



Super investment Public – not private – for the public good

Anna Pha

Decades of neo-liberal cost-cutting, privatisation and lack of planning on the part of governments are affecting the efficiency and future profitability of the corporate sector. Lack of infrastructure, poor maintenance and outdated technology are amongst their concerns. The Australian Constructors' Association, which represents major contractors to state and federal governments, claims there is an \$800 billion infrastructure deficit – a sum that will not be forthcoming from the Gillard or state neo-liberal governments. Discussions are taking place between economists, government officials and big business on whether a certain percentage of superannuation funds should be diverted to infrastructure development.

The investment of superannuation funds in much needed infrastructure could offer far more security for funds than on highly speculative investments as well as be of social and economic benefit. It depends on how it is done – by the public sector or private sector: whether it is used for the benefit of the people or for private profit-gouging.

There is no doubt that billions of dollars are required for schools, hospitals, public housing, public transport, development of renewable energy, water programs, rail freight, ports, airports, bridges, roads, national broadband network, etc. Investment in such urgently needed projects would also create hundreds of thousands of new jobs.

Public infrastructure has declined to a point where the ability of many services to meet needs is approaching or has reached crisis point due to profit-gouging, lack of maintenance and failure to plan for the needs of a larger population and economic growth. Successive Labor and Coalition governments at state and federal levels have cut costs, cut corners, privatised and become obsessed with budget surpluses and tax cuts.

Privatisation has taken various forms such as the contracting out of services to the private, for-profit sector; outright sale of public enterprises; and public private partnerships (PPPs) where governments take the risks and the private sector takes the profits and

walk away when it is time to invest in maintenance. One thing is clear, lack of government planning and privatisation have failed to meet the needs of big business as well as the people of Australia.

The financial sector that controls the investments of superannuation funds (including many of the investments of industry funds) has failed dismally in the management of workers' retirement savings. They have invested where they can reap the largest fees, used the money for their own benefit with little interest in investing it where it would best serve the needs of society or be more secure.

Even the industry funds with trade union representation on their boards invest heavily in speculative products. They were hit hard during the global financial crisis. Workers kept on contributing throughout the crisis and their savings continued to shrink. Losses of 20-30 percent were quite common.

Take AustralianSuper, for example, an industry fund managing \$33 billion of workers' retirement savings. It typically, depending on which option a fund member chooses, invests a paltry 9-13 percent in infrastructure compared with 40-70 percent in shares. Around half of these shares are international, i.e. the investment goes offshore. Losses in many of these products during the crisis were up to 25 percent, depending on the composition of the product (shares, cash, fixed interest, property, infrastructure, etc).

Members of the private (retail), high fee funds which tend to have a higher concentration of higher risk products (big buck outcomes when all goes well) took a massive hammering. Some lost 60 percent or more of their savings.

As already stated, the concept of investing a certain percentage of superannuation funds in infrastructure could be of great benefit. The problem with the current discussion is that the big business interests behind it want the funds to be invested in private sector developments. They are not calling for super funds to be invested in not-for-profit public sector infrastructure.

They want more government contracts and private sector development of tollways, tunnels, bridges, ports, airports and national broadband network. They would invest workers' retirement savings in infrastructure



with the expectation of accumulating profits - a portion of which would be returned to workers as long as the profits flowed. The risks associated with losses, mismanagement, long-term neglect of projects and collapse when the company walks away would be carried by workers and taxpayers.

The Communist Party of Australia has been calling for a certain percentage of superannuation funds to be invested in public infrastructure by state and federal governments for the benefit of the community.

Security of funds paramount

As fund balances continue to fluctuate and fears of a double dip recession remain in the US and Europe, workers face further losses, if not now, then when the next crisis phase of the business cycle occurs.

Compulsory superannuation was introduced with the aim of winding back the aged pension (self-provision in retirement), privatising the provision of retirement income for workers and to provide the finance sector and big business with a large source of capital for speculative and investment

purposes. The icing on the cake for the private sector is that it is workers' savings that are at risk. The financial institutions increase their power over governments and industry as they determine where funds are invested and rake in huge (often hidden) fees and commissions.

They now have at their disposal more than \$1.3 trillion, enjoy a steady flow of regular income from the nine percent compulsory levy and welcome the prospect of that rising to 12 percent over next 10 years. The question for workers and trade unions is how to protect those savings, ensure that the age pension is maintained and the funds are put to good use.

Reform is required. The question is what sort of reforms and in whose interests. The following three principles are proposed as the basis of reform:

Workers are guaranteed an adequate income to live in dignity and enjoy their retirement for the rest of their lives.

Workers' savings should not be gambled with or placed at risk.

Investment of superannuation funds should be in socially beneficial and ethically (eg regard to peace,

environment, etc) desirable areas such as public services, infrastructure, job creation, etc.

Towards these ends the CPA is proposing that a national superannuation fund be established which workers can join on a voluntary basis. This fund would be government guaranteed, invest in public projects and programs such as hospitals, schools, national broadband network, public transport, renewable energy, rural, regional and Indigenous programs and job creation.

Retirement income from the national superannuation fund would be in the form of a defined benefit – that is, a set amount per fortnight. It would not be dependent on the ups and downs of Australian or international stock markets, gambling in derivatives, currency gyrations or hedge fund manipulations. The benefit would be indexed regularly in line with movements in the average wage.

In addition, industry and retail funds should be required to allocate a certain percentage of their funds to public infrastructure development. ✪

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Persecution of Roma people

The Guardian

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Broadband storm set to break

The majority of Australians have embraced the concept of a world class National Broadband Network (NBN). It would be an epoch-marking piece of infrastructure; a natural monopoly which, if they were to be consulted, that same majority of voters would surely prefer to have wind up under public ownership and control. However, the debate about to be unleashed in parliament and in the public sphere will question the very concept of the NBN, whether or not it is a viable project or (as Opposition leader Abbott describes it) "an icon of waste and incompetence." The pressure will be on in the weeks and months to come and the people of Australia, particularly those in neglected regional and remote areas, will have to stand up for what they voted for.

The looming showdown indicates that Abbott and the Coalition are going negative in the new parliament. They will serve the corporate interests they represent and resist the desire on the part of Australian voters for a new style of more open politics. Malcolm Turnbull is back on the Opposition's front bench and his first task in his new communications shadow portfolio will be to "demolish" the NBN. They will be peddling an "NBN 3.0" – a hybrid of technologies with an emphasis on improved wireless and satellite services. It is the old hands off, "leave it to the markets" approach that has left most technical experts in the field pretty cold.

There are plenty of questions about the NBN that deserve answers. Where is the huge skilled workforce needed for the eight-year project going to come from? Why should Telstra be given \$100 million to retrain employees to work on fibre networks? Why couldn't a government taskforce be created to facilitate that transition and coordinate the training of other workers? What control will there be to prevent Internet Service Providers upsetting the undertaking to keep prices the same for clients in the city and the bush? Will the priority given to the rollout in regional areas be preserved throughout the project or simply showcased initially to keep independent MPs Rob Oakeshott and Tony Windsor onboard?

These are not the questions the Opposition and its backers will be pushing. Their questions will be couched in such a way as to suggest the NBN was a political fix devised onboard an aircraft bound for Canberra – a folly for which generations will pay a hefty price. Where's the business plan? Why do we need a Ferrari when a Commodore will get us where we need to go? The rather unimaginative line of attack disguises not so much a lack of understanding of the spiralling demand for communications capacity but rather a preference for a sector currently delivering strong profits for the existing main players. If the Libs have their way Telstra would not be obliged to split their wholesale and retail arms. They would privatise the assets of the National Broadband Network Co forthwith.

The Rudd/Gillard government deserves some credit on these issues. The pilot for the project in regional Tasmania has been delivered on time and on budget. A \$23 million implementation study from consultants McKinsey & Co and KPMG found that the NBN does have a strong business case. The government has rejected advice to leave it to the private sector to complete the initial upgrade of wireless and satellite services to remote locations envisaged under the plan. Given all of this, the ultimate objective of the government of stepping out of the scene and leaving the magnificent asset to private cowboy operators is all the more unacceptable given the effort and investment by the working people of the country.

The weeks to come will be challenging as the proponents of various upgrades to the county's broadband capacity take centre stage. The reactionary policy will be made to appear progressive. "Why not spend the \$43 billion on serious measures to tackle climate change?" and so on. The pedlars of this snake oil are not serious. It is in the interests of the Australian people, and particularly those of us who live in regional and remote areas, to continue to push for a national, publicly owned broadband network and all those other demands that do not suit the transnationals.

PRESS FUND

If you think Malcolm Turnbull will have a hard job convincing Australian citizens living in regional areas that they shouldn't have Broadband, spare a thought for the Pope. Arriving in Britain for a state visit, he declared that the World War II Holocaust was caused by atheism, and that only religion would guarantee world peace. Now that will require a really hard sell! *The Guardian* team promises to continue covering the many stories from around the world in which religion has been used as an excuse for war. In the meantime, however, our thanks go to this week's sole supporter, "Round Figure", for his contribution of \$10. That's right, the Press Fund only has one contributor this week, so we really need lots of you, dear readers, to send in something for the next edition, and to continue doing so, please!

This week's total: \$10 Progressive total: \$4,160

Indigenous health must not fall through the gaps in the ministry

The Close the Gap coalition of 40 leading health and human rights organisations, in congratulating Prime Minister Gillard on forming a minority Labor Government, raised concerns at the dropping of the dedicated Indigenous Health Minister role.

Co-chair of the Close the Gap campaign steering committee, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda, said that he was concerned that the role had been abolished without any clear indication as to how the focus on Indigenous health would be maintained.

"The creation of the Indigenous Health Minister role in 2009 was a welcome signal that there would be dedicated attention to achieving Indigenous health equality by 2030," Mr Gooda said.

In 2008, the government and opposition formally committed both sides of politics to close the gap by 2030 through a number of commitments. This included the development of a comprehensive, evidence-based, long-term plan of action that can achieve Indigenous health equality by 2030:

- Ensuring the full participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their representative bodies in all aspects of addressing their health needs,
- Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled health services in urban, rural and remote areas.

"It is vital that this focus be maintained, as we cannot allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health to be forgotten in the push to establish the Health and Hospitals Network.

"While we have seen a bipartisan commitment to close the Indigenous life expectancy gap, a national agreement from COAG, and a down-payment on funding, we now need a plan for how government will see these commitments through," Mr Gooda said.

"This plan needs to be developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and needs to address existing inequities in health services around the country."

Mr Gooda said that the campaign will be looking for renewed leadership from Prime Minister Gillard to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to meet these commitments.

"We will be seeking an early meeting with Prime Minister Gillard, to discuss the way forward to ensure that Indigenous health still remains a key priority for the next term of government, and will also be looking to meet with the Opposition leader, the Greens and the Independents, to build a strong consensus for action to close the gap."

Indigenous Australians die on average between 10 and 17 years younger than other Australians. A baby born to an Indigenous mother is still between two and three times more likely to die before the age of four.

Aboriginal people experience far higher rates of preventable illness such as heart disease, kidney disease and diabetes.

