



Time for real tax reform

Anna Pha

It is rather ironic that on July 1, the 10th anniversary to the day of the introduction of the GST, the Gillard Labor government caved in to the largest mining corporations on the taxation of the resources sector. This latest saga in "tax reform" reinforces the need for a comprehensive overhaul in the taxation system in favour of working people.

The GST is a regressive, anti-worker tax. It paved the way for successive cuts to corporate taxes and the highest marginal rates paid by those on high incomes. The Gillard-led back-down last week also serves the interests of the wealthy and monopoly corporations.

What remains of the original (albeit inadequate) Resources Super Profits Tax (RSPT) has been renamed to exclude any reference to the concept of a super profits tax.

The deal, made with the three largest and most powerful mining corporations in Australia, slashes the headline super profits tax rate of 40 percent to 30 percent. It adds a generous 25 percent extraction allowance, reducing the effective rate to 22.5 percent. It raises the profit rate at which the tax kicks in from the bond rate to the bond rate plus seven percent – from five percent to 12 percent at today's rates.

It only covers coal and iron ore, removing gold, silver, nickel, copper, uranium and other resources which were previously included. On-shore oil and gas projects will instead come under the existing 40 percent petroleum tax rate. Changes have also been made to the refund of state royalties, rebate on exploration costs and cuts to the corporate taxation rate. (See box opposite for more details of agreement.)

The government's concessions to the industry and the tax's new name, Mineral Resource Rent Tax (MRRT), send a clear pre-election signal that mining and other industries have nothing to fear from the re-election of a Gillard Labor government. When Gillard and her Treasurer Wayne Swan and Resources Minister Martin Ferguson sat down to negotiate with BHP, Rio Tinto and Xstrata, the mining companies already had the upper hand.

Gillard was desperate to prove to the electorate (and big business) that she could produce outcomes without the nasty blood-letting of recent weeks. She also owed the mining sector big time. Their media campaign had played an important role in providing the excuse to unseat Kevin Rudd and deliver Gillard the prime ministership. No way, politically, could she risk a continuation of their multi-million dollar campaign against the government and the super profits tax.

Gillard produced a "Win - Win" situation. A win for Gillard's leadership credentials and a win for the Big Three mining corporations who did better than previously expected. BHP

can't believe its good fortunes. Their Olympic Dam project holds the world's largest known uranium reserves, fourth largest known copper, fifth largest gold as well as huge reserves in silver and diamonds. Their super profits from these reserves have now been exempted from the new tax – even though, as the government pointed out, they belong to the people of Australia. Former BHP chair Don Argus will head a policy transition group with his good friend Martin Ferguson to nut out the details with the mining corporations.

The losers are the people of Australia whose resources are being plundered and whose wealth is being siphoned off, much of it overseas, to wealthy shareholders. The Aboriginal people in particular are victims of this daylight robbery. Not everyone in the mining industry is happy. The rest of the industry was shut out of the negotiations and some of the smaller companies will not be better off, the exploration rebate of 30 percent of costs has been dropped.

Series of regressive "reforms"

After 25 years of neo-liberal (economic rationalist) taxation "reforms" by successive Liberal and Labor governments it is time for a serious review of the taxation system. This does not require a multi-million dollar exercise headed by a neo-liberal from Treasury, just a commitment to a more equitable taxation system that places the burden of raising government revenue on those most able to pay.

Bit by bit as they exploit workers, rip out Australia's resources and pocket record profits the corporate sector's contribution to society is shrinking. The trend is towards individuals funding their own social needs.

For example, the GST and tax cuts have shifted the burden onto working people and the most disadvantaged in the community. The corporate sector does not pay any GST, yet the GST is central to the funding by states of public health services and public education.

The corporate sector does not pay the Medicare levy.

Workers are increasingly funding their own retirement through superannuation, whereas the aged pension is funded out of general revenue. The difference is that general tax revenue includes taxes raised on corporate profits as well as individuals.

Over the past 25 years the corporate taxation rate has been slashed from 46 cents to 30 cents and in four years time will be 29 cents in the dollar of net profits. Both Labor and Liberal plan to continue with incremental reductions in the rate to 25 percent (Henry Tax Review), then 20 percent and even lower.

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Tax backdown at a glance

Resource Super Profits Tax (RSPT) replaced by Minerals Resource Rent Tax (MRRT)

MRRT only applies to companies with resource profits of more than \$50 million

MRRT applies to coal and iron ore – no longer includes other resources such as gold, nickel, uranium, silver

Petroleum Resource Rent Tax of 40% extended to all oil and gas projects

RSPT rate of 40% reduced to 30% with new 25% extraction allowance resulting in effective rate of 22.5% – cutting the tax by almost half

Under RSPT super profit was defined as higher than the official bond rate, now it will be the bond rate plus 7% – an increase from 5% to 12% on today's prices

New methods for calculating profit and assets, for transferring losses and depreciating assets, enabling companies to reduce tax liabilities

Royalties paid to states will be credited towards MRRT or Petroleum Resource Rent Tax payments

Smaller mining companies that do not pay petroleum tax or MRRT miss out on the promised refund of state mining royalties and the immediate 30% rebate on exploration costs

Policy transition group established to nut out details of deal to be headed by former BHP chair and Resources Minister Martin Ferguson

Company tax cut from 30% to 29% delayed one year to 2014, with timing of further cuts dependent on future budget outcomes. Small business's tax cut to 29% still goes ahead in 2012

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Gulf spill & grass roots activism

The Guardian

Issue 1462

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Break the two-party system

Federal election campaigns are increasingly becoming personalised competitions between brand names. Following her appointment as Prime Minister, Julia Gillard wasted no time in asserting the Gillard brand. All references to her party's name took second place as Gillard set about addressing the key issues that the opinion polls said were dragging Labor down. Foremost amongst these was the Resource Super Profits Tax (RSPT) and the ad blitz campaign being waged by mining companies.

Last week saw Gillard capitulate to the three largest and most powerful mining corporations in Australia. The Big Three mining monopolies effectively killed the idea of a serious tax on super profits. The question should be asked: Why did an elected government believe it needed the blessing of the largest mining monopolies before introducing a new tax? As *The Guardian* recently asked (June 23, 2010): "Who is running Australia?". Needless to say, Coalition leader Tony Abbott did not ask this question, but indicated he would oppose any additional tax.

The Abbott brand is light on policy detail, the media redirecting attention to his new look – swim suits and cycling gear now replaced by a suit.

Gillard is working quickly to distance her brand from that of the deposed former Labor leader, Kevin Rudd. First on the population question, damping down plans for a large increase and allaying fears generated by right-wing racists.

On refugees she has called for a "debate", a signal of yet another slide to the right. Gillard is extending the quarantining of a large proportion of welfare benefits to the rest of Australia – a policy that could be expected to find favour with Abbott. (See page 3.) There are important differences on industrial relations, but neither brand is committed to defending workers' and trade union rights.

On climate change, Liberal and Labor fall far short of what is required by science although there are differences in their approaches. Both support the war in Afghanistan and the US-Australia military alliance. They are committed to neo-liberal (economic rationalist) economic policies, to budget surpluses, wiping out government debt, cutting corporate taxes, privatisation and deregulation.

The poll-driven, media-orchestrated competition between brand names covers up the reality that neither has the interests of working on the agenda. They are capitalist brands, taking turns to run capitalism in the interests of big business. Despite the apparently democratic political system in Australia, neither major party challenges the control over society by big business. The existing two-party system in which they alternately share government obscures and protects the dictatorship of capital over economic and political life. It must be broken.

While it is important to keep the Coalition out of office, it is not enough to accept the re-election of Labor as the only possible alternative. Another brand is needed – a People's Brand. The situation requires the development of an alternative political force that puts the interests of people and the planet before those of private profit.

The forthcoming federal elections provide an opportunity to stand and support candidates that are prepared to build an alliance of progressive, anti-monopoly, democratic forces in Parliament. The Communist Alliance will be offering voters a genuine alternative that challenges the power of the monopolies and serves the interests of working people, small business and farmers, as well as the environment.

The Greens have many good, progressive policies on much more than just the environment. It is hoped that other progressive organisations such as trade unions and community groups also stand candidates so that the process of building the people's movement, and a government of a new type, can be advanced in the next elections.

The new government would need to begin a process of democratisation, making Parliament serve and be answerable to the people's and planet's interests, not those of big capital.

PRESS FUND

The half-year mark is a good time for plain talk. The Press Fund is doing very badly. Our annual target is \$14,000, but until the last edition the total received was only \$2,590. There were 66 contributions, making the average contribution \$39.24. Our weekly totals only reached three figures on six occasions, and the number of contributors only reached two figures once. Nevertheless, the figures also show that our target difficulties would be solved if the majority of our potential supporters who have not made a contribution this year did so – and preferably on a regular basis. So let's do it! We look forward to your contributions for the next edition, because we depend on the Fund to help us meet production costs. We extend our sincere thanks to this week's supporters, as follows:

Jessie Kiek \$100, "Round Figure" \$10, Mark Window \$10

This week's total: \$120 Progressive total: \$2,710

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The higher marginal rates on personal income tax were slashed over those years, taking the system towards a single flat tax rate, with a tax-free safety net for those on very low incomes. The aim is to further cut higher marginal tax rates in the direction of a flat tax rate above the tax-free threshold.

GST to rise

These planned cuts to company and personal income tax have to be funded. There are no plans to cut the obscene \$30 billion plus military budget. It will be done by further cuts in social welfare and the raising of the GST. The Liberals have plans to increase the GST to at least 15 percent. That is the amount that former Liberal leader John Hewson called for in 1993. When the Howard government brought in the 10 percent GST it was forced to make certain concessions, including the exclusion of health, education and fresh food from the tax. The aim of the Coalition is to remove all exclusions so that all goods and services are taxed at 15 percent.

The GST, like all flat rate taxes, is regressive. It taxes everyone at the same rate in the dollar on their purchases. Workers, pensioners, unemployed and others on lower incomes spend most, if not all, of their income on goods and services while those on higher incomes can afford to make GST-free investments, travel overseas, etc. The promises that the GST would result in well funded public hospitals and schools never materialised. The GST take has risen from \$24.4 billion to \$45.2 billion over ten years, at the same time the federal government has reduced in real terms its contributions to public services.

Some neo-liberals are calling for the eventual phasing out of income (personal and company) taxes altogether with government revenue primarily sourced from broad indirect taxes such as the GST. People would be expected to have special savings accounts, along similar lines to their superannuation funds, known as "self-provision", to cover them for periods of unemployment and sickness. The "welfare state" would be wound back to the barest of safety nets. "Self provision" is on the agenda of both Liberal and Labor.

Progressive tax system required

Taxation is an important instrument for distributing wealth in any society. It is central to the funding of government, health, education, housing, infrastructure, community services, sport, culture and the many other areas that contribute to living standards and security of the people. A progressive tax system is one where those on higher incomes pay at a higher rate in the dollar – according to their ability to pay.

The Communist Party of Australia is calling for real, progressive reforms to the taxation system. These are centred on the following:

- Abolition of GST.
- Increase in marginal rates of personal income tax on higher incomes
- Increase in taxation rate of company profits.
- Higher marginal rate of taxation of super profits across all industries
- Abolition of negative gearing.
- Abolition of massive corporate taxation concessions.
- Wealth taxes. ☺

Sydney

Communist Alliance Election Launch

Saturday July 10, 6.30pm

AMWU building, 133 Parramatta Rd, Granville
5 minutes from Granville Railway Station

\$20 entry includes
Mediterranean buffet and entertainment

RSVP Thursday July 8

Tony 0451 635 924



Special Printer Appeal

The Communist Party of Australia and *The Guardian* need to raise \$18,000 for a new printer for publication of booklets, leaflets and other material in their day-to-day work. It may sound a great deal of money, but thousands of dollars are saved in the long term by doing this work in-house.

We urge all *Guardian* readers to send in their contributions as soon as possible. We would like to close the appeal by the end of July. All donations are appreciated no matter how small or how large. We do not have any corporate sponsors. We rely on you, our readers, our supporters and our members.

