



Defence White Paper

Making Australia poorer not safer

Dr Hannah Middleton & Denis Doherty

The United States is driving to contain and control China and maintain its domination of the fast growing Asian region. The new Australian Defence White Paper (DWP) obediently adds to US military pressure and provocation designed to achieve this goal, all carried out in the context of a dangerous, growing regional arms race.

The Turnbull government will spend almost \$50 billion in the next decade to fund the biggest expansion of the Australian naval power since World War II.

At a cost of \$1 trillion over the next 20 years, the DWP is leading Australia down the destabilising and risky path of military escalation, making us poorer but definitely not safer.

This money should really be used to create jobs for the 800,000 unemployed, homes for the homeless or to help the two million Australians living in poverty.

Instead the billions will go into the pockets of the armaments corporations, most of them US-based.

Strategic assumptions

The major investments contained in this White Paper are based on two key strategic assumptions. Firstly, that the US remains our most important ally and the ultimate guarantor of the liberal order upon which the security of our sea lines of communication depend.

However, alliance with the US has pulled Australia in wars it did not need to fight – Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. It continues to place our nation at risk of further involvements.

Secondly, that while the rise of China continues to be a source of economic prosperity, the country's military expansion and refusal to obey the rules-based global order create tensions that Australia must rearm in order to counter.

The rather bland phrase "rules-based order" (which is used 53 times in the DWP) is of course spin for capitalist rules, for what is an American creation, the rules of the jungle!

All that China actually threatens is the continuing military supremacy in and economic and political domination of the region by the USA.

Surrounded by US bases in Singapore, South Korea, the Philippines and Japan, with the US taking over nearly half of Guam for a massive military base, with Australia allowing US marines to be based in Darwin, it is hardly surprising that China is moving to defend its borders.

China is asserting its role in the region, as one might expect from a growing and powerful country. It is also asserting its right to self defence. For Australia to risk making China an enemy, because it suits the interests of the USA, is the height of folly.

China

Chinese officials have commented that "Australia has

been encouraged, seduced and threatened into a military build-up by the United States.

"Australia should try to maintain a good economic and trade relationship with China ... its military expenditure will not bring any benefit to Australia either strategically or economically."

Throwing our weight around

The DWP concedes that any attack on Australia is an extremely remote prospect but it feels able to talk about preparing the ADF to take "a more active role in shaping regional affairs".

The boost in naval and air power will allow Australia to project force further and more powerfully in the region. The US Deputy Sheriff is creating the most powerful regional military force (apart from the US) so it can throw its weight around in our region.

The DWP states that "the government is committed to working with the United States and like-minded partners to maintain the rules-based order by making practical and meaningful military contributions where it is in our interest to do so".

Interoperability

The full spectrum maritime forces outlined in the DWP are designed to operate seamlessly with the US in sea-lanes, cyberspace and outer space.

The maxim within Australian defence circles is "interoperability" with the US military.

Interoperability – the process of Australian forces becoming more closely integrated with those of the US – means that Australian forces can operate with US forces and no other. This is because internal military communications are now dependent on US-controlled systems

This ever-deepening military subservience to the United States compromises Australia's security, because our support for US engagement in the Asia-Pacific adds to regional tensions and increases the risk of Australian involvement in war. It does not in any way serve our strategic interests.

Australia's economic well-being, security and national independence require a foreign policy which upholds peace and supports transparency, disarmament, co-operation and mutually beneficial trade.

Fightback!

- April 5 to 18 are the dates for the Global Day of Action against Military Spending (GDAMS).
- Organise \$1 trillion protests in your area.
- September 26 to October 3 is the time to aim directly at the US as we protest the 50th anniversary of the US base Pine Gap. The facility directs US killer drone assassinations, is crucial for US nuclear war-fighting strategies and is involved in massive surveillance programs.

For detail of the hardware and spending see page 2 ★



\$1 TRILLION for drones, subs, F35s etc

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Guardian

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Nuke industry targets SA

South Australians are being bombarded with media messages boosting the “benefits” of nuclear industries and ridiculing their opponents. People with concerns over the controversial proposals being bandied about are accused of promoting the “rainbow warrior mythologies of the hard left” and engaging in “Midnight Oil-style gesture politics”, according to the *Australian Financial Review*. Sledging from the pro-nuclear sector has kicked up since the release of the “tentative recommendations” of the Nuclear Fuel Cycle Royal Commission headed by former SA Governor and retired Rear Admiral, Kevin Scarce.