Close the Gap is Australia's largest ever Indigenous health campaign that aims to close the life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and other Australians within a generation. ✪

Solidarity with Hondurans

On Wednesday September 15, the Sydney Coalition for Honduras organised public statements by the Greens Senator-elect Lee Rhiannon and Theo Bougatsas of the NSW Teachers' Federation, outside the Brazilian Consulate in Market Street, in support of the National Front of Popular Resistance (FNRP) in Honduras. On the same day democracy marches were held in Honduras to support a massive 1.26 million petition for the convocation of a National Constituent Assembly to democratise the constitution and demand the return of the exiled President Manuel Zelaya and over 200 other political exiles.

September 15, the day chosen for the actions, is Independence Day in Honduras. The major democracy marches were held in the cities by the FNRP, but repression against marchers was especially serious in San Pedro Sula.

Hundreds of teargas bombs were fired in San Pedro Sula. A 66-year-old lottery ticket street vendor, Efrain Lopez, suffocated

and died. Dozens suffered fractured limbs and wounds from security forces' beatings and severe gas intoxication. Thirty-seven marchers were illegally detained. Musical group *Café Guancasco*, who performed at the Resistance rally, were physically assaulted and their equipment confiscated by police. *Radio Uno* also suffered a police attack including teargas fired into the station, and a sociologist leaving the building was badly beaten.

"We urge the government to ensure that diplomatic pressure is put on the United States and Honduras to respect the people's petition of over 1.25 million signatures and get that democratic process restored," said Lee Rhiannon. "That is the message the Greens will take into the parliament of this country. We stand with the Honduran people to ensure that democracy is returned, the trade unions of that country can operate fully and openly, the military operations are wound back, the military budget is cut, and ensure that the great assets of that country are there for

the benefit of the people of that nation," she declared.

Theo Bougatsas said: "Students, especially those in Honduras ... want to fulfil their dreams. There's no dreams in Honduras, it's currently a nightmare. We need to see change in Honduras. When we ask ourselves – can we see a better future for Honduras? We must say 'yes we can' and 'yes we should'."

Santiago Reyes, on behalf of FNRP, said: "It is important for the people of the world to know what is happening in Honduras, and to stand up against what is happening."

The June 2009 coup in Honduras overthrew an elected government with the support of the United States, a throw-back to the horrors of US-sponsored military dictatorships in Latin America.

This solidarity event was held in front of the Brazilian Consulate in Sydney, because the Brazilian government has resolutely opposed the coup and opposed the return of undemocratic Honduras into the Organisation of American States. ✪

SOLIDARITY WITH GUAM

Film showing

*The Insular Empire:
America in the Marianas*

Wednesday 13 October 7-8.30pm

Club Room NSW Teachers Federation
23-33 Mary Street, Surry Hills,
tickets at door \$20/\$12

Multi-Cultural Concert

with: Ahmed Al-karawi; Antonio;
Florence Cheung; Metin Yilmaz;
Pourandokht Naseri; Rami Al-asadi;
Samir Maarbani Veli Toprak; Group Tililili;
(and Friends)

Saturday 16 October 7.30pm

Tom Mann Theatre
136 Chalmers Street, Surry Hills
tickets at door \$40/\$25

Proceeds to "We Are Guahan", the organisation of the indigenous Chamoru people of Guahan (Guam).
Sponsored by Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition, Sydney Peace Foundation and Maritime Union of Australia

Info 0418 668 098

Taxing time ahead for Gillard govt

Anna Pha

Taxation was almost buried as an issue during the election campaign, but it could become a make-or-break issue for the Gillard minority government. Treasurer Wayne Swan has been forced to not only go ahead with a tax summit in 2011 that he did not want, but to accept items on the agenda that he had categorically ruled out. At the same time the mining lobby appears to have strengthened its grip on the Ministry with appointments such as Greg Combet, Joseph Ludwig, Bill Shorten and the industry's "darling" Martin Ferguson retaining the resources and energy portfolio.

In negotiations with the independents, Labor agreed to a "public forum of experts" to discuss the Henry Taxation Review by June

Gillard took over as prime minister, she negotiated the watered down mineral resources rent tax (MRRT) with the big three mining companies (BHP Billiton, Xtrata, Rio Tinto). Forrest was furious at not being included and has been fighting ever since for a seat at the negotiating table – one of the reasons for his call for the tax summit.

Independent MP Tony Windsor also insisted on a tax summit to discuss the Henry Review's recommendations, including the highly controversial mining tax which Swan said was not up for review. Swan has since reluctantly said they can discuss "the design of the tax" but "we have to move forward with legislation".

Family First Senator Steve Fielding, who was not re-elected to the Senate, is threatening to make life as difficult as possible for the



Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Treasurer Wayne Swan.

The Henry Review's 138 recommendations are a neo-liberal prescription for the unfettered, market-driven plunder of Australia's non-renewable resources to make Australia more attractive to foreign and domestic investors.

2011. Pressure from industry and independents has seen this public forum expand to a full blown summit where almost anything related to taxation could be on the table.

Independent MP Rob Oakeshott led the charge, calling for a summit to address tax reform following discussions with mining magnate Andrew Forrest. He has expressed support for a move from state-based mining royalties (taxed according to volume of production) to some form of federal rent resource tax (based on profits).

Forrest, who heads Fortescue Metals was one of the leaders of the very vocal campaign against the Rudd government's resources super profits tax (RSPT). This campaign played a major role in providing the trigger for the Gillard coup against Rudd. When

government in the Senate where he holds balance of power until his exit in July 2011. He is opposed to the mining tax.

Independent MP Andrew Wilkie has warned that the mining tax is "rushed" and "flawed" and also wants more consultation with industry before he could support it. He has also raised the question of extending it beyond coal and iron ore. Gillard's backdown on the original RSPT saw other minerals excluded from the tax.

Under pressure from the independents and the big end of town, Swan has now confirmed that all recommendations of the Henry Review will be up for discussion including those his government had specifically ruled out, among them taxing capital gains more highly and rationalising taxation of alcohol.

system, an area that Rudd had left for implementation at a later date (See *Guardian* No 1454, 12-5-2010).

It takes a long-term perspective for gradual change over 40 years. The Rudd/Swan Labor team took initial steps in its implementation in the 2010-11 budget last May in the areas of superannuation, the mining super profits tax, abolition of state mining royalties, assistance to the mining industry, reduction of corporate taxes, assistance to small business in write-down of capital expenditure and reduction in taxation of interest on savings deposits.

GST on agenda

The big end of town was disappointed when the GST was excluded from the Henry Review. They are pushing for the present

exemptions on certain goods and services (education, medical, fresh food, etc) to be ended - for all goods and services to be subjected to the tax. At the same time they are demanding that it be increased.

The big accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers is calling for an immediate rise from 10 percent to 12.5 percent. Partner Tim Cox made comparisons with New Zealand where it has risen from 10 to 12.5 percent and set to increase to 15 percent in October. Britain will be lifting its rate to 20 percent next January!

Cox openly admits that the aim of increasing the GST is to be able to reduce taxation on company profits, personal income tax, payroll and other state taxes. Successive reductions in company taxation over the past 20 years have seen the official corporate rate reduced from 46 cents to 30 cents in the dollar. Cuts to higher marginal rates on personal income tax have seen the wealthy pay a far smaller proportion of their income in tax.

These regressive trends were compounded by the very unfair GST which taxes the rich and poor at the same rate in the dollar and is paid on a much higher proportion of income by those on low incomes. This is because the rich do not spend all of their income on goods and services in Australia – they invest much of it or invest and splurge it overseas.

The Greens oppose any increase in or extension of the GST. They are seeking a gradual and long-term shift in the tax system from work-based

taxes to taxes on natural resources and pollution. This includes a carbon tax, a national carbon trading scheme and other ecological taxes and charges that reflect the full environmental cost of the production, use or disposal of resources.

They also have a number of proposals for reducing inequities in the current personal and corporate tax systems. These include a new top marginal rate of 50 percent on incomes of \$1 million or more, the return of the company tax rate to 33 percent and reductions in corporate tax concessions. Their progressive policy is totally at odds with the Henry Review, the government and its patrons in the mining industry and other sectors of big business.

The summit, scheduled for mid-2011 is certainly shaping up to be a big test for Labor under pressure from the various vested corporate interest groups, and the differing views between those holding the balance of power in the both Houses.

Add to that a belligerent Opposition leader who would rather see the government brought down than support legislation that he himself would have introduced. As for the working people of Australia and the trade union movement, the Gillard government will have to be forced to give them a voice through action on the ground and support for the Greens' in parliament. Gillard and her loyal ministers are no friend of labour, their class interests lie elsewhere. ☹

Pete's Corner



Sydney

CFMEU Farewell & Solidarity Concert

Andrew Ferguson has been nominated by the ALP Socialist Left as a candidate for the NSW Legislative Council. It is expected that this nomination will be endorsed by the ALP and Andrew will be in a winnable position and will be elected to state parliament at the next state elections.

Andrew has worked for the CFMEU for more than 30 years dedicated to workers' rights, social justice and international solidarity. From Palestine to solidarity with the Cuban revolution, the CFMEU has been uncompromising.

You are invited to our Farewell for Andrew. In a continuation of our tradition of internationalism, CFMEU Officer, Rita Mallia, will report on her recent two week visit to Colombia. Proceeds from the Farewell will be contributed to assist the struggle for human rights in Colombia. Rita was a guest of Sinaltrainal, the food manufacturing union that represents workers employed by multinationals, such as Coca Cola, Kraft and Unilever. In addition to visiting picket lines and trade unions across Colombia, Rita visited imprisoned trade unionists and filmmaker Liliyany Obando. Liliyany has now been in jail for nearly two years, unconvicted of any crime.

Friday October 8, 6.30pm
CFMEU, Level 2 / 10 Railway Street, Lidcombe

Special guests JJ Son con Idalbelis from Santiago de Cuba
Entrance \$5.00 – Dinner and drinks on sale
All proceeds for human rights in Colombia

The disgraceful pursuit of Ark Tribe

ABCC under a microscope as Ark returns to court

Hundreds of supporters rallied outside the Adelaide Magistrates court in support of Tribe when his court case resumed on Monday 13 September. They cheered him on as he entered court for closing submissions. Union members and supporters also joined a rally outside the Australian Building and Construction Commission's (ABCC) headquarters in Sydney.

Inside the court, Michael Abbott, QC, for Tribe, argued the ABCC had not exercised its power correctly in ordering Tribe to front the interview. He said the notice was invalid because it had not been issued by the Commissioner.

Steven Dolphin, also acting for the defence, said a ruling in Tribe's favour could have a broader significance on the way the ABCC conducts its business.

The case could result in every previous ABCC investigation being placed under the microscope, according to one of the unionist's lawyers.

CFMEU national secretary Dave Noonan urged the federal government to scrap the ABCC regardless of the outcome of the trial.

Ark must now wait another seven weeks to learn if he will be jailed for six months until Magistrate David Whittle hands down his judgement in November.

The 47-year-old is accused of

failing to attend an ABCC interview in 2008 in relation to an unauthorised safety meeting at an Adelaide building site.

"This is the eleventh time I've been back to court for this crap," Ark Tribe told supporters after climbing onto the scaffold stage in Adelaide's picturesque Victoria Square on Monday. The threat of six months jail has been hanging over his head for almost two years.

"No Australian worker should have to face what I have just for withdrawing their labour from an unsafe situation."

Ark was working on a site where workers took action after the builder refused to address safety concerns. Safework South Australia backed up their claims.