Our warmest thanks to this week's contributors:

Frank Gosden \$50, June Ayres \$100, Fred Rouady \$50, E Newey \$50,

This week's total: \$250. Cumulative total: \$450.00

Special Printer Appeal

Name/Organisation _____ Phone Contact: _____

Address _____ Contribution: \$ _____

Cheque/Money Order: make out to "Communist Party of Australia".

Credit card: sign, give name on card, card number & expiry date: Visa Mastercard

Name on the card _____ Signature: _____

Card Number: _____ Expiry Date: ____ / ____

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

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

Thank you for your support.

Welfare quarantining - coming to a suburb near you

Bob Briton

One of the biggest welfare reforms in Australia since WWII slipped quietly through the Senate last week. The welfare quarantining imposed on Aboriginal communities during the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) is to be extended to the whole of the Territory and then to any disadvantaged area anywhere in the country nominated by the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Service and Indigenous Affairs. The further stigmatising of poverty is to spread across the whole of the NT from July 1 this year and will be in place by mid-2011. From there it will roll out across the country.

The move will not restore the *Racial Discrimination Act*. The compulsory leasing of the land on remote Aboriginal communities by the Commonwealth will continue. More Aboriginal people will be caught up in the extension of quarantining along with the poorest non-Aboriginal people.

The change locks at least half of the recipient's welfare payment to a "basics card" that can only be used at certain shops - mostly big retailers - for a limited range of

"essential" goods. Recipients will have to negotiate with Centrelink to be able to use the money to pay urgent bills. Generally, the whole of any lump sum payment like the baby bonus is quarantined. The restriction on where the card can be used will make it extremely difficult for a person receiving Centrelink payments to travel interstate.

The system will be forced on recipients of the:

- Age pension
- Disability pension
- Carer's pension
- Newstart Allowance and Family Tax Benefits
- Parenting Payment

In theory the system will be "opt out". To do that one has to prove any school aged children are attending school regularly, provide evidence of "responsible parenting" such as proof of immunisation, regular visits to the doctor or allied health professional, enrolment in child care services or playgroups or other structured activity. They will need to prove their "relative financial stability", which could involve assessment of their budgeting skills over the previous 12 months. As the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) pointed out in its policy analysis, many middle-income individuals and families would have

trouble meeting the intrusive demands placed on opting out.

The Basics Card can be an embarrassing burden. Some NT shops have set up special queues for cardholders. About one in five purchases are deemed ineligible and have to be returned to the shelves. This humiliation is set to spread beyond the Territory and beyond the Aboriginal community where anti-welfare measures, like work for the dole, are often trialled.

Welfare quarantining and the Basics Card were introduced as part of the NTER in 2007. It was justified as part of a response to alleged widespread child abuse on remote communities and in town camps. The Howard government imposed it and the Labor government kept it.

The current minister, Jenny Macklin, says she is convinced on the basis of facts that the quarantining has had a positive effect on Aboriginal communities. That is hotly disputed. ACOSS insists the move has been made on the basis of anecdote, not hard data and that the scheme is a massive gamble with the futures of whole communities.

Claims of more money being spent on food are based on reports from storeowners, not figures. One survey reported a drop in cigarette

sales but another larger survey covering 73 percent of storeowners showed that sales had not changed. Recent research by the Menzies School of Health Research on nutrition in Arnhem Land collected quantitative data from 10 community stores came to the following conclusion:

"Income management independent of the government stimulus payment appears to have had no beneficial effect on tobacco and cigarette sales, soft drink or fruit and vegetable sales."

The effect on the drug and alcohol addicted is also inconclusive. In these cases of dependency it is often a matter of "where there's a will there's a way". ACOSS criticises the present plan and the looming expansion because it punishes whole communities regardless of how well they look after themselves and their families. It does not focus on the actual problems of poverty and unemployment and does not target people with substance dependence for assistance.

The money spent on the scheme would go a long way in alleviating those problems. It is going to cost \$410 million over the next five years or \$4,100 per person per annum. That is about a third of the whole

annual income of an unemployed person. It is three times more than is paid to an employment service provider to help people back into the workforce.

An opt-in system for people targeted for "humbugging" or other barriers to managing payments was rejected. The prejudice that people on welfare are poor managers and bludgers is being played to. The reality of massive Aboriginal disadvantage and widespread unemployment in the rest of the community, especially among the youth, is being downplayed.

Why has the government gone to such lengths and to such huge expense on this dubious scheme? The language of the current government has shifted from "social inclusion" to a more punitive style about breaking "welfare dependency".

The quarantining of payments fits well with the overall strategy of making life on Centrelink benefits intolerable. Any job at any wage will become more attractive or, to be exact, less humiliating. It is a policy for tough times and the tougher times ahead for capitalism. Abbott has promised to impose it on all benefit recipients in the country. It must be fought and rolled back. ✪

Perth talks peace

Vinnie Molina,

On Saturday July 3 around 30 people gathered at La Tropicana Cafe in Fremantle to talk peace. In a public meeting organised by the local CPA branch, Denis Doherty, National Organiser of the Communist Party of Australia and national coordinator of the Anti Bases Campaign Coalition kicked the afternoon off with a talk on Australia and global peace. He stressed the role of the US bases in Australia and elsewhere in assisting the US war machine. Denis encouraged those in attendance to continue the struggle to get rid of the US bases in Australia and gave the example of Viaques in

Puerto Rico and Ecuador where local campaigners managed to end the contracts.

His speech was followed by Hsien Harper, a union activist and anti-uranium mining campaigner who spoke about the environmental and cultural destruction caused by uranium mining. She said world demand for uranium for peaceful purposes was not growing and that much of the uranium mined was destined for military purpose. Hsien used the example of the Electrical Trade Union branch in Queensland that announced on May 31 that its state council had placed a ban on its members' working in uranium mines, nuclear power plants or any part of the nuclear fuel cycle

as an example for other unions to follow. The ban reflects both the ETU's concern regarding the threat to the health and safety to workers engaged in the industry and its view that nuclear power should not be a source of power generation. She stressed the importance of the trade unions taking up the banner on social issues and encouraged all unionists present to lobby their unions to mobilise around the issue.

Kate Davis, Greens candidate for Fremantle, spoke about her enthusiasm at the forum to raise awareness of women and peace. She addressed the devastating effects of war on women and the opportunities for women working together towards peace. ✪

Julia's Putsch

A song in honour of our new Prime Minister's cultural and political heritage (to the tune *Men of Harlech*)

Hark I hear the foe advancing,
Mining shares are upwards dancing,
Liberals in frustration prancing
Certainly displeased!

Private health rebounding!
League tables resounding!
White House thrills to Julia's call,
Afghan war compounding!

Now right-wingers, ride to glory
Carbon in the upper storey,
Never mind, for Labor Tories
Rule the battlefield!

Dylan Evans

Pete's Corner



Viva La Revolucion!

2pm - 5pm Sunday 25th July
MUA 46 Ireland St West Melbourne

Film - to be confirmed
Music - Marisol Salinas
Chilean musicians
Afternoon Tea and Raffle

Entry \$15 - bookings preferred

Contact: Joan - 9857 9249
Everyone welcome for this exciting afternoon.
All proceeds go to projects in Cuba
Australia Cuba Friendship Society - Melbourne

Let's make Australia asbestos-free

Paul Bastian*

Despite decades of litigation and lobbying, Australia is still riddled with asbestos and it's time our federal government stepped up to provide leadership on this public health issue. Asbestos still lurks in the bathrooms, kitchens, roofs and garages of two out of every three Australian homes built between 1945 and 1980.

Our obsession with home-renovation is uncovering much of this asbestos, and the danger is compounded by poor community awareness and different laws relating to safe asbestos handling and disposal in each state and territory.

The other problem is that up until the late 1970s nothing was written on asbestos to identify it, so you can't necessarily tell if a material contains asbestos just by looking at it.

The World Health Organisation states that there is no safe level of exposure to asbestos, and the inhalation of asbestos fibres is known to cause mesothelioma, lung cancer, asbestosis and other respiratory diseases.

Australia has the unenviable record of having the highest incidence of asbestos related diseases in the world, and it's estimated that up to 18,000 Australians are likely to die from mesothelioma by 2020.

That is why the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, the ACTU, the Cancer Council of Australia, and asbestos support groups are now calling for the removal of all asbestos from public and private buildings by 2030.

That may sound like a costly exercise, but the long-term cost of inaction is far greater.

Sixty three year-old Queenslander Ray Colbert is someone who knows just how costly exposure to asbestos can be. Ray worked with asbestos for nine years while he was in the Royal Australian Navy.

He now suffers from asbestosis, is wheelchair bound, and can only breathe with the help of a respirator. Ray is part of the second wave of asbestos victims who were exposed to the product through work, and he says there needs to be an education campaign to ensure there is not a third wave of victims exposed to asbestos in the home.

"We have to have a proper safety audit to identify it and once we've done that we can then set about planning its removal. Till then you're just going to create another hazard and contaminate more people."

The AMWU along with the ACTU is calling on the federal



government to establish a National Asbestos Authority to act as an information hub and coordinate this asbestos removal and education.

We need to help the public identify what products were made containing asbestos and ensure there is a role for local government in asbestos removal.

A first step in this process would be to introduce asbestos safety certificates on the sale of any property or commercial dwelling. This would

enable vendors to identify if there is asbestos, where it's located, what condition it's in, and how it can be removed.

The public health challenges posed by the asbestos time-bomb are great and we need supportive public policy to prevent further suffering and disease.

*Paul Bastian is national president of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union. ☺

Government gets it right on internet gambling

Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union (LHMU) members working in gaming venues have welcomed the government's response to the Productivity Commission report into Gambling.

Louise Tarrant, national secretary of LHMU, the hospitality union said, "The government is right to focus on harm minimisation. Problem gambling is a terrible social and economic cost to individuals, their families and the community. It is particularly distressing for hospitality workers to witness patrons caught in a vicious spiral of problem gambling."

Ms Tarrant said the LHMU believes the government is right to reject the Productivity Commission's recommendation on liberalisation of internet gaming.

"You can't have genuine harm minimisation if people are gambling via the internet. How do you ensure against people gambling

under-age or under the influence of drugs or alcohol and how do you ensure breaks in play?"

Gaming occurring at hospital-ity venues has a far greater chance of being conducted responsibly because of the physical presence of workers, the limitations on credit and the regulation of patron information. The union says gaming via the net is a recipe for personal disaster.

"LHMU is conscious of the need to improve and standardise harm minimisation strategies in gaming venues. We welcome the government's endorsement of a nationally consistent pre-commitment program.

"Workers in the sector will clearly have an important contribution to make into how such a system is introduced and operated. LHMU welcomes the opportunity to work with government and other sector players over coming months to make this a reality." ☺

MUA report and action on safety

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) has welcomed the commitment of the Minister for Resources and Energy, Martin Ferguson, to see that improved worker safety is a critical outcome out of the findings of the Montara Commission of Inquiry.

The inquiry was launched after the uncontrolled oil and gas release from the Montara Wellhead Platform, which occurred from August 21 to November 3 2009.

"That no workers were seriously injured in the Montara wellhead crisis was very, very lucky but we cannot rely on luck when we are considering the lives and welfare of the crews who work in some of the most remote and challenging workplaces on the planet," said Paddy Crumlin,

national secretary of the MUA. "I congratulate the Minister on his determination to see that safety is a prime issue in the event of a crisis like Montara. The important thing is that we have the right regulation moving forward.

"But any recommendations the Minister makes need, inevitably, to be coloured by the safety and environmental disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, whose scope grows daily."

Eleven crew died in the Deepwater Horizon explosion. "We really have to consider the 'What ifs'. What would a calamity like the one in the US – even if greatly discounted – do to our environmental icons like the Ashmore Reef and the pristine coastline of North West Australia," said Crumlin.

Mr Ferguson said he was focussed on "making our oil and gas exploration and production operations the best and safest in the world. This report will play an important role in keeping our workers safe, protecting our environment and safeguarding our energy security".

The Minister also made it clear that before releasing the report publicly he was bound to consider advice from the Australian Government Solicitor to see that in the handling of the report he did not prejudice the conduct of further investigations for possible offences including criminal offences, other civil or criminal action, or undermine any natural justice considerations. ☺

Health identifiers a good start on e-health

Australian Nursing Federation (ANF) federal secretary elect Lee Thomas welcomed the introduction of the Healthcare Identifiers Act saying it will improve patient safety and care by giving nurses and midwives access to electronic health records.

