Following the release of the panel report, the permanent representative of Malaysia to the UN, Dato Agam Hamzy, addressed the Security Council in a speech that will remain forever an honourable and powerful testimony of courage:

“How ironic it is that the same policy that is intended to disarm Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction has itself become a weapon of mass destruction.”

In 2003 the government of Saddam had been eliminated and Iraq had been “liberated”. According to US authorities, Iraq was finally eligi- ble for democracy. In 2015, 12 years after the invasion, and four years since the end of occupation, Iraq is facing myriad difficulties at national, regional, local and personal levels.

While the Islamic State group is featured as “the” issue in Iraq, there are other issues: Wars, sectarianism, civil conflict and crime are shaking the country’s foundations.

Those responsible have refused to accept responsibility. They have become either mute or insist that the infamous “bigger picture” justified the misdeeds.

No one can forget the photographs of Satar Jabar, the “hooded man of Abu Ghraib”.

The US Senate assessment of CIA torture released in December 2014 by US senator Diane Feinstein a brave act of necessity – confirms in irrefutable detail that so-called “enhanced interrogation techniques” were widely used.

The report corroborated that deliberate misrepresentation of facts and events by US authorities, especially the CIA, intensified after 9/11.

The torture report points out that much of the so-called US “war on terrorism” was justified and legitimated by entirely false claims.

The release of the torture report has encouraged the Kuala Lumpur War Crimes Commission to submit two volumes of torture evidence to the recently appointed new chief prosecutor of the ICC in The Hague.

This information has been collected from prisoners who were tor- tured in Abu Ghirab, Bagram and Guantanamo.

With reports like these laying bare the crimes committed in the name of “regime change” and the “war on terrorism”, now is the time for political accountability.

There are many people – the victims of the invasion there has been a shift from US unilateralism to multi-polar internationalism to multi-polar internationalism. This provides important new perspectives for the future.