The ABCC, given extreme powers by the Howard Government to push anti-unionism in the construction industry, jumped in to try and fine the CFMEU under laws that have been condemned by the International Labour Organisation seven times. The ABCC was not interested in breaches of safety by the employer, but in the union's defence of safety.

The Rudd/Gillard government made no attempt to repeal the legislation, instead putting forward legislation (still not passed) to shift the ABCC under its Fair Work umbrella. Gillard was adamant about keeping "a



Marching with Ark Tribe – Unions/Workers/Activists, May Day this year in Sydney.

tough cop" on the beat in the building industry.

Ark Tribe's brave refusal to bow down to a secret police investigation of a legitimate safety matter has exposed the ABCC as a threat to the rights of all Australians.

Abuse of powers

"We'll have to wait for the court to make its decision, but clearly on any analysis these are very, very

serious powers that have been given to the ABCC," Mr Noonan said. "There are some real questions presented as to whether there's been a serious abuse of those powers. "We would urge Labor to put to the parliament a Bill that returns full rights to construction workers and treats all Australian workers equally."

Victorian CFMEU Senior Vice President Noel Washington, paying tribute to Ark, said "the stand he is taking is a stand for all of us. If anything happens to him they will be taking us all on."

Noonan pointed out how the ABCC's hounding of Ark had drawn attention to the way the secretive body conducts itself. "We have shone a light on the dark side of the ABCC and some disturbing details have emerged," he declared. "They have always claimed their coercive powers are only used as a last resort.

"But the incontrovertible evidence

before the court is that the only efforts they made to contact Ark before ordering him to report for a meeting under threat of jail were two calls to a mobile phone number they thought might be his."

"So they have lied. The extreme powers are being used as a first resort and every Australian ought to be concerned about this."

The CFMEU legal team believe they have made a strong case that the ABCC failed to abide by the building industry Act and as such Ark cannot be found guilty.

The CFMEU and other building unions have promised a national strike if Ark is jailed.

As this historic case reaches its dramatic conclusion, Australians must consider whether a country where workers can be jailed over a safety meeting is a place they want their kids to grow up. ✪

"Fair Work" Ombudsman turns blind eye to underpayment of international students

UNITE, the fighting union for fast food and retail workers in Victoria, was appalled to read the 7-Eleven Stores Audit Campaign: Final Report released last week by the Fair Work Ombudsman.* The audit was conducted after UNITE waged a long campaign against the super-exploitation of international students in 7-Eleven stores.

The main complaint UNITE has made is that there is a far-reaching scam being orchestrated by 7-Eleven franchisees whereby they pay employees for only half the hours they work.

On top of this there are other problems in the stores including the non-payment of penalty rates and long periods of unpaid trial work. These underpayments amount to the theft

of hundreds of thousands of dollars in wages per annum.

UNITE explained clearly to the Fair Work Ombudsman that a simple audit of the books would not show up the full extent of the underpayments taking place. UNITE recommended that a comparison be done between the time and wages records and the cash register reconciliation forms. In most stores the employees log in and out of the cash register and a comparison with time sheets would show that people are not being paid for all the hours they work.

Disappointingly this comparison was not done. Instead the Fair Work Ombudsman merely wrote a letter to some franchisees and then asked them to conduct a "self audit"! The Fair Work Ombudsman then only

looked at the books of 20 percent of those who participated. Even this limited investigation showed that 30 percent of the stores were not adhering to workplace laws - an indication itself that there are big problems at 7-Eleven.

UNITE Secretary Anthony Main said, "It is our view that the Fair Work Ombudsman has systematically failed to take these matters seriously. We have made complaint after complaint about the double hours scam but they continue to refuse to look into it.

"They need to explain very clearly why they refuse to compare the time sheets and the cash register log in details. We have told them on countless occasions where the bodies are buried but they refuse to go and dig them up.

"This cannot be put down to incompetence alone. The truth is that if the full extent of this rip-off was known it could bring down this retail giant. It would also do damage to Australia's reputation amongst international student markets. I would say this is a case of the Fair Work Ombudsman working to protect big business interests ... while ignoring the plight of underpaid workers.

"Our campaign against these dodgy practices in 7-Eleven will continue," Anthony said.

And some in government and higher education wonder why international students are looking elsewhere.

*See: www.fwo.gov.au/Audits-and-campaigns/Documents/2010/7-Eleven-Store-Education-and-Audit-Campaign.pdf

For more information: www.unite.org.au ✪

AMWU support for traditional landowners in WA

The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) has warned that the James Price Point Gas Hub in WA must be built with the agreement and good will of Kimberley Aboriginal communities and the Kimberley Land Council (KLC). AMWU WA Secretary, Steve McCartney said the West Australian Government will fail the WA public and Indigenous communities if the process of compulsory land acquisition at James Price Point continues.

"Until such a time that an agreement exists, the Barnett government will not achieve union support for the project," he said.

"The Barnett government is set to repeat the failings of the Court government, which resulted in long protracted battles with traditional owners in the courts, delaying the benefits of these projects for years" said Steve McCartney.

"The KLC has approached the negotiations with the state government in a professional and structured manner. It's a pity that the Barnett Government has destroyed any good faith between the parties by consistently

threatening the use of compulsory acquisition "

"The Premier will cause damage to Indigenous communities for years to come if he continues down this path; this is why the AMWU will not support the gas hub project while the compulsory acquisition process is underway."

The AMWU will convene a meeting of fellow construction unions and the KLC in the coming weeks to consider how the union movement will support the traditional owners in the Kimberley.

"We will not stand idly by while the state government steals this land from its rightful owners," Steve McCartney said.

"The AMWU will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Kimberley Indigenous people to ensure the gas hub delivers good, secure and safe jobs and greater employment and training opportunities for all people."

If you wish to support the campaign, go to the Get Up web site at www.getup.org.au, click on the "Stop the taking of Indigenous land" link, and sign the petition. ✪

Sydney

A meeting of Retired Union members and their guests

The scourge of asbestos in Australia

Speakers: Barry Robson, Pres Asbestos Diseases Foundation

Maree Stokes, V/President Asbestos Diseases Foundation

Stephen Hayter, V/President NSW ARTU

10:30am Thursday, September 23

Tom Mann Thearte 136 Calmers Street, Surry Hills

Authorised by: NSW Alliance of Retired Trade Unionists in cooperation with CRUMA.

WA Politics in the Pub

"Beyond the Two Party System"

Richard Titilius

When the Independents made their decisions and Julia Gillard got the numbers needed for a minority government, many Australians who had never cared nor talked about politics were wondering what was happening – the two-party system had received its biggest shake up in living memory. The Greens not only gained the balance of power with a record nine Senators from July 2011 but succeeded in winning a seat in the House of Representatives for the first time in a general election.

To capitalise on this resurgence of the need and the desire to talk about politics which had been growing in the community, the Perth Branch of the Communist Party of Australia believed it was time to start a regular public forum to debate the urgent social, political and cultural issues of the day - a Politics in the Pub based on the long-running and successful Sydney format.

The venue was the Carlton Hotel, around 30 people attended to hear the three speakers – Greens Legislative Council member Alison Xamon, Socialist Alliance candidate in the recent election for the seat of Fremantle Sanna Andrew and Communist Party of Australia National President Vinicio Molina.

The moderator was Perth CPA Branch Secretary Andrew Hayward. Hayward who noted that Australia has had the two-party system for over 100 years and that Australians have grown increasingly disappointed with it during this time.

Alison Xamon, having taken time

off during her hectic parliamentary schedule to address the forum, spoke about the ascendancy of the Greens. "It is not a one-off but a growing phenomenon in Australian politics and the federal result is a reflection of what happened in the WA state election in 2008."

Since the election the corporate media and especially the Murdoch flagship, *The Australian*, have increased their vitriol against the Greens. They could barely contain themselves when the last of the two Independents sided with Prime Minister Julia Gillard to give her the minority government. "If you listened to the media you would think that the world is about to end," continued Xamon. *The Australian* (09-09-2010) had accused Greens' Senator Bob Brown and his colleagues of hypocrisy over their defeat of the emissions trading scheme; that they are bad for the nation; and that they should be destroyed at the ballot box.

The previous day their most senior writer Paul Kelly said of the election outcome: "This is a recipe for legislative gridlock and timid policy". At *Time* magazine, in an article on the election outcome, guest writer John Lee from the right-wing think tank, the Centre for Independent Studies (Sydney) wrote that this has been the first election since the 1970s to not offer a credible foreign policy vision - signalling a retreat to a "fortress Australia" mentality. There was no mention of the Greens' solid electoral performance.

It would appear that what irritates capital and its clarions is that they do not like challenges to their business as usual which is what Kevin Rudd's

Mining Resources Tax was and which now an ALP minority government with three Independents and a Greens member represents.

Xamon queried why the media are not also asking other groups in our society, including NGOs (Non Government Organisations), public servants, unions and community groups, as Australia is made up of more than just mining companies.

Sanna Andrew, who stood in the seat of Fremantle for the Socialist Alliance, noted that "The major parties ran an ugly campaign towards the right in a bidding war to see who had the most conservative policies."

Andrew believed that the Greens in Australia should continue to exist on the left of the political spectrum as experience had shown that overseas when the Greens went to the centre or to the right they had a tendency to be co-opted by capital and subsequently suffer losses electorally.

The world needed to overcome the dual crises – climate and financial – if living standards for the majority of humanity were to be improved or even maintained.

Vinicio Molina, in his opening remarks, said "Parliament had become a 'closed shop' and this election had been a challenge that would help to break the two-party system."

However, parliament was not the only strategy through which this could be achieved. In the current system of government changes have often occurred through the action of "faceless men" to remove or swap leaders such as the manoeuvres to oust Kevin Rudd and install Julia Gillard.

Last year in Honduras, President Manuel Zelaya experienced a similar



Greens Legislative Council member Alison Xamon

coup by "faceless men" – the business elite of the country together with covert intelligence and military forces from the US – reminiscent of the events which ousted Salvador Allende from power in Chile on September 11, 1973.

Meanwhile, in Australia, the capitalist interests have felt threatened by the ascendancy of the Greens and are worried – especially when the

Greens gain the balance of power in the Senate that their gravy train will come to an end.

However, concluded Molina, "We have a window of opportunity ahead of us to bring about change for the Australian people."

Two further Politics in the Pub are planned for October and November on the themes of health and industrial relations respectively. ✪

Sydney

A victory for all humanity!
Vietnam 1965-75

Seminar – Poster exhibition – Film festival

Sydney Sat September 25, 1pm

Suite 72/65 Myrtle St, Chippendale (opposite Peace Park, cnr Buckland St)

2010 is an important anniversary year for many events in Vietnam's history:

- the 35th anniversary of Vietnam's final liberation and reunification;
- the 65th anniversary of Vietnamese independence
- the 80th anniversary of the Indochinese Communist Party
- the 45th anniversary of the first demonstrations against the war
- the 40th anniversary of the big Moratorium demonstrations

Panel discussions on: Vietnam's long struggle for liberation; The Australian campaign against the war in Vietnam; Vietnam Today – Reconstruction and Solidarity.