Ms Thomas said the ANF hoped the government's e-health reform agenda could now be advanced to deliver a more streamlined health system for the nation.

"On a daily basis nurses and midwives are forced to make important decisions on how to initiate care

for seriously ill people who may present to a hospital and often the nursing and medical staff will not know that person's medical history," she said.

Ms Thomas said e-Health would also make life easier for those on a complex regime of medication.

"Are they allergic to certain medicines? What, if any, medicines are they taking? Do they have an underlying medical condition or are they pregnant? This is vital information that could be quickly accessible through e-Health," Ms Thomas said. "Most people, including the

ageing, struggle to remember the names of all their medicines and often forget important information that may affect decisions around what treatment they should be given. It would be a great help to have a comprehensive health profile of that person including their current health condition and medications."

The ANF is committed to the development of an integrated e-health system and will continue to work with the federal government on the implementation of a system that benefits patients and health care providers. ☺

Book Launch Brisbane

Jim Sharp *Leftside*

A book of poetry
by an authentic
australian working class voice

Saturday 31st July 3:00pm - 5:00pm
Qld Council of Unions Building
16 Peel St., South Brisbane
Refreshments available (gold coin donation)

Program includes:

Lilla Watson:
Welcome

Humphrey McQueen:
Australian historian and social critic

Craig Buckley:
Rep from the meatworkers union, the AMIEU

Ray Hearne:
UK Folk and Labour Historian (Video presentation)

Jumping Fences:
Unique blend of politics and music

Ross Clark:
Well known Brisbane poet and performer

Read more about the book:
www.surplusvalue.org.au/Leftside.html
For more details, contact:
Ross Gwyther: 07 3366 5318

Howard's treatment by ICC should not surprise anyone

Chris – Cricket Politics

John Howard's bid to be the next Vice President of the International Cricket Council (ICC) received a telling blow when six of the nine test playing nations voted against the move. While Australia, New Zealand and England were in favour of the appointment, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Bangladesh and the West Indies all rejected it.

There are many naysaying this decision in the media today. Peter Roebuck (*Sydney Morning Herald*), who was initially against the idea of Howard being put up for the role and preferred the New Zealand candidate Sir John Anderson, claims that in spite of this, Howard would have been a force for good offering the ICC the prospect of someone who might "ask awkward questions".

That may have been the case. However, it is also possible that, having regard to his inexperience in cricket administration, he would ask the wrong questions, to the wrong people, in the wrong way. Liberal MP Peter Dutton was in ABC News Breakfast declaring the decision outrageous. Presumably the Liberal Party now believes that democracy is only suitable when it favours them and their friends, but is an affront to decency when it involves one of their kind being rejected. No doubt if Bob Hawke had been the candidate and had been rejected we wouldn't have heard "boo" from Dutton. At least Bob Hawke could play the game to some degree.

Let's start with Sri Lanka. In 2004, John Howard made a statement which, for all intents and purposes, called Sri Lankan bowler Murali

Muralitharan a "chucker". Whether or not Murali was or is a chucker is not for this writer to say. His action has been tested numerous times and he has been cleared to play by experts and cricket's governing bodies.

India too can feel aggrieved by the past actions of John Howard, although in much more serious circumstances. In 2007, the Australian Federal Police arrested and detained an Indian national, Doctor Mohammed Haneef, in regard to alleged terrorism offences relating to the 2007 bombing of Glasgow airport. There is no need to go into the details. Suffice to say that Haneef was cleared of any wrong doing after some deplorable actions of the Howard government in what had all the appearances of the use of dog whistle politics in the lead up to an election. (Haneef was arrested, interrogated, locked up for a month and had his visa cancelled. He announced last week that he is suing the Australian government.) Fortunately it backfired. To say that the Indian government and Indian nationals in general were upset by the incident would be an understatement.

Of course, we can look further back to see that Howard's attitude towards Asia may have been an influencing factor in the decision made by the six that rejected him, or at least as far as Pakistan, India and Bangladesh go. During the mid to late 1980s, when Howard was leader of the then opposition, Howard's policy of One Australia rejected multiculturalism and called for a slowing down of Asian immigration to support social cohesion.

The Hawke government rejected this approach and some Liberal members of the House of Representatives actually crossed the floor to vote with

Bob Hawke's motion that race or ethnicity should not be an immigrant selection criteria.

As for South Africa, Zimbabwe and the West Indies, Howard's past actions in regards to apartheid would certainly make him a less than attractive candidate in their eyes.

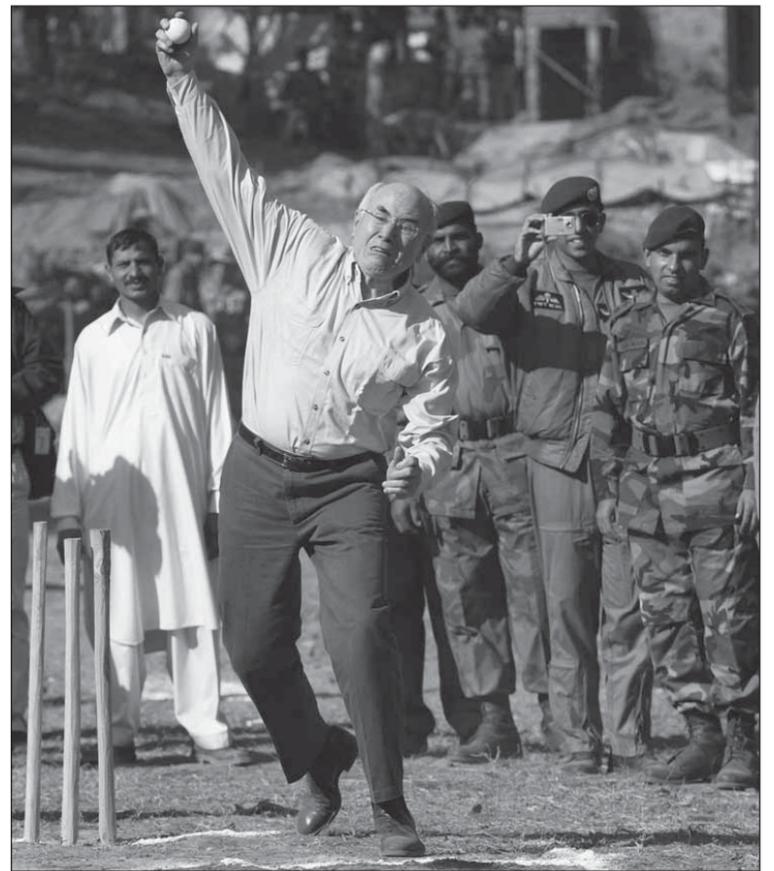
Howard was one of a very few Australian politicians who opposed sanctions against apartheid South Africa during the '70s and '80s. In particular, he was in favour of Australian sporting teams, including cricket teams, touring South Africa despite that country's despicable policies towards its non-white citizens. This was the same South Africa which would not permit mixed race sport to take place under apartheid, thus excluding teams from the West Indies and the subcontinent. While these restrictions were later relaxed for international teams, the opprobrium remained.

Whether or not John Howard's history should be relevant to the test playing nations that rejected him, when considering him for this post, the fact is that it will be relevant to them and it would be hard for anyone to distinguish his past from his abilities.

It has become obvious that the relevance of the ICC is not an important issue for most of the test playing nations.

The ICC is as much of an anachronism as Howard, a remnant of when England and Australia controlled the game. For better or for worse, India controls the game now. Australia and New Zealand needed to put up a candidate that could work within the current system. Howard was never going to be the man for that job.

Sportolitics ★



The insulation saga drags on. Now electricians are furious. They have inspected 23,000 homes with foil insulation to determine if there were any deadly safety problems left over by untrained insulators. Six hundred and ninety roofs had electrical safety problems out of those inspected. It is only natural that they want to be paid for the work performed – but here lies the problem. The then Rudd government has promised to settle all small business bills in 30 days. This is not happening in many cases thus leaving electricians not only out of pocket but having to deal with debt collectors because they can't pay to wholesalers.

More than 168,000 people are missing out on parenting, carer and disability payments worth \$623 million a year because it is too complicated to claim. The "Missing out" report prepared by the Australia Institute found the money the government saved because eligible people did not claim was 1.5 times the amount it lost to welfare "cheats" in 2008. The report found 26 percent of pensioner and healthcare concession card holders were embarrassed to use the card, and 14 percent of low-income households said they deliberately did not use their card because of the stigma attached. It is funny how politicians caught with his or her hand deep in our common pocket do not feel any embarrassment or shame for what they are *not* entitled to.

Police should ask victims of crime about their ethnic origin, according to Graeme Innes, the Race Discrimination Commissioner. The victims' racial profiling should help in addressing the growing belief that Australia is a racist country and unsafe for foreign students, according to Mr Innes. Mr Innes made the call for permanent racial profiling on the eve of the government's release of the private details of 500,000 foreign students for matching against the victims of crime databases held by police. Justice is supposed to be blind to such things as race. The police are expected to investigate crime against whoever it has been perpetrated. How will racial profiling diminish racial attitudes or limit crimes against people? Enrolments by Indian students are down 40 percent this year after media coverage of attacks against Indian students last year – it is doubtful that racial profiling will ever solve any problems associated with crime.

Victorian unions are not campaigning for the ALP in federal marginal seats leading up to the 2010 elections. The Your Rights at Work union campaign at the last elections was instrumental in defeating the Howard government and the end of its WorkChoice laws. Whereas Tony Abbott's industrial policies are the same as John Howard's, the Labor Party has failed to get rid of the notorious restrictions on the right to strike and bargaining rights that had been carried over from Howard's laws. The Australian Building and Construction Commission remains a very thorny issue for the building industry as well.

Sydney

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**Friday, 9 July
7.30 – 8.30am**

outside the
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For more info:
Hannah Middleton
02 9351 4468
peace.foundation@sydney.edu.au

Authorised by The Deaths In Custody Watch Committee (WA) Inc

PUBLIC RALLY

1 pm Sunday July 11
Supreme Court Gardens, Perth
(Cnr St Georges Tce & Barrack St)

Join with the Ward family members in demanding that:

1. The Coronial Inquest into Mr Ward's death be re-opened;
2. An independent review of the Director of Public Prosecution's (DPP) decision not to bring criminal charges be conducted;
3. The evidence and advice that the DPP used to make its decision that no criminal charge be laid, be tabled in Parliament;
4. The transportation of detained persons be returned to the Department of Corrective Services & the G4S Contract ended;
5. There be independent and effective investigations of future deaths in custody;
6. New criminal offences of corporate and custodial manslaughter be introduced into legislation – to ensure that parties responsible for any similar deaths in custody in the future cannot escape being held criminally responsible;
7. An independent public enquiry into institutionalised racism in the WA criminal system.

The DPP has decided no criminal charges will be laid against any party responsible for Mr Ward's death.

That is not justice! The fight is not over!
www.deathsincustody.org.au

The politics of *Avatar*

Bob Treasure

Now that the dust has settled and *Avatar* has been released on DVD and the Gee-Whizz of 3-D has abated and most people have seen the film, it is time to take stock of the highest grossing movie of all time and assess its true political impact.

This is no meek topic! From the outset, *Sydney Morning Herald* columnist Miranda Devine waded in to pan the movie as “left wing propaganda”, anti-American (“...while American soldiers are dying in dangerous wars”) and with a “sanctimonious hippie sensibility”. “The snarling vipers of left-wing Hollywood have been let off the leash in a way previously unmatched in a high-priced blockbuster,” she snarled. Miranda’s knee-jerk response pretty much sums up her usual level of analysis.

Just to fulfil the prophecy, *Solidarity’s* reviewer, David Glanz, claims that *Avatar* shows us the way “...if ordinary people unite, we can win extraordinary victories over capitalism,” and concludes “...The right hates this movie for a reason. On a moon far away in time and space, the battles of today are being fought in 3D – and they are being won.”

Hmmm. “A moon far away,” indeed.