Speakers: Vu Hong Nam, Vietnamese Consul General
Sylvia Hale, Greens MP in the NSW Upper House
Warren Smith, Assistant national secretary MUA, CPA (tbc)
Jack Munday, former BLF leader, Green Bans activist
John Percy, RSP national secretary
Hamish Chitts, RSP, Standfast
Doug Lorimer, RSP, editor Direct Action
Bob Gould, Founder of Vietnam Action Campaign
Harry Black, CPA, former wharfie involved in stopping the *Jeparit*

The poster exhibition includes 80 posters from the antiwar campaign, mostly Sydney demo posters, and about 40 reprints of Vietnamese posters, as well as badges, pamphlets, books and magazines.

In the evening of the seminar there'll be dinner, followed by a film night, *In the Year of the Pig*, the anti-war film by Emile Di Antonio which we screened extensively in Australia in 1970 and 1971, and the 1978 documentary by John Pilger, *Do You Remember Vietnam*.

Sponsored by the Revolutionary Socialist Party and Direct Action.

More info: 02 9310 5608 0419 989 720. Cost: \$10, \$6 for seminar, meal, films

Curious about Cuba?

Are you interested in:

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- food security?
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Be more than a tourist:

Join the Australia-New Zealand Brigade to Cuba!

The brigade runs 27 December 2010 - 20 January 2011 and costs \$1000*.

Find out more and register your interest now!

www.cubabrigade.org.au

Perth



Politics in the Pub

Speakers:

Carolyn Smith, LHMU
Katherine Edyvane, ACFS
Mark Hayward, CPA

Privatising your health! Who wins?

Carlton Hotel
248 Hay Street Perth
6:00 - 8:00pm Thursday October 14

More info: 0419 812 872 or perth@cpa.org.au
Organised by the CPA - Perth Branch

New economic measures in Cuba

Statement by the Cuban Federation of Workers

The economic crisis has affected all economies around the world and Cuba is no exception. Despite the seriousness of the crisis and the ongoing illegal US blockade of Cuba, the socialist state protected workers better than their counterparts in capitalist economies. The government has announced a number of important measures to deal with the current situation and deepen the construction of socialism on a more efficient basis. These have been mis-reported in the mass media as signalling the failure of and even abandonment of socialism by Communist Party leaders and the Cuban government. Nothing could be further from the truth. The following is a statement* by the National Secretariat of the Cuban Federation of Workers (CTC) to Cuban workers explaining the new measures:

Cuba has demonstrated that socialism continues to be the way forward for workers and the environment.

Today, more than ever, the support for the leadership of our people, the will and the determination to continue the construction of socialism are alive and implacable.

Workers:

The Cuban Revolution has 52 years of victorious existence, and today more than ever, the willingness and determination to continue the construction of socialism, to advance and update the economic model we must follow, continues to be alive and unshakeable in the direction of the Nation and in our people, consolidating the gains achieved.

The leadership of the government has been working on a set of measures that guarantee and implement changes that are necessary and urgently need to be introduced into the economy and society, a means to transform and improve the efficiency of current productive and labour processes.

Cuba faces the urgent need to move forward economically, to better organise production, to enhance productivity and raise reserves, to improve discipline and efficiency. This will only be possible through the dignified and dedicated

work of our people. Today, the duty of the Cuban people is to work and do it well, with seriousness and responsibility, to make better use of available resources to satisfy our needs.

As a result of the process of updating the economic model and projections of the economy for the period 2011-2015, it is foreseen in the Guidelines for next year the reduction of more than 500,000 workers in the state sector and a parallel increase in the non-state sector. The timetable for the implementation by government organisations and businesses is the first trimester of 2011.

For the union movement and workers it is an unavoidable task to pay the utmost attention to downsizing, to the process of labour and employment availability, and to ensure the adequate utilisation of human resources. It is known that the excess of places exceeds one million people in the budget and business sectors.

Our state cannot nor should it continue to maintain businesses, productive organisations and services with over inflated staff budgets, resulting in losses that weigh down the economy. They turn out to be counterproductive, generate bad habits and deform the conduct of workers. It is necessary to increase production and quality of services, reduce inflated social spending and eliminate bulky improper gratuities, excessive subsidies and study as a source of employment and early retirement.

The success of the process initiated now depends on the political assurance of the union movement under the leadership of the Party; union leaders prior to undertaking actions will obtain social consensus on the economic and political relevance of this step. These measures seek to identify labour availability and the places that are not necessary and to relocate this labour into jobs where it is necessary and possible or to reorientate those workers.

For those workers in an establishment or workplace that become surplus, the intention is to expand and diversify the present horizon of options with new forms of non-state employment as an alternative; these include leasing, usufruct**, cooperatives and self-employment,

where hundreds of thousands of workers will move in the coming years.

With the state sector it will only be possible to staff those places that are indispensable, in areas where historically there has been a deficit of labour such as agriculture, construction, teaching, police, industrial workers and others.

The country has been running major investment processes in a number of sectors; the petroleum, construction, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals and tourism and at the same time developing other areas of production of goods, and the expansion of services which will generate new sources of employment.

These changes in employment policy will be applied in a gradual and progressive form. They will be started immediately and due to their scale and incidence will span all sectors.

This whole process will be applied on new foundations and norms and will modify the current labour and wage system of those who are surplus and disrupted. It will not be possible to apply the current formula of protecting or subsidising the salary of the workers indefinitely. In the identification, relocation and deployment to other jobs, the activity and personal willingness of those affected will play a very important role. The selection of those who will occupy the available positions in each working collective will be carried out on the principle of demonstrated suitability.

A matter of singular importance is salary. It is necessary to revitalise the principle of socialist distribution; to pay each according to the quantity and quality of work carried out. The system of remuneration for results, applied in workplaces with staff arranged more efficiently, will continue to be the way to lift productivity and, as a result of that, the income of the workers.

Facilitation of the trade union organisation at every level of leadership will contribute to the fulfilment of this policy to guarantee the continuity of the construction of Cuban socialism, applying the concept of Revolution and from the beginning of this historical moment changing all which needs to be changed.



The CTC and the trade unions are committed and will be vigilant with the most strict observance and application of the principle of demonstrated suitability in determining the right to occupy a particular job, as well as ensuring transparency in the way it is carried out.

It is the responsibility of the trade union to act in its sector with a high level of demand and maintain systematic control of the pace of this process, from beginning to end, adopting the necessary measures and keeping higher bodies of the CTC informed.

The unity of the Cuban workers and our people has been the key to realising the gigantic

Colombian political prisoner in fifth week of hunger strike

An appeal for support from the Alliance for Global Justice

At the time of writing, Felix Roberto Sanabria had been on hunger strike for a month amid the squalid conditions of La Tramacua Penitentiary. La Tramacua is the first prison built under a US designed program to restructure Colombia's prison system and increase its capacity by 40 percent. The Alliance for Global Justice (AFGJ) has just received an urgent alert from our partners in Colombia, Traspasa Los Muros, saying Sanabria is in dangerously bad health, having lost over 28 pounds in a hunger strike that began under already harsh conditions. He has also received multiple death threats.

Sanabria has two demands:

1) That La Tramacua's political prisoners be separated from the general prison population, where they are being preyed upon by paramilitary prisoner gangs that are armed by and allied with prison guards;

2) That he be transferred immediately to La Dorada Penitentiary in Ibague because of the numerous death threats he has received.

La Tramacua was designed and funded by USAID and the US Bureau of Prisons. Beatings and torture are common, meals have been documented to be rotten and contain faecal contaminants, and prisoners are allowed access to running water only 10 minutes a day on average.

According to our Colombian partners, Traspasa Los Muros - Beyond the Walls, there are over 7,500 political prisoners in Colombia.

Political prisoners are defined as: prisoners of conscience; prisoners arrested on the basis of frame-ups and paid testimony; and prisoners of war who are members of groups involved in armed struggle. Prisoners of war are included among the political prisoners because at the root of this struggle is a political and economic cause that can only be adequately solved by a political, not military, solution.

Some 6,500-7,000 of the political prisoners are unionists, students, members of opposition parties, journalists, citizens of rural, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, and other segments of non-violent resistance.

An estimated 500 prisoners are captured combatants from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and an unknown number are from the Army of National Liberation (ELN) and other armed movements. Hunger striker, Felix Roberto Sanabria is a prisoner of war and has been in jail since his capture in 2000.

Inhuman conditions

The following is from a report from the political prisoners of La Tramacua's Tower Five that gives some idea of the prison's conditions:

"The food service system is one of total indignity, as is publicly known in this graveyard of liberties called Tramacua, as is demanded and oriented by the US Federal Bureau of Prisons, whose doctrine orders the quantity and quality of the food. Only the basic minimum is permitted in order to survive and not die from physical hunger because, according to them, here there are only terrorists and the anti-social.... For this they add the contamination of foods with faecal material, as was proven with laboratory studies recently realised by the Health Ministry of Valledupar, a situation that has been repeatedly denounced by the prisoners' Committee for Human Rights.

"Also, it is a constant that the food supplies may be in a state of decomposition - meat with worms, poorly cooked, raw or rotten, and including that on the tablecloth can be seen to swim larva and worms that are submerged in the receptacles the prisoner must use to drink and eat for physical hunger and thirst without having eaten and thus avoiding that he might protest....

"For such reasons, 70 percent of the population remains sick, with severe illnesses of the stomach - constant diarrhoea and vomiting, gastric ulcers, headaches and all kinds of gastrointestinal diseases...." ✖

WHAT TO DO:

Copy the sample letter, or write your own, and send to US and Colombian authorities:

To contact Colombia's Ministry of Interior and Justice, INPEC, General Prosecutor, and National Public Defender, please use the following email addresses:

sgeneral@mij.gov.co
atencionalciudadano@mij.gov.co
reclamos@inpec.gov.co
webmaster@inpec.gov.co
cap@procuraduria.gov.co
quejas@procuraduria.gov.co
webmaster@procuraduria.gov.co
secretaria_privada@hotmail.com
agenda@agenda.gov.co

Readers are also asked to download, sign and circulate AFGJ's petition demanding better conditions at La Tramacua. Send the filled out to petition to the address at the bottom of the form or to AFGJ/Tramacua Campaign, PO Box 2815, Tucson, AZ 85702, USA.

The petition is available from www.afgj.org

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CD review by Wally Brooker

Leon Rosselson sings for Palestine



Leon Rosselson.

task of building the Revolution and in these transformations that we are now undertaking it will continue to be our most important strategic weapon.

** Typically the government makes available land, a building or means of production for use without charging rent. The person keeps all the benefits of his/her work. The government can take it back if it is not used or if the government needs it.

* Unofficial translation from the original in Spanish by Guardian staff. ✪

unger strike

g to express my concern for Felix Roberto Sanabria, a prisoner engaged in a hunger strike against the inhumane conditions in La Tramacúa Prison in Valledupar, Colombia. Sanabria has been subjected to death threats and abuse. I demand:

Sanabria's political prisoners be released from the general prison where they are subject to abuse by paramilitary gangs;

Sanabria be moved to La Dorada Prison in Ibagué since his safety is compromised due to the many threats to his life at La Tramacúa.

you use your influence to ensure these demands are met and that Sanabria is improved at La Tramacúa.

The Last Chance: Eight Songs on Israel/Palestine, a new compilation CD from Leon Rosselson, is a powerful personal statement from a distinguished British folksinger who continues to be one of the finest progressive songwriters working in the English language. Rosselson's songs draw from a deep well of musical traditions: English music hall, labour anthems, French realist song, Jewish folk and European classical. His great accomplishment is his consistent ability to integrate his fine melodies with acutely observant lyrics and wordplay.

Rosselson, now 75, comes from a Communist Party background. Once a member of a socialist-Zionist youth movement, today he's an active supporter of the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign against Israel. In the revealing notes accompanying this CD, he describes spending a year in Israel at the end of the 1950s "where the word 'Palestine' was never mentioned" and admits that he has "argued the rights and wrongs on both sides" over the years.

Now he acknowledges that critics of the 1993 Oslo Accords were right. Israel's goal for Palestine, he writes, is "a patchwork of disconnected Bantustans." In his personal view, a two-state solution is now "almost impossible to envision."

Leon Rosselson is the composer of *The World Turned Upside Down*, a much-covered song about the Diggers, the agrarian communists who represented the left-wing of England's bourgeois revolution in the mid-17th century. His topical and satirical songs first gained notice on the influential BBC TV show *That Was the Week That Was* in the early '60s. Since then he has released some 20 albums and written 17 children's books. Storytelling is, indeed, a strong feature of Rosselson's art.

The *Song of Martin Fontasch* tells the tale of a folksinging Jewish partisan during World War II who manages to convince his German captor to let him write one last song before he is shot. Adapted from a story by the Jewish-Italian writer Primo Levi, this effective opening track links Jewish resistance to the genocidal

Hitler regime with the contemporary Palestinian liberation struggle.

The connection is suggested by the use of contrasting musical forms. The verses narrating the grim story of the Jewish partisan and his German captor are sung in march time while the chorus breaks out into a yearning waltz of freedom:

This song is for those who are cast out by history

The banned and abandoned, the spurned and ignored

Whose homes have been taken, whose dreams have been broken

Who huddled on hillsides, demand to be heard.

Palestine is not named, but if anyone hasn't yet got the analogy, Rosselson drives it home in the last verse:

Then let not our sufferings turn our souls to ice

So that we do to strangers what was done to us.

Rosselson's *Song of the Olive Tree*, convincingly performed here by English folksinger Janet Russell, is a song of classical simplicity. Its melody alternates between minor and major tonalities as it contrasts the destruction and theft of Palestinian olive trees by the occupying regime with the deep inter-generational meanings that they hold for the Palestinians:

The settlers came, they beat us black and blue.

They said, Next time we shoot you. Understand?

But still we dared to come, we had no choice
We came at night like thieves to our own land.

The most unusual track on the album is *The Last Chance*, narrated and sung by Rosselson, who accompanies himself on the piano. It's set in the late '50s in a nightclub in Beersheva, a city on the edge of the Negev desert in southern Israel. The protagonists, Meier and Sam, engage in an increasingly acrimonious debate. Meier, a butcher and holocaust survivor, espouses militant Zionism and despises not only Arabs,

but also "donkey riding Yemenis" and other non-European Jews.

The mournful, pacifist-leaning dancer Sam mischievously questions the newly victorious ideology. Their debate climaxes when, in a fit of rage, Meier flings a stone in the dancing Sam's direction. In response Sam puts his arms around his head and says, "I want to go home." Elegiac in its tone, *The Last Chance* appears to be a metaphor for the broken dream of an exclusive Jewish state in Palestine:

They came from nowhere
The lost, the broken, and the mad
They blundered in like blind invaders

There's not a weak track on the album, but in the interests of brevity I shall restrict myself to brief comments on two other songs.

They Said examines the guilt and denial surrounding the notorious massacre of Palestinians in the village of Deir Yassin in April 1948, an atrocity that many historians believe precipitated the flight of 750,000 Palestinians from their homeland called the Nakbah. Rosselson sang this song in 2005 at a commemorative meeting near the site where Deir Yassin had once stood, organised by a group of Israelis called Zochrot (Remembrance).

Yafa! (Jaffa!) introduces Palestinian singer Reem Kelani. She performs the only non-Rosselson piece on the album. It's a keening qasidah (vocal improvisation) based on an Arabic poem by the Jaffa-born Palestinian writer Mahmoud Salim al-Hout (1917-1998) who was driven into exile in 1948 and lost all of his manuscripts in the process. The anguish of the uprooted poet is powerfully conveyed and transcends language.

This album is highly recommended. It can be ordered directly from the artist (with PayPal) at www.leonrosselson.co.uk or from www.fourdogsmusic.co.uk. They're your best bet if you want the hard copy with Rosselson's notes. If you're satisfied with just the music it can be downloaded from iTunes.

Profits from the sale of *The Last Chance: Eight Songs on Israel/Palestine* will go to Medical Aid for Palestinians (www.map.org.uk). *People's Voice* ✪

Immigrant bashing in France

Emile Schepers

What do France's right-wing President Nicolas Sarkozy and Arizona's Republican governor Janet Brewer have in common? They both think they have found a "novel" solution to falling poll numbers: Go after the dark skinned outsiders.

In Sarkozy's case, his government is battling corruption scandals that sharply reduced his polling numbers. The next election is not until 2012, but Sarkozy and his right-wing UMP (Union for a Popular Mobilisation) party are taking no chances.

Sarkozy is the son of a Hungarian nobleman whose estates were confiscated under socialism and a woman whose originally Sephardic family came from Thessaloniki, Greece. He associates himself with a French right-wing which, since the Dreyfus scandal of a century ago, has been notably prone to extreme cultural nationalism and disdain for foreign influences. For demagogic electoral purposes, he seems to want to project himself as the most French of all.

Sarkozy has distinguished himself by his insulting statements about youth of African and Middle Eastern origin. Starting in July, he went after a new target: Itinerant foreign born Roma people (sometimes still called Gypsies).

Today, there are between a half million and a million and a half Roma in France, most of them settled down. But a minority still travels around in caravans and lives on the margins. These include a few thousand who moved to France from Eastern Europe after the collapse of socialism.

It would not be honest to say that the Roma had no grievances under the socialist governments. But after the collapse, virulent anti-Roma prejudices gained ground, leading to violent attacks. This has led to emigration, which in turn has been met with bigotry in West European countries such as France. These more visibly foreign Roma, who for want of other possibilities end up living in shabby illegal camps, are frequently scape-goated by local political demagogues.

On July 28, after a couple of incidents between police and Roma, Sarkozy and his Minister of the Interior Brice Hortefeux began a series of raids on Roma camps, continuing, with more fanfare, an existing policy of eliminating illegal camps and rounding up foreign born Roma for deportation. So far this year 8,313 Roma have been deported, mainly to Romania and Bulgaria.

Sarkozy may be violating the rules of the European Union on the right of people of one Union country to travel to another, and Roma deported under this program can probably simply and legally return to France. This raises suspicions that all this is being done for the TV cameras.

Sarkozy has now upped the ante by threatening to institute a policy whereby the French born children of immigrants may be stripped of their citizenship if they commit serious crimes. This too will be difficult to implement, but if the purpose is to consolidate the nationalistic and populist Right behind Sarkozy and the UMP, it does not matter.

In the US, Republican politicians are doing the same with the plan to strip US born children of undocumented immigrants of their



citizenship. That is probably not going to happen either, but it plays well with the base.

The Romanian and Bulgarian governments have objected. To the Romanians, France pointed out correctly that their recent governments have done little to provide for their own large and needy Roma populations, according to an article by Steve Castle in the *New York Times*.

The European Commission is investigating the matter.

Within France, the crudity of the Sarkozy-Hortefeux policy led

to protests by the Roman Catholic Church, civil and immigrants' rights organisations, most of the Left and even some people in Sarkozy's own government.

The French Communist Party (PCF) denounced Sarkozy's anti-Roma campaign.

"The Roma are European citizens since 2007. These are rights which have to be respected.... Their sanitary and social situation can't be regularised by means of a 'coup' of spectacular expulsions, of dismantling of camps for the benefit of the evening TV news programs.

These practices [belonging to] another era have to stop.

"The situation of the Roma is well known. Chased from town to town, from country to country, they are weakened, made vulnerable, and ... the target of all sorts of trafficking. The degree of civilisation of a society is measured by its treatment of its weakest members." The statement calls for France and Europe to stop this mistreatment, and to provide Roma, rather, with the means to become settled with full access to all rights and services. *People's World* ☺

European unions set to march for "Robin Hood taxes"

Scott Marshall

Next in the "rising tide of world labour protest" file comes the September 29 labour actions in Europe. Unions and supporters all over Europe are calling for action against planned austerity measures by their governments – everything from wage and pension cuts to mass layoffs in social services. Labour organisers throughout Europe will be joined in rallies and demonstrations by retirees and students.

A massive labour-led march in Brussels, the capital of the European Union, will be a centre-piece of the action. Organisers are expecting upwards of 100,000 demonstrators from around the continent. Participating union federations in Spain, Portugal, Britain, Ireland, Lithuania, France, Greece, Germany, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Italy, Serbia, Latvia, and Poland have protests planned for

the day. The actions range from a general strike in Spain, to several industry-wide strikes in Portugal and several other countries to rallies and demonstrations.

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) General Secretary Sharan Burrow [former ACTU president] is calling on the demonstrators to demand "Robin Hood taxes" to pay for the economic crisis and put people back to work. These include stock transaction taxes and others aimed at raising taxes on big business and the super rich. The ITUC is one of the chief organisers of the September 29 actions.

The September 29 actions come on the heels of some pretty big anti-austerity actions in the past few weeks, including major strike actions in Britain and France. In addition, on September 7, World Federation of Trade Union (WTU) affiliates around the world held similar actions in 20 countries,

including in Europe, Asia, South America and the Middle East.

These global actions come as labour, civil rights, immigrant rights, peace and others are mobilising in the United States for the October 2, One Nation march on Washington for jobs. October 2, besides being a critical action for jobs and economic justice, will also be one of the largest 2010 election rallies.

As buses, trains and cars arrive in DC, hundreds of thousands more will be joining labour walks, phone banks and local rallies around the country. The October 2 mobilisations for jobs will also energise and organise hundreds of thousands to get out and vote on November 2.

All of these actions call for more communication, exchange and contact between labour and progressives globally. Workers of the world are fuelling a rising tide of anger and fight back! ☺

No more house demolitions!

Stop the offensive against the Arab population!

Statement of the Israeli Communist Forum

The Israeli Communist Forum condemns the systematic and cruel demolition of houses in the Bedouin village of Al-Arakib. These homes have been brutally destroyed again and again in recent months, after being rebuilt by its residents. The demolitions leave hundreds of villagers homeless, including many children, denying them the most elementary living conditions.

This brutal destruction of houses is part of a campaign waged against the Arab population in the Negev and its so-called "unrecognised villages", itself part of an overall offensive against the Arab population in Israel, in all its parts - in the Negev, the Galilee, the Triangle [a concentration of Arab towns in the Umm al-Fahm-Baqa al-Gharbiyye-Tira area], and the mixed cities. Recently we witnessed house demolitions at Umm al Fahem and other localities in the Wadi Ara region, as well as increased harassment of the Arab populations in Jaffa and in Ramle-Lod area.

Increasingly, we hear calls for "transferring" parts of the Arab

population in Israel, particularly in the Triangle, so as to overcome the so-called "demographic threat".