Colin Murphy, in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, had a more measured view. In an article entitled “*Avatar*, not as liberal as it looks”, Murphy suggests that director James Cameron’s clever use of classic American narrative clichés such as “heroic self-defence”, and that of “the lone good soldier who defies corrupt orders from the hierarchy” (as in *Rambo*, one of Cameron’s first Hollywood scripts) to support an authentic, natural, freedom-loving community (the Na’vi) – all this turns the innocent Na’vi into “Americans”.

The same Americans whose “holy tree”, the Twin Towers, was destroyed by heartless terrorists, forcing them to take matters into their own hands – the modern “Boston Tea Party” protestors, perhaps.

Comforting sub-texts

Murphy is correct on this basic point: *Avatar* poses no threat to the American military psyche. It is comforted from the very start by the fact that the narrator, Jake Sully, speaks as an archetypal “American”. He has lost the use of his legs fighting as a marine, he is a veteran, thus in a sense he can do no wrong. We are assured from the very beginning that, no matter what happens in this story it is a dialogue within the heart of the Empire itself.

And the Empire provides opportunities unavailable to the rest of us: they can zoom to the farthest corners of the universe, there is the latest in scientific power and the chance to immerse oneself in the exotic, to change form and to embrace love with a different (but nevertheless, beautiful) species.

It’s an adventure exclusive to the rulers of the galaxy. Wow! Just like John Smith and Pocahontas, just like *Dances With Wolves* and *The Last Samurai* and a hundred other romantic colonialist epics: these colonisers are so nice, who (no matter how exotic) could fail to love them? Wouldn’t we all just love to be part of this Empire, rich in adventure and exciting things to do?

The Indigenes of Pandora, the Na’vi, are drawn in such idyllic, romanticised “oneness with nature” terms as to be risibly Disneyesque. It all hearkens back to the “noble savage” vision that permeated European colonial art and literature of the latter 18th Century. They’re so spiritual: they have a huge natural cathedral rather like Enid Blyton’s “Faraway Tree” and they commune with beasts and luxuriant plants and everything. No class struggle there!

But the Na’vi’s resistance to ruthless exploitation of “Unobtainium” mines is pretty hopeless: they are naïve, disorganised for warfare, and still shoot bows and arrows. Heaven forbid that, like the Vietnamese, they devise their own strategy for slaying the Beast. Only when the

expertise of the Empire (good ole Jake) comes to them, only when, in fact, the American military psyche consents to their rebellion, do the Na’vi stand a chance. They can then get on with the job of engaging in some “Firepower Pyrotechnics” so we can witness wham-bam explosive violence in all-consuming 3-D surrounda-fluff. After all, that’s what everyone came to see: simple “Entertainment”.

Examine the context

Too much analysis of *Avatar* itself, however, can be mind-numbing and counter-productive without an evaluation of its context, its “place in the world”. As Marxists, it is our obligation to do so, since to study a work of art in isolation denies society the courtesy of acknowledging its role in the creation of *Avatar*, and the impact it has.

Let us assume that *Avatar* is indeed the anti-capitalist, anti imperialist, eco-sensitive “spectacle” that most admirers/critics claim it to be. On the surface, at least, it does appear to be just such an ideological attack on the American Empire. Why then, did one of the world’s foremost transnational globalisers (“capitalist-imperialists”), namely, Rupert Murdoch, finance the film?

Murdoch is CEO of the most rapacious media network in the world today, News Limited. This “parent” company owns 20th Century Fox, the producer of *Avatar*. At a confessed minimum, the capital put up to make the movie was US\$230 million. *Time* magazine offered a revised estimate of US\$300 million in production costs, however, with marketing costs to create the necessary “hype” and Cameron’s own delayed contribution, according to the *New York Times*, the total pre-release amount was pushed to US\$500 million, making it easily the most expensive movie of all time.

Meanwhile, world capitalism faced a “Global Economic Crisis” – not a time for risky investments. In the background, the Iraqi occupation and war in Afghanistan, conflicts rabidly encouraged by Murdoch media both in the United States and here in Australia, showed no signs of any resolution, let alone “victory”. So why would Murdoch, no friend of the working class, nor of rebellion and most certainly no fan of worthy left-wing causes, stoop to financing his own gravedigger?

There are several options to consider. One, that Murdoch took no editorial interest in Cameron’s project and didn’t comprehend the danger within it, a prospect surely not in accord with his own form as a successful investor and Icon of the Empire. The evidence is that he took a close and personal interest in its progress. There was a lot of money at stake.

Two. Rupert Murdoch really is an aesthetic philanthropist who is prepared to sponsor oppositional views for the sake of Art and Culture, regardless of how they may impact upon him personally. At least one Hollywood blogger seriously posited this view. All evidence is to the contrary, however. Whether the opposition was his own employees at Wapping or whistleblowers on the phoney “weapons of mass destruction” issue, Murdoch has always been utterly ruthless in dispensing vilification and suppression of ideological opponents.

Three, that he is an entrepreneurial gambler prepared to take the risk of cultivating mass opposition to wars in the Middle East, the despoliation of the environment and capitalist excess for the sake of a windfall for News Ltd in the face of sliding returns from the GFC. In fact, the latter did occur, and *Avatar’s* receipts kept News Ltd in the game while others crashed. But Murdoch, a “gambler”? Not on this scale, and not with any real prospect of global uprisings upsetting those self-same profits. No way.



Avatar is pure escapism – cartoonish in its characterisation.

It was the issue of “mass opposition” he was sure about.

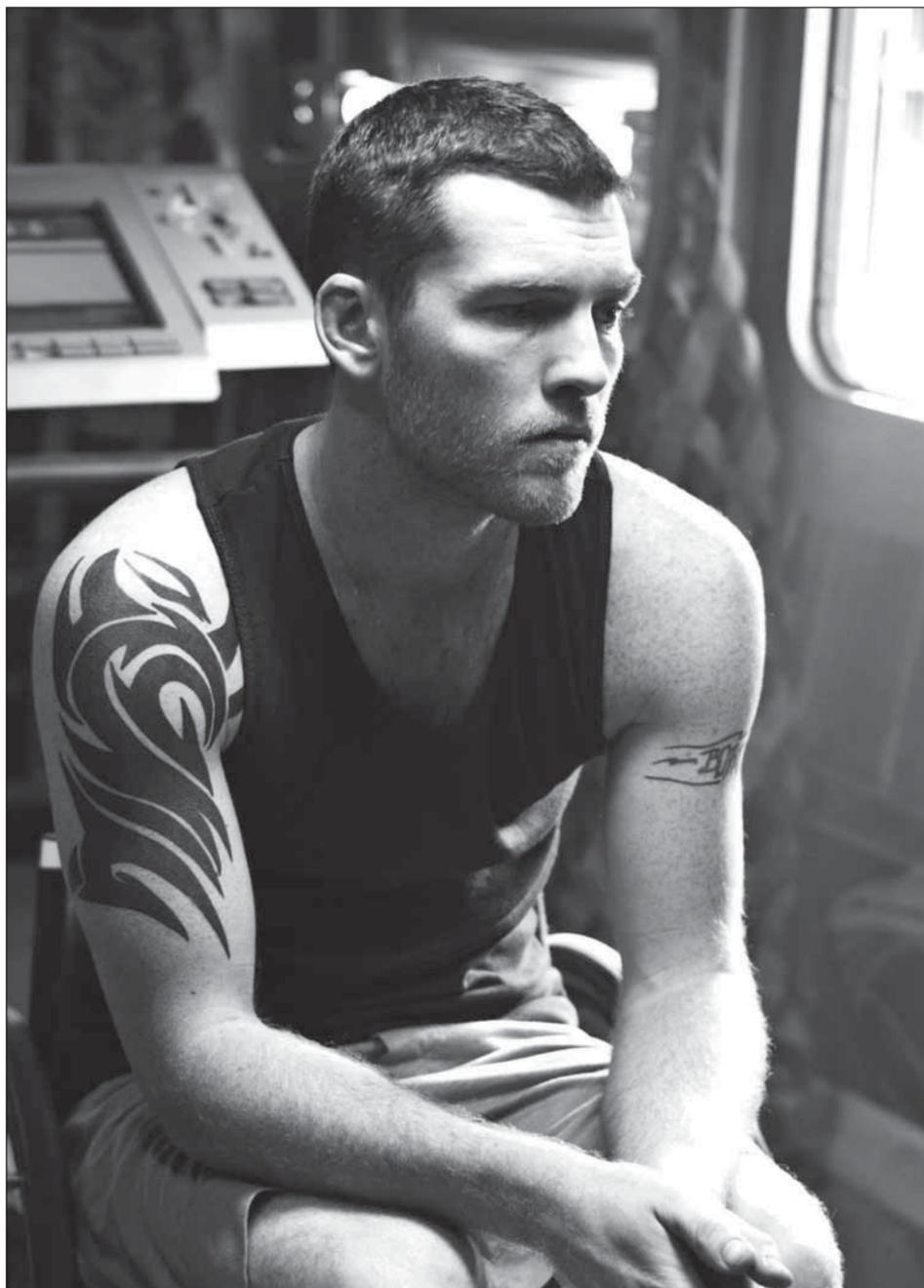
Only the final option can be seriously countenanced, that is, that Murdoch the producer was in no way threatened by the thematic content of *Avatar*. On one level we can say that this is a far cry from Miranda Devine’s recurrent nightmare of the American Project being subverted. Rather it is a clear gesture of contempt towards the Left and how it might exploit the issues so clearly presented: it is just too weak to mount any serious challenge to the institutions of capitalism.

On another level, it is hardly the fault of the Left that tens of thousands of cinema-goers are not rushing from *Avatar* screenings shouting “Down with Capitalism” because the film is simply not effective as a vehicle for active engagement. Far from it. Its role is to create passivity, and it does so beautifully.

Imperialism with an *Avatar* face

Back to the film itself. The purpose of Sully’s transformation as an avatar was to find some peaceful way of winning over the Na’vi: in the words of Dr Grace Augustine (Sigourney Weaver), to find a “diplomatic solution” to their resistance. Of course it had to fail if we were to achieve our inevitable wham-bam climax, but the audience is nevertheless left with the subliminal conclusion: all that death and destruction could have been avoided if Sully’s mission had been fulfilled.

After all, an Empire that can create “other people” can surely convince an innocent bunch of Pandorans to share their goodies. If only the Bush-style militarists hadn’t taken over with their “Bust through or Bust up” strategy, America would not have suffered the humiliation of defeat and been shown the door. The Empire’s civilisation is really too sophisticated for that!



Jake Sully, speaks as an archetypal “American”.

Avatar poses no threat to the American psyche. It is comforted from the very start by the fact that the narrator, Jake Sully, speaks as an archetypal “American”. He has lost the use of his legs fighting as a marine, he is a veteran, thus in a sense he can do no wrong.



Peter Pan and child trafficking



Gabriel Molina

It is particularly difficult for Cuba's enemies to justify the reason for US citizens being prohibited to travel freely to Cuba.

Approximately 10 years ago, almost at the end of his second term, President Bill Clinton attempted to restore that right to his compatriots. At that time he affirmed that allowing citizens to travel to Cuba would be in the interest of the United States, as the best means of influencing the island.

But the rights and interests of US citizens are not being respected. Mafia groups from Florida demanded of Clinton's successor, the hated George W Bush, that he revoke that policy given that, incredibly, the ones who were influenced were the visitors and not the visited.

In total contrast to what is happening in relation to other underdeveloped countries, the interest of those groups, mostly located in Miami, is to provoke Cubans into leaving the island and taking refuge in the United States. The US's other neighbours cannot understand why, while walls have been constructed to keep them out, all kinds of obstacles are being put in their way, while they are hunted, maltreated, expelled and even killed, Cubans reaching US territory illegally are given refugee status and all kinds of privileges – in the name of democracy and freedom.

That arbitrary regulation has been the cause of an incessant human trafficking that has turned into a lucrative and deadly business.

It all began 50 years ago, when in 1960 the CIA came up with a false law widely reproduced and distributed by its agents. In that way, Cubans were led to believe that the new revolutionary government had decided to remove parental custody of children and abrogate it to the state.

An unheard of mass of confused children preparing to travel alone to the United States began to crowd into Havana's José Martí airport. That was because approximately 14,000 families failed to think or act sensibly and let themselves be deceived by the criminal plot organised by the CIA, under the codename Operation Peter Pan.