At the same time, there is an ongoing campaign aimed at excluding from the political arena the Arab population's representatives. There is an increasing incitement against Arab MKs [members of the Knesset - Israeli parliament], one of whose new highlights is the campaign against MK Hanin Zuabi (Balad) and the Knesset's decision to revoke some of her parliamentary privileges. We condemn this campaign and demand that all such Knesset resolutions be overturned. We call for an end to the politically-motivated judicial process conducted against the Hadash [The Democratic Front for Peace and Equality] Chair MK Muhammad Barake, and to all other judicial acts against the Arab elected representatives.

We call for unity of action, both among the Arab population and among the Jewish supporters of democracy, peace and equality, so as to effectively confront these and other manifestations of fascist and racist schemes. ☺

Adelaide

PHOTOGRAPHIC ART EXHIBITION – THE DIGNITY OF LABOUR

Photographs by Wolfgang Sievers (1913 - 2007)

September 25 - October 11

Weekdays: 9am - 5pm Weekends: 2 - 5pm

Kerry Packer Civic Gallery Level 3, Hawke Building Uni of SA 50 - 55 North Tce Adelaide

Presented by the Graham F Smith Peace Trust

Sievers was a passionate campaigner for human rights.

Opening of the exhibition by Greg Mackie Sunday 26 September 3.30pm

Phone: 08 8267 3915 Email: info@peacetrust.org artspeacetrust.org/exhibition

Why vote for the communist slate in Venezuela?

Crucial parliamentary elections are coming up in Venezuela on September 26. The Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV – United Socialist Party of Venezuela), the ruling party led by Chávez, is expected to win once again, but the outcome could be tighter than previous elections. The opposition forces have managed to regroup into one “grand coalition” which includes even some nominally “left” and previously pro-Chávez forces.

There is also an intensified disinformation and slander campaign by the bourgeois media, both domestic and international. According to a study by the National Electoral Council, 75.4 percent of televised campaign advertisements have been pro-opposition, and 24.6 percent have been pro-government since the race

for 165 seats in Venezuela’s National Assembly officially began.

The Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV) has reached an electoral agreement with the PSUV, and is endorsing the pro-Chávez slate in its entirety. This agreement is different from the previous set of elections, when the PCV supported most of the PSUV candidates, but ran three or four PCV candidates in specific areas where the PSUV candidates were considered either corrupt or “closet” counter-revolutionaries.

The PCV is campaigning hard to get voters to support the PCV “slate”, which is identical to the PSUV slate. The PCV’s reasoning is laid out in the following article by Alejandro Ruiz, translated from the Spanish original (Venezuela Cantaclaro, 10-09-2010):

For the first time in its nearly 80-year history, the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV) has a prominent place on the ballot: top left, next to the majority United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). The place, once reserved for the bourgeois parties AD, Copei and the reformist MAS, is now reserved for the forces of the Bolivarian Revolution, and this is no small thing in political-electoral struggle.

Thanks to the alliance between socialists and communists for the upcoming elections on September 26, all candidates of the PSUV are those of the PCV in the nomination lists in all states. So why vote for the Communists? Is it not the same as voting PSUV?

Electoral speaking it is the same, but every vote for the PCV will have a distinct quality in the battle to deepen the revolution, to fight the counter-revolutionary and reformist tendencies.

This reason would be enough to vote for the Communists. But there are other reasons as well. Every vote for the PCV would be a recognition of its consequential history, since its founding in 1931, in the fight for socialism and its loyalty to Commander Chávez since his presidential candidacy in February 1998.

While some who claimed they were loyal to President Chávez have since betrayed the Revolution and

deserted to the ranks of the opposition and imperialism, the leaders and militants of PCV have remained consistent over the 11 years of this revolutionary government.

Each ballot marked “PCV” is a vote against the renegades of the past and against the traitors of today with their theories of “democratic socialism”, who have now joined with the most reactionary forces in intemperate attacks against Chávez and the Revolution.

Every vote for the Communists is also a vote for honest and constructive criticism of revolutionary failures and errors in the development of governance.

In addition, each vote for the PCV is a vote in support of proposed revolutionary laws which help to transform the social relations of production and to build the hegemony of the socialist alternative to the current capitalist reality, such as the Law of the Social Councils of Workers, permitting the working class to exercise control in existing public and private companies.

Your vote for the PCV will support those who have strongly promoted the passage of the New Organic Labour Act in the National Assembly and in the streets - a law which will establish general and absolute job security, the reduction of the working day, retroactive increases for pre- and postnatal care and other social benefits.

A vote for the PCV is also a vote for its proposal to nationalise and socialise the entire banking and financial system of the country, with mechanisms for the participation of workers in the control of management. And to root out those corrupt financial elements who victimise their customers, and profiteer from our country’s oil revenues.

And finally, a vote for the Communists will strengthen the international movement that has been most engaged in defence of the Bolivarian Revolution around the world. While so-called “socialist” parties on various continents and the Socialist International (social democrats – Ed) itself are uniting with the right to attack Chávez and his government, the communist parties everywhere – in Europe, Asia, North America, South America, Africa and Oceania – are fervent defenders of the Bolivarian Revolution.

Each vote for the PCV will be like a stone in the teeth of the anti-communist campaign of the Cardinal and the bourgeoisie. It will be like a stone in the teeth of the liars of *Globovision*, the newspaper *El Nacional* and other private media. Every vote for the Communists will be a missile to the heart of imperialism and its lackeys. And the more the votes, the more the enemies of our Revolution will tremble in fear.

People’s Voice ☼



The PCV – Communist Party of Venezuela.



Global Briefs

UNITED STATES: The US is urging Arab States to withdraw a resolution from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that calls on Israel to sign an anti-nuclear arms treaty. The US says this could “harm” Middle East peace talks. Arab countries and Iran are seeking to build on a victory at last year’s IAEA assembly meeting where a non-binding resolution passed calling on Israel to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Israel has never confirmed or denied having atom bombs but has said that “full” Middle East peace is a condition for it to join the NPT.

INDIA: US President Barack Obama hopes to sign a deal for US\$5 billion worth of arms sales to India during a visit to New Delhi in November and have the US replace Russia as India’s largest arms supplier. The deal includes Patriot defence systems, Boeing mid-air refuelling tankers and certain types of howitzers. Wang Mingzhi, a military strategist from China’s People’s Liberation Army Air Force Command College said the arms sales will strengthen ties between Washington and New Delhi. “[They] will have the effect of containing China’s influence in the region. For example, once India gets the C-17 transport aircraft, the mobility of its forces stationed along the border with China will be improved. Mobility includes transportation, lifting, landing and deployment,” Wang told the *Global Times*.

IRAQ: The *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* on September 8 published a study based on family interviews demonstrating five years of increased cancer and infant mortality rates and altered gender patterns at birth. Infant mortality appears to have spiked to 80 first-year deaths per 1,000 births – 136 deaths in 2009 – a fourfold hike over rates in Jordan and Egypt. “Alarming [cancer] rates” are “significantly higher for all malignancy [especially] leukemia, lymphoma, brain tumours and female breast cancer.” The UK investigators suggest “some mutagenic agent at some time in the past.” They ask: “Could this have been around 2004 when the fighting occurred?” See full report at MDPI – Open Access Publishing (www.mdpi.com).

UNITED KINGDOM: Three days before its annual assembly on September 13, the Trade Union Congress reported the loss of 1,351,000 private sector jobs since early 2008 when jobs peaked at 31 million and the recession began. At the same time ten percent of public sector jobs are now on the chopping block. The mining and quarrying sector lost 15 percent of its workers; the manufacturing sector 12 percent; construction 11 percent; and retail seven percent. Quoted in the British *Guardian*, TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said, “[Government] spending cuts will condemn us to high unemployment for the foreseeable future.” (See full TUC report at www.tuc.org.uk).

JAPAN: Anti-US base forces won a majority in Nago municipal elections on September 12 in the Okinawa Prefecture. Japanese Communist Party candidate Gushiken Toru and 15 other candidates opposing the construction of a new US base in the city’s Henoko district won the majority of seats.

Call to Women around the World

From National Secretariat – Federation of Cuban Women

Sisters:
At a time when, once again, humanity faces the danger of a nuclear war, we must join ourselves in defence of life. That is why, the Federation of Cuban Women, calls all women and men of good will, to add to the claim of over four million Cuban women, who together with its people, demand the freedom of five of its compatriots unjustly imprisoned in The United States.

This September 12, Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Lavañino, Fernando Gonzalez, Antonio Guerrero, and Rene Gonzales have

spent 12 years in cruel confinement. The long period of this injustice, is not only intended to punish the five anti-terrorist fighters, but also their families, particularly Olga Salanueva and Adriana Perez, whose right of visiting their husbands has been denied.

A wall of silence has been raised by the big media transnationals so that this truth be unknown. But as José Martí said, “one just principle from the depths of a cave, is stronger than an army”.

Let us raise our voices to demand of the US government the immediate release of these men,

whose courage and exceptional ethical dimension, are recognised today by personalities from the whole world.

Women, life-deliverers, appreciate the value of the family and know the power of solidarity. Let’s join in all actions that contribute to publicize this case and put pressure on the US public and its authorities.

Sisters of the world, we count on you so that our five sons, who we consider heroes, true representatives of a people, that love freedom and peace return home.

End to injustice, free them now! ☼

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



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

Build communities not prisons

The *West Australian* newspaper (16-08-2010, p.15) reports the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services on June 6, 2010, described to a Parliamentary Inquiry in prisoner education, training and employment strategies that there is overcrowding and under staffing in WA women's jails. The Director of Operations at Custodial Services described that the "good grace" of prisoners was the major mitigating factor in keeping prisons safe during periods where it appears that overcrowding is leading to the brink of crises.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Institute of Criminology incarceration is not only rising in terms of total numbers but also in terms of proportion to populations, state and nationally.

I would like to suggest that the only solution is not in building more prisons but rather in additional funding to go towards expanding educational and training facilities in juvenile detention centres, adult remand and prison centres.

Wherever in the world this investment in education and people's positive advancement has occurred re-offending rates have dramatically diminished. Wherever prisoners have received the opportunity to complete an education or skills training while in jail, they have demonstrated the

obvious less likelihood of re-offending. Therefore we have evidence-based solutions right in front of us.

Australian prisons do not have sufficient diverse education and skills training facilities, vocational guidance, rehabilitation and professional counselling services. The existing facilities and services are not equal to the prison population. It costs the State \$100,000 per year for each prisoner when the majority of these funds would be better spent in real educational facilities for prisoners and in referral and support services, for those who could be asked by the criminal justice system to commit to them, rather than serve time in prisons where for the most part they are hardened up for a life of knocks, high risk crime, the endangering of community, their essential poverty, lack of self worth, self loathing and the prospect of the steely echo of the door of prison life.

In WA the government has budgeted more than \$600 million to be spent on increasing the prison population during the next four years. More prisons are being planned, and 2,300 prison beds are to be added. Could we not invest these funds in building communities rather than prisons, in reinvesting in justice through comprehensive educational facilities, in acquiring job skills, acquiring high level literacy, in providing tertiary level qualification opportunities and in providing at all times psychosocial counselling and mentoring? Wouldn't we all be the better off for this, and unfold a more civil and just society?

Gerry Georgatos
Harrisdale, WA

Bigotry on the rise

With the anniversary of 9/11 we had the usual upsurge of bigotry and war mongering. There was the idiot in America who wanted to burn copies of the Koran. Someone should tell him about that bloke in Germany who had books burnt in

the 1930s and who started World War II.