Researchers José Wajásán and Ramón Torreira describe it as "a sinister manipulation on the part of Washington of the major fears of Cuban parents".

In their book *Operation Peter Pan*, the authors quote documents from the Kennedy Library declassified from National Security Files, which, via a letter from General Maxwell Taylor, inform of a covert action program to defeat the Cuban government.

For the first time on October 26, 1960, the CIA-created Radio Swan referred to a supposed law to take children aged 5 to 18 from their parents, in order to convert them into "monsters of [Marxist] materialism."

The custody conspiracy had gone into operation by word of mouth months earlier.

Initially the CIA gave the task to the conspiracy group headed by the ex-prime minister of the Carlos Prío government, known as Pony Varona, a derivative of his name Tony, in honour of his lack of personal refinement.

Later, other groups became involved, because Varona left the country, leaving the mission in the hands of his closest partners, Leopoldina and Ramón Grau Alsina, niece and nephew of ex-president Ramón Grau San Martín, who confessed their guilt after their arrest. They printed out the false law, saying that they had stolen it from President Dorticós' office and circulated it clandestinely. The apocryphal document stated in its Article 3: "When this law comes into effect, the custody of persons under 20 years of age will be exercised by the state via persons or organisations to which this faculty has been delegated."

Panic spread among thousands of Cuban families. Having structured the plot at national and continental level, the US government stated that it could take in all Cuban minors who wished to travel there, without visas or papers. In that violation of its own immigration laws, Washington gave large sums of money to the airline companies to transport the minors to Miami.

Father Bryan O Walsh, whom the authorities placed at the head of the program, declared years later that he received approximately 15,000 children. It was a tremendous paradox: parents abandoned their children to an unknown fate, with the ingenuous intention of protecting them.

The majority of those children suffered from major traumas that culminated in a total sense of non-belonging. Some of them learned alone to insert themselves in society, while there were extreme cases like that of Robert Rodríguez who, at the age of 55, brought a lawsuit before a Miami court, claiming that during the five years that he was under a "protection program in the archdiocese of the city, he was the victim, along with other children, of continuous sexual and emotional abuse". He said that "he was mistreated and sexually abused in the various camps where he was placed, as were other children taken there."

During the last 50 years, a number of variations of Operation Peter Pan have emerged from Miami and Washington. The most recent one, essayed since 2003, did not surprise anyone. It was very much part of the excesses of the Bush administration, looked down on by the rest of the world on account of its unscrupulous form of government. But, by maintaining Cuba on the list of countries trafficking minors – as it announced on June 14 – the government of President Barack Obama, which it was thought had a minimum amount of decency, is destroying the few hopes of change that some people might still be holding onto.

Granma ✖

Sully's love affair with Neytiri (Zoe Saldona) is central, here. It proves that the Na'vi could be lulled and taken over *nicely*. After all, he was invited to provide the leadership in their liberation struggle, wasn't he?

Just coincidentally, a very "nice" President has been elected to lead the United States. In many respects, Obama is the liberals' last hope of grasping the heart of the Empire. His role is to win back the respectability of US imperialism world-wide – to undo the damage of the Bush term fiasco, fix up the economy and regain moral leadership of the globe. Already troops have been "peacefully withdrawn" from Iraq (actually there are still 90,000 + troops there), and the language of the Afghan war has changed, from using drones to selectively bomb the enemy into oblivion, to "supporting and protecting" the local populace.

For liberals like James Cameron, this is *Avatar's* sub-textual alternative to the barbarity of Bush-style militarism. And it is something that people like Rupert Murdoch, at least tactically, might be prepared to endorse. Fundamentally the aim, US hegemony on a social, political and economic plane, remains the same, but the strategy must be more subtle, more sophisticated, more "cultured".

Form over content, every time

Whatever "deep" interpretations we might tease from the movie, however, the general public's appreciation of *Avatar* is at a more basic level: after a rollicking ride through some amazing 3-D Utopian immersion, a predictable plot with some pretty clunky acting leads to the defining battle where good defeats evil. End of story. Successful, passive "Entertainment".

What remains is a residue of image and form: the sub-aquatic blue of Pandora; the strangely alluring and exotically CGI (computer

generated imagery) crafted Na'vi; the noise and 3-D confrontation of battle lurching from the screen. Form totally overshadows substance, the "meaning" of the movie is utterly secondary. Now, ain't that the way of it all? Small wonder Rupert and his News Ltd ilk could be relaxed about James Cameron's message.

Avatar is pure escapism. There is simply no "reality" to it, even as allegory or parable. It is sci-fi, way, way out there, "on a moon far away in time and space", it is so "exotic" as to be absolutely remote from suburban life and, yes, it is cartoonish in its characterisation. In short, it deliberately aims to make its audience sit back, relax, and be an object. Not, it must be stressed, as a "subject", one capable of engaging in the consequent reality of action, no, everything is co-opted onto the screen.

Today, it would seem, the audience is less inclined to even *discuss* issues arising from the cultural immersion around them. "Why ruin a good movie by analyzing it?" they say, "Just enjoy it for what it is: entertainment," they say, "You read too much into things," they say, "Oh do shut up," they say, "you are making a scene." There is a fear, here, a "self censorship" that seeks to avoid the confrontation of debate, conflict, and the hidden truths which might emerge.

Those truths relate to capitalism and the way we separate "work" from "entertainment". The way we sit back, exhausted, switch off mentally and allow junk to flow through us. To engage, to exercise our critical faculty, to clarify our own position, to act on our "entertainment" might involve some work for our minds, some conclusions which in turn might require struggle and our emergence to adulthood.

For surely, we are being manipulated by the capitalist entertainment industry, which is treating us all like children. If we do not resist, the Empire's avatars will have our minds and US hegemony is assured, without so much as a shot or arrow being fired. ✖

military psyche.

the fact that the narrator, Jake Sully, has lost the use of his legs fighting sense he can do no wrong.

Why Exxon Mobil is more dangerous than BP

Susan Webb

BP may be getting all the bad headlines these days, but Americans should probably worry more about Exxon Mobil. Big Oil's financial sway over Congress and even the White House has been widely reported – with the overwhelming bulk of oil money going to Republicans.

But Exxon Mobil Corp stands out among the nation's oil giants in one big way: it is quietly spending millions of dollars to fund an enormous, interlocking network of extreme right-wing "policy" groups, foundations and think tanks – often with innocuous names – working to shape public opinion and policy. A glance at the MediaMatter Conservative Transparency project gives the picture.

For example, Exxon has given more than US\$1.2 million to the American Council for Capital Formation. This group's website is filled with attacks on the climate bill now before Congress. Featured items include an op ed by its senior vice president, Margo Thorning, published on May 18 in the *Detroit News*, headlined "Climate bill will stall Michigan's manufacturing engine."

Another featured item, a recent *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) interview with ACCF's head, Mark Bloomfield, cheerleads cutting the capital gains tax. Bloomfield boasts he is known as "Mr Capital Gains."

According to the WSJ article, Bloomfield holds a monthly Washington dinner "for an eclectic group of members of Congress, corporate executives and journalists." The article says these gatherings "harken back to a less partisan and hurried time in Washington, when policy was often hashed out informally and off-the-record."

Exxon has given US\$1.6 million to the Competitive Enterprise Institute, which calls itself "a public interest group dedicated to free enterprise and limited government." CEI, says Sourcewatch, "postures as an advocate of 'sound science' in the development of public policy". However, CEI projects dispute the overwhelming scientific evidence that human induced greenhouse gas emissions are driving climate change. They have a program for "challenging government regulations", push property rights as a solution to environmental problems, opposed "US vehicle fuel efficiency standards and been a booster for the drug industry."

Then there's the National Centre for Policy Analysis (NCPA), which Exxon has given US\$520,000. It says its goal is "to develop and promote private alternatives to government regulation and control, solving problems by relying on the strength of the competitive, entrepreneurial private sector." It pushes Social Security privatisation and health savings accounts, rather than the dreaded "Obamacare." Its website sports blurbs from Newt



ACCF's head, Mark Bloomfield boasts he is known as "Mr Capital Gains."

Gingrich and right-wing commentator John Stossel.

According to the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, the NCPA prides itself on "aggressively targeting key political leaders and special interest groups, establishing on-going ties with members of the print and electronic media, and testifying before Congress, federal agencies, state lawmakers, and national organisations."

Exxon is one of the top funders of the National Taxpayers Union, to whom it has given US\$315,000. NTU calls itself a "citizen group" advocating the flat tax – tax cuts for the rich, cutting government services, "individual liberty, and free enterprise." Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform, was one of NTU's executive directors.

Exxon has given US\$531,000 to the Heartland Institute – another "free market" group that fights efforts to curb global warming action and other environmental measures, and pushes school vouchers and privatisation – and US\$385,000 to the right-wing Heritage Foundation. And on and on. MediaMatters has an extensive listing.

And Exxon Mobil, alone among the top oil corporations, has joined forces with extreme right-wing funders like the Koch and Scaife family foundations, and others less well known but equally far-right, in this vast stealth effort.

Exxon has given US\$1.9 million to the well-known right-wing American Enterprise Institute (AEI). That's small potatoes compared to US\$17 million for the AEI from the top funder of right-wing groups, the Wisconsin-based Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, which got its start with the proceeds of the Allen-Bradley Company, manufacturer of rheostats. Or the US\$8 million for the AEI from the right-wing Smith Richardson Foundation financed by the Vicks VapoRub fortune. Or

the US\$6.4 million from the Scaife Foundation, financed by the Mellon industrial, oil and banking fortune. But it shows the kind of company Exxon Mobil keeps.

Exxon has given US\$265,000 to the Manhattan Institute, funded by the same collection of right-wing foundations. The Manhattan Institute, frequently cited as a source in major media like *The New York Times*, without any mention of the extreme-right nature of its funding, trumpets "market-oriented policies" and says it is aimed at "shaping American political culture and developing ideas that foster economic choice and individual responsibility." It holds forums and conferences, and produces publications, books and a quarterly magazine *City Journal*.

Its website features a June 27 article in the *New York Daily News* by institute fellow Diana Furchtgott-Roth attacking the effort to pass a "living wage" law in New York City. She calls a "waste of money" a law that would require new projects that receive city subsidies to pay workers US\$11.50 an hour or US\$10 an hour plus health benefits.

Over and over, for what Hillary Clinton once perceptively called the "vast right-wing conspiracy," Exxon Mobil's name pops up among the funders.

The far right in the US isn't just tea party "wackos." To get to the root, a good place to start would be Exxon Mobil. *People's World* ☘

Build an all-Ireland economy Political statement, National Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Ireland

As the CPI has been pointing out since the onset of the present economic crisis, working people are paying and will continue to pay a heavy price for the policies of both the Irish and the British governments of bailing out the banks and finance houses, giving priority to the needs of finance capital at the expense of workers.

The most recent emergency budget introduced by the British government is yet another example of making workers pay. The coalition government in London has proposed cutting £128 million (\$220 million). This follows the £370 million (\$765 million) in cuts agreed by the Northern Ireland Assembly last September.

These savage cuts will bear heaviest on the poor, the unemployed, and those who rely on public services. They will result in significant jobs losses in the public sector and reduced public services and will lead to the further privatisation of existing public services.

It is against this backdrop that we must view the role and potential use of the draconian provisions of the *Public Assemblies, Parades and Protests Bill*. It is imperative that this legislation be defeated, and it is necessary to mobilise public opinion to do so. What is needed is the enactment of a Bill of Rights, not more repressive measures.

Banks appear to be determined to further deepen the economic crisis and to expose Ireland to even

greater debt by pursuing aggressive mortgage policies requiring an impossible increase in house prices over a number of years. This is leaving Ireland in a position of extreme vulnerability, potentially threatening the solvency of the state itself.

The recent publication in the *Republic* of two reports on the banking crisis simply confirms what has been public knowledge. They confirm the influence and dominance of banking and speculative investment policies and to some degree the extent of the financialisation of the economy that has been a growing feature over the last two decades. These economic and social policies have dominated all other policy needs and requirements.

Unfortunately the reports, rather than being used to question the basis and direction of the economy, are being used for meaningless party political point-scoring by the egos that occupy Dáil Éireann.

The Regling-Watson Report reveals the effects and the restrictions on possible economic and fiscal policies of the *Republic's* adoption of the euro. The abandoning of fiscal controls to the European Central Bank resulted in policies being determined by the major economic powers and by the European finance and banking monopolies.

What is increasingly clear to any objective observer of the policies now being perused is that the

crisis can only deepen. The policies now being imposed by the EU Commission, not just in Ireland but in other EU member-states, will only lead to further savage cuts and reduced public spending and will drive millions into poverty. They will only further damage the real economy.

There are no solutions that the EU Commission will consider that would shift the impact of the crisis onto the backs of those who caused it.

The labour movement has to be won away from the belief that solutions can come from the Irish or British governments or from the European Union. The two failed economic entities are being exposed daily, and this process can only increase over the coming months and years. The lasting needs of the people, north and south, can be met only in the process of building an all-Ireland economy, with the maximum democratic contribution from and control by working people.

Mobilising the people back onto the streets is what is now needed, north and south, if working people are to defend their wages, their terms and conditions, and the services the public depend on, to stop the destruction of public services, and to prevent mass emigration. Now is the time to call for the repudiation of the national debt. This debt belongs to the bankers, not to working people. ☘

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Queers Against Israeli Apartheid refuse to be silenced

Savannah Garmon

On the morning of May 25, the Board of Pride Toronto held a press conference on the lawn outside its offices to announce that the phrase "Israeli Apartheid" would be censored from the upcoming 2010 Pride Parade. The decision, aimed at banning the Toronto-based activist group Queers Against Israeli Apartheid from the parade, set off a firestorm in the community, including refusals to participate in the festival and an open letter denouncing the decision by eight founding members who organised the first Toronto Pride parade in 1981.

The attempt to ban political speech at Pride Toronto fits a clear pattern – Israel's public relations machine has attempted to malign critics and silence dissent around the world for decades. And these attempts have recently reached new heights in Canada, in response to the success that Palestine solidarity activists in Canada have achieved in recent years.

The first Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) – now an annual, international political gathering – was held on the University of Toronto campus in 2005. The organisers of IAW have endorsed the call by Palestinian civil society for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel until it complies with international law. The BDS movement is modelled on the boycott campaign that was successful in helping to bring apartheid to an end in South Africa through non-violent means.

The apartheid analogy has put Israel and its apologists on the offensive because it has garnered unexpected levels of support through BDS and other tactics that aim to challenge Israeli state policy.

On June 2, 2009, the Canadian Parliamentary Coalition to Combat anti-Semitism (CPCCA) was formed "... for the stated purpose of confronting and combating anti-Semitism in Canada today." However, most people involved in the BDS movement saw this as a thinly-veiled smear campaign against critics of Israel. The real goal of the CPCCA seems to be to conflate all meaningful criticism of Israeli state policy with anti-Semitism – in fact, many believe it may attempt to amend

Canada's anti-discrimination laws to label criticism of Israel as hate speech.

Outright censorship is not the only means in the Israel lobby's toolkit for silencing opposition. In recent years, Israel has embarked upon a "re-branding" campaign to promote an image of itself as a modern, liberal society with open values while whitewashing its deplorable human rights record.

A key component of this campaign has been the promotion of Israel as a nation with a progressive outlook on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues, especially in relation to its neighbours and Palestinian society.

There is truth in this, at least for the Israeli Jewish population, but claims that this is of widespread benefit to Palestinian queers and trans people (e.g. Tel Aviv as a "gay Mecca") are unfounded. More importantly, that Israel recognises same-sex marriages performed in other countries does nothing to excuse the humanitarian disaster that has resulted from its siege and attacks on Gaza.

It was in response to this re-branding campaign that Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA) formed. In fact, there are several members of QuAIA who also marched against South African apartheid during the 1980s in solidarity with South African anti-apartheid activist Simon Nkoli, who was a black gay man. Even then, critics disparaged their presence in the Pride parade in Toronto, pointing to relatively greater acceptance of homosexuality in the white South African community compared to blacks living under apartheid. Today, queer activists have begun to label this type of expropriation of the LGBT struggle to distract from other human rights abuses with the term "pink-washing."

QuAIA also endorses the Palestinian civil society call for BDS, and in particular a September 2009 initiative to boycott LGBT leisure tourism to Israel. This campaign was initiated in response to the International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association's decision to hold a tourism conference in Tel Aviv in coordination with an Israeli LGBT group, Aguda, despite the Palestinian call for the boycott of Israel.

To challenge the re-branding



Last week Pride Toronto reversed its decision to ban the words "Israeli Apartheid" and so the group Queers Against Israeli Apartheid participating in the July 4 parade with the consent of the Pride organisers.

campaign, QuAIA took its message to the 2008 and 2009 Pride festivals in Toronto, marching without incident. The Israel lobby responded to QuAIA's presence with outrage and initiated a smear campaign against the group. Israel lobby groups such as B'nai Brith and the Simon Wiesenthal centre attempted to portray QuAIA as an anti-Semitic hate group, despite the fact that many of our members have histories of anti-racist activism and many are Jewish themselves.

After the 2009 parade, a propaganda film was made against QuAIA by a local gay Jewish lawyer and self-proclaimed "gay activist." The film was distributed to city councillors in an attempt to convince them to pass a city resolution that threatened to defund Pride Toronto unless they banned our group from marching in 2010.

What followed was a complex series of events; eventually, it was revealed through a freedom of information request that a small group of city bureaucrats, councillors and pro-Israel lobbyists colluded to eject QuAIA from the Pride parade despite the fact that they were aware that QuAIA in no way violated the city's anti-discrimination policy. Notwithstanding this revelation, the Board of Pride Toronto voted 4-3 on May 21 to ban QuAIA, giving in to this year-long smear campaign.

The fallout from Pride Toronto's decision has been tremendous. The queer community of Toronto was galvanised to confront Pride about censorship – after all, censorship has been previously used in Canada to force LGBT individuals back into the closet – and it has also brought forward other concerns about depoliticisation, corporatisation and fair representation of less privileged communities within the LGBT umbrella. And after a month-long community organising effort, Pride rescinded the ban on June 26 – a significant victory for free speech and the Canadian Palestine solidarity movement as a whole.

In a more general sense, across North America – and even the world – the realisation seems to be spreading in the LGBT community that our identities and our rights are being used as an excuse to deny the identity and the rights of another people, halfway across the globe.

Well before QuAIA formed, Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism has been championing the message of queer solidarity with Palestine in San Francisco. In the wake of the ban against QuAIA and the massive attention it has received, at least four new groups have formed worldwide projecting a similar message.

Further, a channel of communication has begun to develop between

queer activists in Palestine and those in the Palestinian Diaspora. The two main Palestinian LGBT organisations, ASWAT and al-Qaws, have released a joint statement condemning Pride Toronto's banning of our group while a new queer Palestinian group has formed endorsing the call for BDS. In the end QuAIA invited the Palestinian director of al-Qaws to visit with QuAIA during Pride – she will be marching with us in the upcoming parade. In light of all this, the claim some in Canada make that "the Palestine/Israel conflict has nothing to do with the queer struggle" is further deflated every day.

So it seems that while LGBT people in Palestine have begun speaking out both for themselves and for their people as a whole, LGBT activists in the West are starting to realise they cannot allow their struggles to be co-opted by Israel's colonisation schemes. And here in Toronto, Queers Against Israeli Apartheid will not be silenced. QuAIA were determined to march in this year's Pride Parade on Sunday July 4, and our demand for justice for all Palestinians, queer and straight alike, will be voiced.

Savannah Garmon is an activist for transgender rights, sex worker rights and has been active with various groups in the Palestine solidarity movement since 2002. The Electronic Intifada. ✪

Huge success of PAME strike

The massive successful strike of PAME on June 29 acquired a much greater significance as it confronted one of the dirtiest operations against the workers' movement. The 11th strike of the class-oriented forces in a period of six months paralysed factories, workplaces, ports, train stations and airports throughout the country. Picket lines were mounted in front of numerous workplaces.

The port of Piraeus once again became the field of hard class conflict. The class-oriented trade unions of the lower engine crews and merchant maritime engineers and the forces of PAME resisted bravely and guarded their strike. Despite the intimidation exerted by the social democrat government, the ship-owners and the other bourgeois parties, the strike was a huge success. Those forces used

the dirtiest methods such as:

- court decisions that declared the strike illegal
- warrants of arrest against trade unionists of PAME and heads of the boards of the seamen's trade unions
- terrorist bomb attack outside the house of the head of PAME in Thessalonica one day before the strike aiming at the intimidation of the class-oriented forces
- use of terrorism, repression and chemicals by the repressive forces and the port police corps. Despite that they did not manage to prevent the class oriented forces from entering the port in order to guard the strike. The forces of PAME managed to block the vast majority of the ships. A few ships left the port "with the gun at the head of the crews" though without

passengers and vehicles. In fact they sailed aided by the repressive forces that beat and wounded workers. The crews of the ships played a crucial role despite the extortions of the employers.

- the lies of the bourgeois media that it is PAME and strikers that allegedly damage tourism and not the poverty spread by the government's measures.

These methods met an immediate response from the class-oriented forces that guarded their strike successfully, with determination and discipline and the tens of thousands of workers who participated in the strike.

In addition, tens of thousands took part in the strike demonstration of PAME in Athens outside parliament as well as in demonstrations held in 60 cities

throughout the country, against the destructive measures that increase retirement ages, cut salaries and pensions, deregulate the redundancy threshold, increase taxes, extend flexible labour relations, freeze wages for three years and attack pensions.

"They legitimate the crime against our social security rights, the plundering of a big part of our income," said Yiannis Tassioulas, president of the Construction Workers' Trade Union from the platform of the demonstration.. "The plunderers are accusing their victims of resisting the plundering ... Our answer to their legitimacy is: law is the rights of the workers and not the profits of the capitalists. For that reason they will always have to confront us."

The strike demonstration of PAME in Athens addressed a class,

internationalist appeal to the working class and the militant trade unions in Europe, to the European trade unionists who struggle against the severe anti-workers' attack calling them to coordinate their struggle and reject the compromised European Trade Union Confederation and all the forces that have disarmed the workers' movement through the policy of conciliation, of class collaboration and submission.

The experience from these struggles makes the struggle for radical changes even more urgent. The working class produces the wealth and must assert itself. The means of production, the wealth must pass into the hands of the people. This goal can reinforce the struggle.

Communist Party of Greece (KKE) ✪

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Palestine and the Helen Thomas affair

Some recent straightforward remarks on Palestine by Helen Thomas, a renowned and outspoken American journalist (among other things she has been very critical of the US involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan) created a lot of controversy in the media.

In late May Jewish Rabbi David Nesenoff spoke to Helen Thomas and asked her to comment on Israel, after a chance meeting on the White House lawn. Nesenoff asked, "Any comments on Israel? We're arresting everyone today. Any comments?" (The latter was a reference to the pro-Palestine protestors outside the White House). Thomas reportedly stated, "Tell them to get the hell out of Palestine."

Nesenoff, was apparently, "shocked and hurt" by what she said. But he further prodded Thomas, asking her "Any better comments on Israel?" Thomas said (about the Palestinians), "Remember, these people are occupied and it's their land. It's not German. It's not Poland."

Nesenoff then said, "Where should they go?" Thomas answered, "They should go home to Poland,

Germany and America and everywhere else."

Let's look at the context of this incident. Helen Thomas is a well-educated and very knowledgeable woman of Lebanese background who has witnessed over her lifetime the destruction of Palestine, the dispossession of its people and the devastation of Lebanon by Israel.

And over this time she has also seen successive, hypocritical US governments continue to dispense immense sums of money (over US\$4 billion a year) to fund illegal Israeli settlements, wars and the occupation. Added to this the recent killings of nine civilians and injuring of many others aboard a protest flotilla taking food, medical and building supplies to Gaza.

Any sensitive and sensible person would understand her feelings of distress and frustration at the injustice suffered by the Palestinians and the relentless dishonesty she has endured in her position as a White House correspondent.