At home the chief of our military has urged us not to quit the war on terror. What war on terror?

To top it off, the Rev Fred Nile has had the hide to try to ban women from wearing the Burqa. He obviously doesn't know that Islam believes in the same God that he does and that it recognises Jesus as a Prophet.

As far as the Burqa is concerned, quite apart from any religious consideration, in a country like Australia that has one of the highest incidence of skin cancer in the world, the Burqa is a very intelligent mode of dress. If there was an equivalent of the Burqa for blokes, I'd wear one myself.

Ron Barrett
Mt Druitt, NSW

Open letter to PM Julia Gillard

On behalf of the Australia West Papua Association (AWPA), I am writing to you concerning the recent media reports about the torture of activists in Maluku by members of the Indonesian counter-terrorism unit Detachment 88. Detachment 88 also operates in West Papua where they have also been accused of human rights abuses. In December 2009 the West Papuan leader Kelly Kwalik who was of great symbolic importance to the West Papuan people was killed by the Indonesian security forces which included members of Detachment 88.

We will not go into great detail of the human rights abuses committed by this unit and that of the other Indonesian Special Forces unit, Kopassus. These human rights abuses have been documented in numerous reports and the activities of the Indonesian security forces are well known to the Australian people from their past history in East Timor,

Sydney

Concert for Miners of Chile & Better Mine Safety Campaign

6:30 pm Friday October 29

CFMEU, Level 2, 10 Railway Street, Lidcombe

The Construction Forestry Mining Energy Union has initiated an Appeal with the Chilean community in Sydney to assist the miners in Copiapo, Chile. The Appeal will also assist the campaign for better mine safety. Also it will help the campaign to force the mine owners to pay the entitlements of the 200 plus miners above ground who have been sacked due to the appalling safety at this mine site.

Already \$50,000.00 has been raised and is being sent to the Sindicato No 2 Minera San Esteban "Mina San Jose" and the CUT in Copiapo. \$1,500.00 of this was contributed from officials of the CFMEU in Sydney.

For more information, contact Olive Jinga
02 9749 0414 or ojinga@nsw.cfmeu.asn.au

Aceh and the ongoing abuses in West Papua.

A recent Human Rights Watch report titled "What Did I Do Wrong?" *Papuans in Merauke Face Abuses by Indonesian Special Forces*, documents a number of cases of West Papuans who were tortured by Kopassus troops.

AWPA and other civil society organisations have written regularly to Australian governments over many years about our ties with the Indonesian military. We have raised concerns that any aid or training given to the military would be used against the West Papuan people who are struggling for their right to self-determination.

Many of the NGO submissions to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties (JSCOT) concerning the Lombok treaty, also raised concerns about the past history of the Indonesian military's treatment of civilian populations. Unfortunately these concerns have proven yet again justified in the case of the treatment of activists in West Papua and Maluku.

During the occupation of East Timor by Indonesia, the Australian government appeared to believe that by continuing ties with the Indonesian military that the professionalism of the Australian military would rub off on the Indonesian military. However, this proved to be wishful thinking and a complete failure as was shown by the behaviour of the Indonesian military at the time of the referendum in East Timor.

It is also a failure now. To quote from the Human Rights Watch Report, "The cases in this report illustrate how violence thrives when a culture of impunity persists in the heart of what is supposed to be one of Indonesia's best trained fighting units".

AWPA is urging you to put a moratorium on the training, funding and any ties between the Australian military, Detachment 88 and the special forces unit Kopassus, until a full inquiry is held into the activities of these units in relation to human rights abuses in the archipelago.

Joe Collins
Secretary, AWPA (Sydney)

Culture & Life

by Bill Meyer

Progressive films will shine at Toronto Festival

The Toronto International Film Festival is celebrating its 35th anniversary this month with an exciting array of over 300 films that will provide cinematic treats to film lovers of all tastes.

For those progressive viewers, this year's selections include new titles from some of the world's great progressive filmmakers. France's master of challenging, intelligent cinema, Jean Luc Godard, offers his latest philosophical treatise on world politics and cinema in the enigmatic *Film Socialism*. Already creating controversy for its intentional lack of sufficient English subtitles, the film defines once again the director's ability to raise serious questions about world politics and how art should address the subject.

One of America's most talented progressive filmmakers, John Sayles, has a perfect record of directing valuable and relevant films that have great appeal to the progressive community. From *Matewan* and *Brother From Another Planet*, to *Men With Guns* and *Casa de los Babys*, Sayles has never failed to offer the most penetrating studies and critiques of American foreign policy.

He brings to this festival his latest portrayal of US imperialism. Of course there are many forays to pick from, but here Sayles chooses a lesser-known example – the brutal American occupation of the Philippines in 1900. The film is entitled *Amigo* but in some countries it carries the name *Brother from Another Country*, reflecting his earlier classic with a similar title.

Another world master of progressive cinema, the UK's Ken Loach, is bringing his newest film, *Route Irish*, to the festival. And yes, it's another example of US imperialism and occupation, this time the Iraq war, and is titled after US occupation troops' nickname for what became the world's most dangerous road, in Baghdad. Social realist Loach has covered many political themes in his long, distinguished career, and he will appear at the festival with his long-time screenwriter Paul Laverty, who has collaborated on Loach films, including *Carla's Song*, *Bread and Roses* and *Wind That Shakes the Barley*. Multi-Oscar winner cinematographer Chris Menges (*The Killing Fields*, *The Mission*) continues his long association with Loach also. They shared in the making of two classic working class British dramas, *Kes* and *Poor Cow*, back in the '60s. This film promises to be one of the highlights at the festival for progressive viewers.

The Toronto International Film Festival isn't only about great cinema. Adding to the excitement of having world-class filmmakers in attendance, the festival has scheduled several intriguing panel discussions. In a discussion called Politics and Cinema, Loach and Laverty will be interviewed by the acclaimed filmmaker Michael Moore.

Bruce Springsteen will also be in attendance to be interviewed by actor Edward Norton about music and cinema. A new documentary about the making of Springsteen's pivotal recording of *Darkness on the Edge of Town* will be screened at the festival in conjunction with his appearance on the panel.

Another new documentary and a panel discussion entitled *Waiting for Superman*



A scene from *Route Irish* – titled after US occupation troops' nickname for what became the world's most dangerous road, in Baghdad.

addresses the American crisis in public education and the search for solutions. The film is directed by Davis Guggenheim (*An Inconvenient Truth*) and stars, among others, philanthropist Bill Gates, who will be in attendance for the panel discussion.

Last year the Toronto Festival took on a bit of controversy by choosing the Israeli city of Tel Aviv to feature in its City to City Programme. The brutal attack on Gaza had just occurred and it appeared insensitive if not downright politically inappropriate to honour a country that had just committed a major crime against humanity. But this year Istanbul is the honoured city, and there should be little controversy. And ironically the festival is showing one of the most intense depictions of a city under siege, in *Tears of Gaza*, by Norwegian director Vibeke

Løkkeberg. The powerful documentary utilises raw and shocking unseen footage gathered from Gazan cameras that show why the world was so outraged by the Israeli attack.

There are also at least two other films addressing the tragedies in the Middle East. Julian Schnabel's (*Basquiat*) film *Miral* is a diary of a young Palestinian woman growing up in East Jerusalem. The film stars among others, Willem Defoe and Vanessa Redgrave. *Precious Life* is reminiscent of *Heart of Jenin*, both films showing heartfelt examples of Israelis and Palestinians working together to save lives.

These are just a few of the films that show promise for progressive viewers. You can read about the whole Toronto International Film Festival at "tiff." (tiff.net).
People's World ☺



Sun 26 Sept –
Sat 2 Oct

New Zealand-born writer, actor and stand-up comic Tony Martin says of his new occasional series *A Quiet Word With ...*: “When producer Nikki Hamilton-Cornwall and I began to imagine a TV series [in which Martin would interview guests], we didn’t want to set up a show and then just talk to whoever is in town during the weeks the series is filming.

“We decided I should wait until there was a subject I felt I could speak to, naturally and at length. A person I knew a lot about and am a bit of a fan of. That way, I wouldn’t have to pretend to be interested or fake up a makeshift camaraderie.”

The first episode of the resulting series is *A Quiet Word With Bill Bailey* (ABC1 Tuesday September 28 at 10.05pm, repeated on ABC2 Sunday October 3 at 6.30pm).

And the first thing that strikes you about the program is that Tony Martin clearly thinks himself to be at least as interesting and significant as his guest. He talks about himself, his musical tastes, his youthful experiences, etc, constantly interrupting his guest to (perhaps unconsciously) turn the focus to himself.

On the strength of the first

episode, the series could be better titled “Tony Martin talks about himself in the presence of ...”. The series is intended to be a number of “one-on-one conversations” and they certainly give the appearance of being unrehearsed and unstructured, to the point that at times the guest is almost incoherent while he searches for the right word or response.

Bill Bailey would, I think, be an interesting guest for an interviewer like Parkinson, someone who did his research rather than just a fan. And an interviewer who is not under the delusion that he is interviewing himself.

David Dimbleby, son of British ruling class mouthpiece Richard Dimbleby, was never going to be a sympathetic commentator on the history of the English Revolution of the 17th century. In *Age Of Revolution* (ABC1 Tuesday September 28 at 8.30pm), episode four of *Seven Ages Of Britain*, he is clearly horrified by the enormity of chopping off the head of the monarch! What’s more, he also clearly thinks that we will be just as appalled as he is.

Dimbleby is astute enough to realise that King Charles’ extravagance did not enamor him to an impoverished population but Dimbleby’s contempt for the Puritans is total and he gives less than due acknowledgement to the influence of social reformers like the Levelers and Gerard Winstanley.

By choosing to trace Britain’s history through the development of its art, Dimbleby inevitably pursues his class inclination too, for the ruling class were the patrons of the arts, and of course hired the leading artists of the day to immortalise them in oils and marble and to elaborately decorate their mansions.

Dimbleby finds nothing wrong with this arrangement at all, as you



Bluey & Sheila – the six-part documentary series *Penguin Island* (ABC1 Thursdays from 30 September at 8.00pm).

would expect from someone who is happy in his relationship with the ruling class.

Although the English Revolution was temporarily successful, the necessary class forces had not sufficiently developed for that success to be permanent, and like the later French Revolution, it was eventually overthrown and the monarchy restored.

In the process, however, the power of the aristocracy had been weakened and that of the ascending bourgeoisie strengthened, which at that time was a progressive development. Apparently caring little for classes, Dimbleby fastens on to the scientific developments that accompanied the rise of the bourgeoisie.

So, the interest in this series is in the detail, because the overall line and structure is of little value, but it contains much incidental material to interest the Marxist historian.

I remarked in reviewing the first episode of *The Genius Of Design* (ABC1 Tuesdays at 6.00pm) that it was relentlessly superficial. It also viewed all technological development as evidence of the wonders of capitalism: commercial potential was all that mattered.

The second episode, *Designs For Living*, looks at “the crisis-stricken decades” of the 1920s and 1930s. This, one would have thought, would be fruitful ground for a study of design related to its times and the social pressures resulting from the aftermath of WW1, Germany’s economic collapse, the rise of the USSR and of its opposite, Fascism, and imperialism’s headlong rush towards war.