Thomas' comments were not directed against Jews in general, but specifically at Israelis, the Zionist Jewish settlers who have colonised Palestine and displaced its original native inhabitants and established the state of Israel.

Most Jews are not Zionists or Israelis. And the vast majority of these settlers have no traditional bonds with the place, while the original inhabitants have been dispossessed of their land and homes.

Her actual transgression was to tell the truth about the reality of situation in the Middle East and in particular the tragedy of the Palestinians. This is something the US administration, the military/industrial complex and the powerful

Israel lobby wouldn't tolerate and Helen Thomas was pressured to resign from her job.

The Israeli national interests and the US are so intertwined and both so culpable for Israel's sordid history and immoral actions that US leaders are very touchy on the subject.

I think that Thomas just couldn't stand the double standards of US policies any longer and her angry outburst was a response to the anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab prejudice and duplicity that exists in the US on the issue. In a statement Helen Thomas has said she regretted her comments.

It was rash, but brave of her to express her views. Let's hope she has made people think deeply about the issue and that more people are prepared to question and defy the prevailing standpoint in the ruling circles in the USA.

Steven Katsineris,
Victoria

Be honest, Minister Faulkner

On the 7.30 Report of June 23, Minister of Defence John Faulkner said that the reason that we have troops in Afghanistan is that we are fighting terrorism and that the Bali bombers trained there.

This illogical statement went completely unchallenged. If the Bali bombers trained before the invasion then the training bases have been destroyed and the argument is redundant. If, on the other hand, the training was after the invasion then it means terrorist training requires no bases and that training continues unabated despite, or perhaps because of, the presence of 100,000 odd foreign troops.

It also means that terrorist training could occur anywhere. So why are we terrorising the Afghan people with our bombs and missiles? Minister Faulkner should be honest with us (as he expected of others in Senate committees when in opposition) and say that the Australian troops are really there as the junior partner in the Anglo-American alliance for world hegemony.

David Bastin
ACT

Broader issues than just the tax

Question: What is the opposite of the dictatorship of the proletariat? Answer: The dictatorship of capital. A glaring example of the dictatorship of capital has revealed itself in the removal from the highest political office in the country of the prime minister. Let no one be in any doubt about the power of the capitalist class and the pressure it can bring to bear on anyone who stands in the way of capitalist accumulation.

It appears to me that the mining tax was destined for failure (as was the ETS) and represents a typical social democrat stuff up. It would have been far more conducive for the federal government to set up its own mining organisation (National Mining Company of Australia sounds good) and to mine the minerals themselves.

In the last five years the staggering sum of \$255 billion has been repatriated to overseas investors, that's an incredible \$51 billion each year, more than the defence and health budget combined. The state through taxation has already paid for much

of the infrastructure in the form of ports, pipes (for gas) and roads. The National Mining Company of Australia would award itself more and more contracts and push out the large capitalist miners.

As private capital took flight as it has threatened to do, the NMCA would absorb the workers that were dumped by the fleeing capitalists and take over mining in Australia completely in a relatively short period of time.

I do find it interesting that the banks and finance capital in general were pretty quiet over the tax. Maybe because they stood to gain from the tax as much of the revenue raised was to go into the increase of superannuation from 9 percent to 12 percent. This would indicate that there is much rivalry amongst different sectors of the capitalist political economy.

The problem is that the social democrats and for that matter the non communist "left" in general is wed to the capitalist system and its options, severely restricted by a lack of philosophical, ideological and class content, they only knows capitalist methods.

The ETS was a case in point where capitalist methods were to be used to make a pollutant (carbon) a commodity to be traded, not controlled and reduced but bought and sold in an open international market with the degradation of the planet set to continue. The need for a government of a new type is growing more and more with each election.

Only with the working class as masters of the means of production can Australia progress to socialism and political, economic freedom and independence.

Mark Hayward
Perth

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Twilight and paranormal romance

In a perspicacious review of *Eclipse*, the third part of the *Twilight* film quartet, based on Stephenie Meyer's serial novels, Paul Byrnes wrote in *The Sydney Morning Herald* that "these movies take seriously the depth of emotion that a young person feels in first love.

"That is where their [the films'] power lies, not in the beauty of the actors. That is why *Romeo and Juliet* features strongly in their school scenes: Shakespeare also took it seriously."

At the end of his review Byrnes poses the rhetorical question: "Does anyone go to these films to see a fight between werewolves and vampires?"

The answer, of course, is only the more brain-dead among adolescent males, although you would think they could find more than enough explosions and other mayhem in the run-of-the-mill exploitation movies that choke our screens most of the time.

As Byrnes points out, Catherine Hardwicke, the director of the first film in the series, "concentrated on the depth of emotion". She set the tone and the look of the series, and was very faithful to the book. Like the book on which it was based, the first

Twilight film was phenomenally popular, and not just with teenage girls.

The unfortunate Ms Hardwicke was presumably confident that she would go on to direct and help set up the subsequent films too, but it was not to be. Banks, not creative people, run the film industry. Ms Hardwicke was unceremoniously dumped and a succession of directors have helmed the later films in the saga.

For my money, hers remains the best of them so far. It has more emphasis on the people in the film and less on special effects. As Byrnes indicates, she emphasised emotion over violent action.

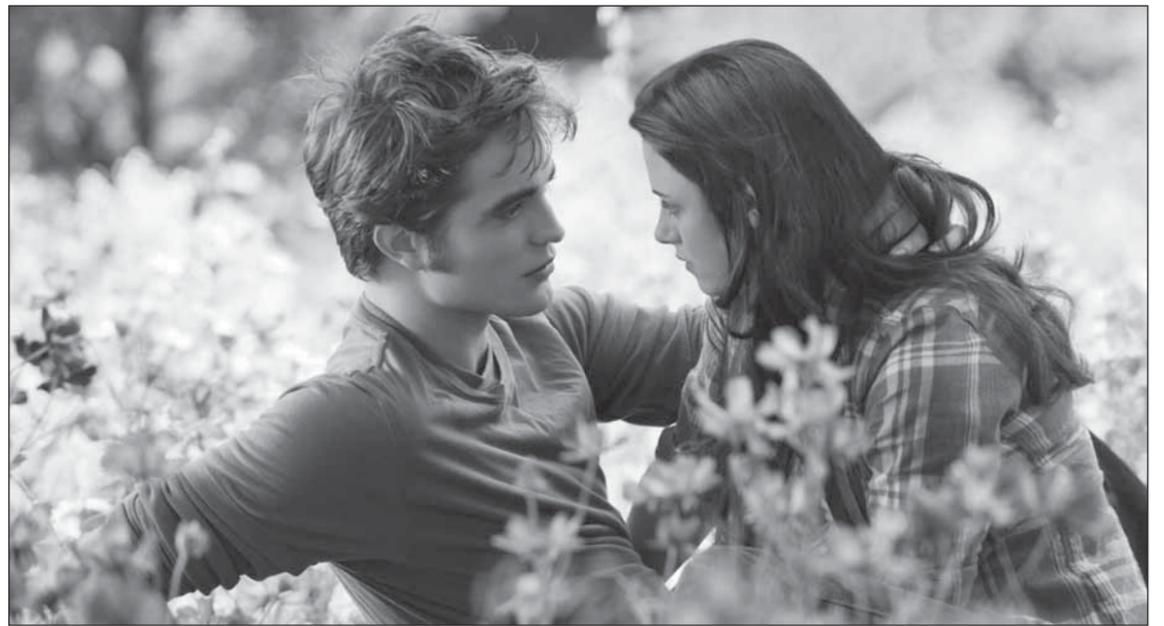
Under capitalism, films are big business, requiring big investments. Financial institutions back films if they think they are going to make money, not otherwise.

That is why there have been so many films that are sequels (or sometimes "prequels"), or remakes of earlier popular movies, or films based on popular TV series or even on computer games. The essential element is that the proposed film be something that is "presold", whose potential return can be calculated by an actuary.

Banks and other financial sources considering putting up money for a film have formulae they use to determine the likely return on their investment. According to these formulae, they can calculate very precisely how much money a remake will take, for example.

It is a known percentage of what the original took, modified by how long ago the original was released, by the pulling power of the actors who will appear in the new version, sometimes by the popularity of the director as well, possibly by the topicality or otherwise of the theme.

This is why a totally original film without well-known stars is simply not "bankable" these days: without a big studio behind the project able and willing to invest its own money



Robert Pattinson and Kristen Stewart star in *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse*.

in a film, independent productions languish on the vine.

The *Twilight* films, however, are based on a very successful series of novels. They are part of a phenomenally popular literary genre that today fills lots of space in any modern bookshop's shelves: paranormal romance.

There is plenty of other paranormal fiction to choose from as well – sword and sorcerer fantasy, sci-fi fantasy, horror, and much more.

Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* books are a slow exploration of a love affair between a human and a vampire. By contrast, her sci-fi novel, *The Host*, is about a love affair between a human and a violet centipede, part of an invasion force of parasitic creatures that have taken over the Earth. It is told from the point of view of the parasite, whose human host is also in love with the same man.

In many ways, I like it better than the *Twilight* books. They will

have great trouble making it into a film, however!

The various genres of paranormal and fantasy fiction inevitably overlap. Their range extends from Philip Pullman's very imaginative *His Dark Materials* series (*Northern Lights*, etc) at one end to Charlaine Harris' Sookie Stackhouse novels at the other end.

Pullman's series encompasses not only intersecting universes but also a war with Heaven. The villain in this series is very much organised religion. The film version of the first book in his series was called *The Golden Compass* and it did fair business, but any sequel has been blocked by the hostility of the Catholic Church in particular, which has frightened off the necessary investors.

Harris' novels about Louisiana telepath Sookie Stackhouse are a delightful mixture of mystery, adventure and romance (with a dash of sex). Harris includes almost every

kind of magical being in her books, but the *setting* remains rooted in normalcy.

There is a lot of trashy paranormal literature around, such as Nancy Collins' novels about the vampire Sonja Blue or Sherrilyn Kenyon's *Dark Hunter* novels (advertised as *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* meets *Sex And The City!*). Many of these are loaded with almost pornographic sex scenes, but their mix of magic and violence is so divorced from credibility it simply becomes boring.

One series that is well worth finding in your local library (or bookshop) is Cassandra Clare's *The Mortal Instruments* (*City of Bones*, *City of Ashes*, etc). This is genuinely exciting, highly imaginative and very well written. Its array of magical creatures includes fairies, vampires, demons and angels, all of them portrayed with great conviction. I can thoroughly recommend Clare's dazzling trilogy. ✪



Sun 11 July –
Sat 17 July

John Lautner was a visionary US architect who spent his life creating houses that were an integral part of his own pursuit of beauty. He spent a significant amount of time studying the *site*, absorbing its chief characteristics, what it was that made the site special, and then he would sketch a rough design that saw the house and the site become one.

The examples of his art – shown in *Infinite Space* (ABC2 Sunday July 11 at 7.30 pm, repeated ABC1 Sunday July 18 at 3.30 pm) are truly extraordinary examples of buildings that are integral with their environments.

Admittedly, these remarkable houses were commissioned by clients with plenty of money, but while the houses are imaginative and extraordinary, they are never opulent, there is no tasteless flaunting of wealth. Lautner put the same artistry and brilliance of vision into a local school that he designed, an educational facility that makes you realise just how spiritually impoverished are the luckless pupils of most schools.

Lautner actually designed a number of public projects but very few ever got built, his radical designs probably being too unusual for hide-bound official bodies spending public money to take a chance on.

Lautner's work is clearly worthy of study and this film, by architectural filmmaker Murray Grigor, should have been enthralling. Sadly, it is not. Grigor obviously is too much in love with his subject and apparently cannot bear to cut anything out. The result is a film that goes on too long and wears out its welcome – it lasts an unbelievable hour and a half, when if tightened up to a less self-indulgent one hour (or even forty minutes) it could have been as extraordinary as Lautner himself.

Booyed up, apparently, by the popularity of the Thames/BBC quiz show *Qi* (ABC1 Tuesdays at 9.30 pm), which the ABC started at about series five, this week the ABC has wisely chosen to go back to the beginning of the series so that we in the outer reaches of the Empire can enjoy the wit and occasional erudition that is its hallmark.

Episode one features an appallingly youthful-looking Stephen Fry but curiously Alan Davies looks the same as usual. The other guests are Fry's mate Hugh Laurie (before he went to the US for *House*), writer and broadcaster Danny Baker and actor-comedian John Sessions, who reveals himself to be very erudite indeed.

The program's penchant for rewarding interesting answers more than merely correct ones gets something of a workout in this first episode with Alan Davies determined to be interesting.

The program's other main element, its good-natured fun, is also well in evidence.

This week's instalment of the generally splendid advocacy series *e² transport* (ABC2 Wednesdays at 8.00 pm) should be compulsory viewing for everyone involved in urban planning, public transport, as well as local and state government.

Designed by John Lautner
US architect, "Marbrisa"
Acapulco, Mexico – *Infinite Space* (ABC2 Sunday July 11 at 7.30 pm, repeated ABC1 Sunday July 18 at 3.30 pm).



The episode, titled *Portland: A Sense Of Place*, shows us – succinctly but tellingly – how the city of Portland in Oregon, by popular vote, chose to end urban sprawl and instead to invest in modern, fast public transport, and a general focus on making the use of your car so unnecessary you leave it at home.

City officials explain the dramatic effects of making the pedestrians the dominant consideration in their city planning, to the extent of doing away with wide streets in favour of narrow ones so that pedestrians can cross in comfort and peace.

Not only has Portland reduced its carbon footprint, as its use of the car has slumped, but it has attracted a multitude of new businesses to the city area anxious to take advantage of the ease of transport available for their customers.

This being the USA, the city officials are anxious that everyone understand that this is all being done with the support and participation of the private sector (public/private partnerships loom large in their financing of their urban infrastructure and even in their efforts to get public support for the urban renewal program), but the results are a credit to them nonetheless.

Two or three years ago, the centre of Portland was decaying, moribund, depressed and depressing. The push to ban further outward spread came from people who wanted to preserve the rural character of the city's surroundings.

Once they voted to do just that, and to put their efforts into reviving the centre of the city as a place for people to live and work and shop, the whole character of the city changed.

Today their problem is the number of new people who want to live there! But they are determined to keep a good percentage of low cost housing, to resist gentrification, which would defeat the thinking behind the entire project.

This is capitalism doing something right, because those responsible have put people ahead of profit-making. It is noticeable that there is no participation in the film by any representative of the auto industry.

The Volcano That Stopped The World (ABC1 Thursday July 15 at 8.30 pm) is about (what else?) Eyjafjallajökull, the Icelandic volcano whose eruption in April brought the world's airlines to a grinding and embarrassing (and costly) halt.

Iceland is itself the product of the volcanic activity that formed (and

is still forming) the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, the line where two of the Earth's tectonic plates meet. The ridge neatly bisects Iceland, and since these plates are moving apart about two centimetres every year they allow magma to force its way up to the surface, sometimes under hundreds of feet of snow and ice, causing catastrophic melts (with accompanying floods), explosions and eruptions of lava and ash.

Iceland has *lots* of volcanoes and a significant eruption every five years on average. This British program has striking footage of previous eruptions and stunning evidence of the terrifying power of a volcano. It tries to answer all the questions uppermost in people's minds: what happened, where was it, why did it stop aircraft movements and why was it so sudden?

In the process it does a first rate job of showing us the current state of vulcanology as well as the vulnerability of modern jet engine design to clouds of silica particles, as thrown up by some types of volcanoes.

In an unsensational, matter of fact way, it does a sterling job of explaining a major natural calamity, making it both fascinating and informative at the same time. ★



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POLITICS
in the pub

July 9

GILLARD'S MYSCHOOL

Angelo Gavrielatos, Dep Pres Aust Education Union, Sen VP NSW Teachers Federation;

Jane Caro, social commentator, co-author *A Stupid Country – How We Dismantle Public Education*

July 16

HENRY TAX REVIEW WHO BENEFITS, WHO LOSES

Peter Davidson, Senior Policy advisor, ACOSS;
Michael Janda, ABC Online Business Reporter

July 23

WILL THE CURRENT FLOODS SOLVE THE PROBLEMS OF THE MURRAY-DARLING BASIN?

Richard Kingsford, Prof, UNSW;
Bruce Thom, Prof, Wentworth Group

July 30

AFGHAN WOMEN SPEAK OUT

Gary Cagaroff, filmmaker *Garden at the End of the World*;
Rosemary Morrow and Mahobar, aid workers and teachers to Afghan women and children

August 6

POPULATION GROWTH – PROMISE OR THREAT?

Mark O'Connor, author *Overland Australia*;
James Arvanitakis, UWS

August 13

WHAT NEXT FOR LABOR-PROGRESSIVE IDEAS

Ben Eltham, writer *New Matilda*;
Miriam Lyons, Executive Director, Centre Policy Development

August 20

IS THE GREATER SYDNEY REGION SUSTAINABLE?

Geoff Evans, Mineral Policy Institute,
Arthur Rorris, General Secretary, South Coast Labor Council

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Gulf spill galvanizes activist community

Matthew Cardinale

NEW ORLEANS: With the US government and oil giant British Petroleum under fire for their handling of the more than two-month-old Gulf Coast oil spill disaster, environmental and community activists across the country are taking matters into their own hands.

In New Orleans, a Gulf Emergency Summit was held to design a grassroots response to the crisis on June 19, resulting in the launch of the "Emergency Committee to Stop the Gulf Oil Catastrophe".

"We're organising a broad resistance," Larry Everest, a spokesperson for the committee from San Francisco, California, who travelled to the Gulf after the disaster, told IPS.

"The goal of the summit flowed from the call we put out, a recognition of the enormity of the catastrophe... and recognising that the disaster is out of control and spreading and BP and the government have shown they are unable and unwilling to stop the disaster and protect the environment or even tell the truth," Everest said.

Some 35,000 to 60,000 barrels of oil are estimated to be leaking in the Gulf every day. BP says it is collecting 23,000 to 25,000 barrels.

The Gulf Emergency Summit included about 100 activists from around the country, particularly the US south, as well as many from New Orleans where the meeting was held. Organisations represented included public housing advocacy organisations like C3-Hands off Iberville, Survivors' Village, World Can't Wait, the Lower Algiers Environmental Committee, Pax Christi, and Women United for Social Justice.

"We're calling for people coming together and fighting and organising

and demanding the truth and that everything be done to stop this catastrophe. We're organising mass independent actions that are not subservient to or within the framework of the issue as defined by BP and the government," Everest said.

"They [BP and the government] have been taking out ads, holding meetings, they're on TV daily telling the population that everything is being done that should be done, that everyone should follow their lead. This is a lie. They're not informing people of the full scope of this horror either," Everest said.

Two actions have been held so far in New Orleans as a result of the Summit. First, two days after the Summit, about 25 activists protested at the United Command in New Orleans. The protesters presented a BP official with their list of demands. The BP official wouldn't even identify himself to the protesters, Everest said.

Two days after that, Emergency Committee activists attended one of BP's Open Houses for the public, again presented their demands, and demanded that BP answer questions.

In the period shortly after the April 20 explosion on the Deepwater Horizon oil rig, BP representatives would answer questions from citizens at their forums, Everest said. However, BP changed the format after they were "crucified by members of the public" and now company spokespersons give short prepared statements and allow members of the public to visit informational tables.

The Emergency Committee demanded that BP answer questions publicly, not one-on-one, and BP gave in, answering questions at least at that forum for about 40 minutes, Everest said.

"They're trying to prevent collective mass consciousness and actions.



It's major PR [public relations] and damage control... These open house meetings are propaganda and disinformation sessions that 'everything is being done' and 'we're so sorry'. They're cover-ups," Everest said.

In addition, activists have been holding protests across the country in cities not directly impacted by the oil spill.

One day of national protests, referred to as "Crude Awakening", was called on June 19 by Code Pink and the Sierra Club.

In Atlanta, a dozen protesters gathered at a midtown BP gas station. Many of the protesters were young people unaffiliated with any organisation. Others were members of the Revolutionary Communist Party, which also sent many representatives to the Summit.

"We're here to protest BP and the crimes they continue to be perpetrating against all living things in

the Gulf Coast region and the US," said Carol Coney, an organiser of the local protest. "It's an assault on our country – environmental and economic terrorism."

People in the US "who have any kind of heart for working people and creatures that live in the ocean, all of us are heartbroken by what has happened and what is still happening," Coney said.

"I think BP has done a great disservice to humanity. This is a f**king disaster and I think BP needs to be held solely responsible for the cleanup effort," said Oliver Howington, a protester and transgender activist.

"This is an excellent example of how corporations and government work together to make environmental disasters like this possible," Howington said. "The government let them have all this deregulation and [won't] impose limits or caps."

Activists held signs that said

"Save Our Sea Critters" and "We Demand Alternative Energy Now".

An estimated 100,000 activists around the world also held a "Hands Across the Sand" action on June 26, in which people held hands along beaches in opposition to offshore oil drilling, from 12 noon to 12:15 in their local time zone.

"Originally intended as a local event, Hands Across the Sand went international with events held in: Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Belize, Canada, Costa Rica, Germany, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Spain, France, United Kingdom, Greenland, Croatia, Ireland, India, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Lebanon, Mexico, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, Panama, Peru, Poland, Sweden, Tanzania, and South Africa," according to the Surfrider Foundation.

Political Affairs ✪

South Korean villagers say 'No!' to US navy base

Bruce K Gagnon*

I have recently returned from a week-long trip to South Korea, where I visited several communities that are experiencing major expansion of US military bases. Several farming and fishing villages, each more than 400 years old, are either being completely destroyed or severely impacted as their lands are taken for the enlargement of US bases.

The *Washington Post* reported several years ago that the US would be doubling its military presence in the Asian-Pacific region in order to "manage" China. Thus we now see US base expansion on Guam, Okinawa and in South Korea.

One such case is the small Gangjeong fishing village on Jeju Island in South Korea. The South

Korean Navy is ostensibly building this base, but when members of our organisation called the South Korean Embassy in Washington, DC, to support the opposition to the base by local residents they were told, "Don't call us, call your own [US] government. They are pushing us to build this base."

The US wants to deploy Aegis destroyers, built here at Bath Iron Works in Maine, at the base on Jeju Island largely because of its strategic proximity to China. China imports 80 percent of its oil on ships and a Navy base on Jeju would help give the US ability to "control" this vital shipping lane in the Yellow Sea. While the declining US economy can't compete with China anymore, the Pentagon is embarking on a strategy that says if we can control access to declining supplies of oil then we

will still hold the keys to the global economic engine.

A very provocative strategy indeed.

Gangjeong village is famous for growing tangerines and for its fishing and soft coral reefs. UNESCO has named the sea coast there as one of the world's environmental jewels. The building of a Navy base in Gangjeong, to serve as a port for the growing US Aegis destroyer fleet, will require dredging of the sea bed and destruction of the coral.

Gangjeong's rocky coast reminds me much of Pemaquid Point here in Maine. The Navy plans to completely cover the rocks, now full of aquatic life, with cement in order to build docks for the ships.

The village of 2,000 people held a referendum where 94

percent of the residents voted against the Navy base. Sadly, though, the right-wing South Korean government is moving forward with plans for the Navy base construction, carrying out the will of the US Navy. Already more than 50 of the residents have been arrested for their non-violent sit-ins as they attempted to block construction equipment from beginning work.

Next month Gangjeong residents will do their third week-long pilgrimage around the entire Jeju Island in order to plead with their government to cancel plans for the Navy base. They are doing all they can to protect their fishing and farming culture. They talk about the need for someone to fight for the water, the coral, the fish, and their lands.

The Maine Veterans for Peace

recently held another protest at the latest "christening" of an Aegis destroyer at BIW. Few in our state think about where these ships go once they leave Maine's waters.

But I have now seen one community in South Korea that does not want these ships to come there. Gangjeong's mayor told our visiting international delegation that "Jeju Island is at a crossroads – either eco-friendly or militarised." When he said that, I wondered how Mainers would feel if the Navy wanted to pour concrete on the rocks at Pemaquid Point? I bet Mainers would fight to the bitter end.

That is what the villagers in Gangjeong intend to do. Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space (*Bruce K Gagnon is the coordinator). ✪



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