For this series, however, these two decades are significant for the uncluttered lines of the Bauhaus and the English infatuation with mock Tudor and the three-piece lounge suite, both of which are curiously divorced from any concurrent historical processes.

Not surprisingly, the program goes out of its way to dismiss the work of architect and designer Le Corbusier. He was a socialist, and his housing designs are aimed at social, group, communal living

– and this program is a partisan of individualism.


The Australian contribution to penguin species is the Little Penguin, which was once found in great numbers on the edge of the Southern Ocean but is now restricted largely to rookeries on the tip of Phillip Island.

Smelly and noisy, they are nevertheless a successful tourist attraction by virtue of their small size and self-important appearance. Every year half a million tourists from all over the world go to Phillip Island to watch the nightly “penguin parade” as 26,000 little adult penguins emerge from the sea at dusk and laboriously climb up to their nesting burrows.

The six-part documentary series *Penguin Island* (ABC1 Thursdays from 30 September at 8.00pm) uses the latest satellite tracking to film penguins at sea and in their nest boxes and burrows. The series was filmed over six months by some of Australia’s best wildlife filmmakers, and technically the film is first rate.

What lets it down is the relentlessly twee narration by Rolf Harris, a narration more suited to children’s show than to a documentary. ☹

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The global financial crisis and subsequent economic crisis saw more people than ever questioning the capitalist system, the power of monopoly capital, and their influence over government. Social democrat governments in Australia and around the world have failed to protect the interests of the ordinary working people and the planet. Why? Should we be surprised? Whose interests do they really serve? What is social democracy? How does it differ from socialism? What is meant by democratic change? What is the alternative to capitalism? For answers to these and many other questions about social change, these four paperbacks give readers a great start.

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Editorial Office
 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010
 Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833
 Email: guardian@cpa.org.au

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Sydney

POLITICS

in the pub

September 24
THE DESTRUCTION OF THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM
 Brendan O’Connor, Associate Prof, US Studies Centre, Uni of Sydney;
 Lloyd Cox, Dr, lecturer Macquarie Uni

October 1
NO MEETING – Long weekend

October 8
AFGHANISTAN – FOR PITY’S SAKE BRING TROOPS HOME!
 Phil Glendenning, Director Edmund Rice Centre;
 Patricia Garcia, Act For Peace, Int. Programs Dir Nat Council Churches

October 15
TIBET – THE STRUGGLE FOR CULTURAL SURVIVAL
 Screening of part of film *Tibet – Murder in the Snow*,
 Mr Jigme, President of the Tibetan Community;
 Tenpa Dugdak, from Tibet Effect

October 22
ATHEISM – RELEVANCE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE & PEACE
 Jane Caro, Social commentator, author, atheist;
 Neil Ormerod, Professor of Theology, Australian Catholic University

October 29
POPULATION GROWTH & CLIMATE CHANGE – A DEBATE
 Mark Diesendorf, Professor Institute for Environmental Studies, author
Climate Action – a Campaign Manual for Greenhouse Solutions;
 Ben Spies Butcher, Sociology Macquarie University

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The infinite hypocrisy of the West: The plight of the Roma people

The absence of truth is the biggest tragedy in our dangerous nuclear age

Although several articles on this subject were published before and after September 1, 2010, on that day the Mexican daily *La Jornada* published one of great impact entitled *El holocausto gitano: ayer y hoy (The gypsies' holocaust: yesterday and today)* which reminds us of a truly tragic history. Without adding or deleting a single word from the information contained in the article, I will quote some lines referring to some events that are really touching. Neither the West nor – most of all – its colossal media apparatus have said a single word about them.

"1496: boom of humanist thinking. The Roma peoples (gypsies) from Germany are declared traitors to the Christian nations, spies paid by the Turkish, carriers of the plague, witches and warlocks, bandits and child kidnappers.

"1710: century of enlightenment and rationale. An edict ordered that adult gypsies from Prague be hanged without any previous trial. Young persons and women were mutilated. In Bohemia their left ear was cut off; in Moravia, their right ear.

"1899: climax of modernity and progress. The police of Bavaria founded the Special Section for Gypsies' Affairs. In 1929, the section was promoted to the category of National Central Section and was moved to Munich. In 1937 it was based in Berlin. Four years later, half a million gypsies died in the concentration camps of Central and Eastern Europe.

"In her PhD thesis, Eva Justin (assistant of Dr Robert Ritter of the Racial Research Section of the Ministry of Health of Germany), asserted that gypsies' blood was extremely harmful to the purity of the German race. Someone called Dr Portschy sent a memorandum to Hitler suggesting that gypsies should be submitted to forced labour and mass sterilisation because they jeopardised the pure blood of the German peasantry.

"The gypsies, were labelled as inveterate criminals, arrests started en masse and as from

of Auschwitz) wrote that among the gypsies deported there were old people almost 100 years of age, pregnant women and a large number of children.

"At the ghetto of Lodz (Poland) none of the 5,000 gypsies survived....

"In Yugoslavia, gypsies and Jews were equally killed in the forest of Jajnice. Farmers still remember the cries of the gypsy children who were taken to the places of execution....

"At the extermination camps, only the love of gypsies for music was at times a source of comfort. In Auschwitz, starving and infested with lice, they gathered together to play music and encouraged children to dance. But the courage of gypsy guerrillas who fought alongside the Polish resistance in the region of Nieswiez was also legendary."

Music was the factor that kept them together and helped them to survive, just as much as religion was for Christians, Jews and Muslims.

The successive articles published by *La Jornada* as from the end of August have reminded us of events that were almost forgotten about what happened to the gypsies in Europe. After having been affected by Nazism, they were consigned to oblivion after the Nuremberg trials in the years 1945 and 1946.

The German government headed by Konrad Adenauer declared that the extermination of the gypsies before 1943 was a result of the state's legal policies. Those who had been affected that same year did not receive any compensation. Robert Ritter, a Nazi expert in the extermination of gypsies, was set free. Thirty-nine years later in 1982, when most of the affected persons had already passed away, the government recognised their right to compensation.

More than 75 per cent of the gypsies, whose total number is estimated to be between 12 and 14 million, live in Central and Eastern Europe. Only in Tito's socialist Yugoslavia, gypsies were recognised with the same rights as the Croatian, Albanian and Macedonian minorities.

The Mexican newspaper described as

"It is difficult to believe that in the year 2010, after the terrible past Europe had with racism and intolerance, it is still possible to criminalise an entire ethnic group by labelling it as a social problem."

1938 they were put into special blocks at the Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Gusen, Dautmergen, Natzweiler and Flossenburg camps.

"In a concentration camp he owned in Ravensbruck, Heinrich Himmler, chief of the Gestapo (SS), created a space to sacrifice gypsy women who were submitted to medical experiments. One hundred and twenty Zingari girls were sterilised. Gypsy women married to non-gypsy men were sterilised at the Dusseldorf-Lierenfeld hospital.

"Thousands of gypsies were deported from Belgium, the Netherlands and France to the Polish concentration camp of Auschwitz. In his memoirs, Rudolf Hoess (commander

"particularly perverse" the mass deportation of gypsies to Romania and Bulgaria ordered by the government of Sarkozy – "a Jew of Hungarian descent". These are the exact words used by the newspaper. Please do not take this as an act of irreverence on my part.

In Romania, the number of gypsies is estimated to be two million.

The president of that country, Traian Basescu, a US ally and an illustrious member of NATO, called a woman journalist a "filthy gypsy". As can be observed, this is an extremely delicate person who speaks in a polite language.

The website univision.com posted some comments about the demonstrations against the



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deportation of gypsies and the "xenophobia" in France. According to AFP, around "130 demonstrations should take place in France as well as in front of the French embassies in several European Union countries, with the support of tens of human rights organisations, trade unions and left-wing and ecologist parties". The extensive report refers to the participation of well known cultural personalities such as Jane Birkin and the film-maker Agnes Jaoui and reminded readers that Jane "together with Stephane Hessel, a former member of the Resistance against the Nazi occupation of France (1940-1944), was part of the group that later on met with the advisors to the Minister of Immigration Eric Besson.

"It was a dialogue of the deaf, but it is good that this took place, for it showed that most of the population was enraged at that nauseating policy", said a spokesperson of the network Education Without Borders."

Other news about this thorny issue comes from Europe: "Yesterday the European Parliament put France and Nicholas Sarkozy on the spot for having deported thousands of Romanian and Bulgarian gypsies during a tense debate in which the attitudes of Jose Manuel Durao Barroso and the Commission were described as scandalous and ridiculous for their apparent pusillanimity and for failing to condemn Paris' decisions as illegal and contrary to community rights", according to an article by Ricardo Martínez de Rituerto published by El Pai_s.com.

La Jornada published in another article impressive social data. Neo-natal mortality among the gypsy population is nine times as much the European average and the life expectancy rate is hardly above 50 years of age.

Before that, on August 29, it had reported that although there have been plenty of criticisms "from the European Union institutions as well as from the Catholic church, the United Nations and the broad spectrum of pro-immigrant organisations – Sarkozy insists in expelling and deporting hundreds of citizens from Bulgaria and Romania and therefore, European citizens – using as an excuse the alleged 'criminal' character of these citizens."

"It is difficult to believe that in the year 2010," concludes *La Jornada*. "after the terrible past Europe had with racism and intolerance, it is still possible to criminalise an entire ethnic group by labelling it as a social problem."

Suddenly, while I was writing this Reflection, I remembered that France is the third nuclear power in the planet, and that Sarkozy also has a briefcase with the keys required to launch one of the more than 300 bombs he has. Is there any moral or ethical rationale in launching an attack against Iran, a country condemned for its alleged intention of manufacturing this kind of weapon? Where are the good sense and the logic of that policy?

Let us assume that Sarkozy all of a sudden goes crazy, as it seems to be the case. What would the UN Security Council do with Sarkozy and his briefcase?

What will happen if the French extreme Right decides to force Sarkozy to maintain a racist policy, opposite to the norms that prevail within the European Community?

Could the UN Security Council respond to those two questions?

The absence of truth and the prevalence of deception is the biggest tragedy in our dangerous nuclear age. ☘



Communist Party of Australia

Website: www.cpa.org.au
Email: cpa@cpa.org.au

Central Committee:
General Secretary: Dr Hannah Middleton
Party President: Vinnie Molina
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010
Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833
Sydney District Committee:
Tony Oldfield
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010
Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833

Newcastle Branch:
303 Hunter St
Newcastle NSW 2300
Ph: ah 02 4926 1752
Riverina Branch:
Allan Hamilton
2/57 Cooper St Cootamundra 2590
riverinacpa@live.com.au

Melbourne Branch:
Andrew Irving
PO Box 3 Room 0 Trades Hall
Lygon St Carlton Sth 3053
Ph: 03 9639 1550 Fax: 03 9639 4199
West Australian Branch:
Branch Secretary: Andrew Hayward
PO Box 98 North Perth WA 6906
Ph: 0421 982 719 Email: perth@cpa.org.au

Brisbane Branch: David Matters
PO Box 33, Camp Hill, Qld 4152
Ph: 0419 769 129
cpabris@live.com.au
South Australian State Committee:
Bob Briton, PO Box 612, Port Adelaide BC,
SA 5015 Ph: 0418 894 366
www.cpasas.blogspot.com
Email: sa@cpa.org.au

The Guardian

Website: www.cpa.org.au/guardian
Email: guardian@cpa.org.au