The state is suffering high unemployment already and the situation is set to become disastrous when General Motors Holden stops vehicle production next year. The nuclear lobby is exploiting this vulnerability to sell some very doubtful goods to a wary public. To nobody’s surprise, the recommendations coming from the Royal Commission are for a waste dump to be established in the state and for other nuclear options, including power generation, to remain open.

A dump (officially a “storage facility” or even “repository”) for high level nuclear waste is being sold as a jobs and finance bonanza. It is projected to cost \$147 billion over the claimed 120 year life of the dump but bring in \$257 billion in revenue over the same period. A handy \$5 billion a year would be put into a sovereign wealth fund for the cash-strapped state. The people of SA are right to be sceptical. Last year SA senator Sean Edwards said that nuclear power would mean free electricity for residents of the state.

The Royal Commission found that nuclear energy would not be economical for the “foreseeable future” because of relatively flat demand for electricity and the unexpected and, for some corporations, unwelcome success of wind and solar power generation. If, at some stage, Australia needs to hurry up its efforts to get to a zero emission target for power generation by 2050, the nuclear option is back on the table.

Nuclear power is still being sold as “clean” and “safe” energy in spite of the fact that other countries are prepared to pay \$1.75 million per tonne to store their waste in South Australia. Commissioner Scarce stunned an audience at the Adelaide Town Hall with the claim that even the major nuclear accidents over the decades, the most recent of which took place at Fukushima, have not resulted in serious consequences for human health.

The federal government is looking kindly on developments in SA. The Liberal party has had a pro-nuclear stance for many decades and a Howard-era inquiry into the nuclear option came back with a big thumbs up. Josh Frydenberg, the Minister for Resources, Energy and Northern Australia, says it would be a “brave” federal government that stood between the people of SA and their preferred options for the future. The corporate media drum beat is that the community is changing its mind on nuclear industries and their safety record.

At odds with the claim that there is hardly the need to discuss such a benign proposition, Australia’s “safe” credentials are being sold. The country is politically and geologically stable and we have vast “empty” areas to dump the nuclear cast-offs. The spirit of *Terra Nullius* is alive and well in the current, national nuclear “conversation”. Assurances about Australia’s supposed high technical standards were undermined recently with revelations that the ship carrying treated nuclear waste back to Australia from France was a flag of convenience “ship of shame” of doubtful suitability with a low paid crew.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians would be well advised to resist state and federal government agendas, particularly the reckless proposition for a high grade waste dump in SA. It’s a foot in the door for the whole nasty, antiquated industry. The argument will go “seeing we currently store high grade waste, we may as well have the power generation that could use it.” And, as can be seen during various diplomatic showdowns around the world, if a country has nuclear power generation, it is an open question whether they have or are developing nuclear weapons. Australia mustn’t buy into this nightmare.

PRESS FUND

There are persistent rumours that the Fairfax Press is considering pulling out of printed media and focusing on digital publication. If that happened, print media would be dominated by extreme right-wing papers such as the *Daily Telegraph* in Sydney and on a national level by *The Australian*, which is said to be bankrolled by Rupert Murdoch despite making a loss every year. But the exit of Fairfax would also provide us with an opportunity to take advantage of a gap in the vast print media field. It’s terribly important to improve the *Guardian’s* content and promote its distribution, and you can help us right now by sending in a Press Fund contribution for the next issue – and preferably on a regular basis. Our thanks go to this week’s supporters, as follows:

Mark Mannion \$5, “Rough Red” \$5, “Round Figure” \$15, Don Mudie \$20

This week’s total: \$45 Progressive total: \$1,780

CPA Greetings on IWD

On the occasion of International Women’s Day, the Communist Party of Australia expresses its solidarity with those fighting for the rights of women as part of the struggle for the liberation of humanity from capitalism. The first International Women’s Day in 1911 was the initiative of pioneer German Communist Clara Zetkin. There has been an unbroken chain of commitment among Communists since then. We look with pride at the achievements

of people inspired by our great cause. The Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia in 1917 gave men and women equal rights protected by law. Socialism has proven to be on the side of women and continues to set the example as in socialist Cuba.

Unfortunately, 105 years after that first IWD and 88 years since it was first observed in Australia, there is still much to do. In fact, the gender income gap is growing across the country and in some occupations it

reaches up to 24 percent. Despite all the promises and community awareness campaigns, women are more likely to live and retire in poverty and much more likely to suffer domestic and family violence than their male counterparts. Services for victims are under-funded or have had their funding withdrawn entirely. The CPA is committed to the struggle to achieve justice on these questions and the whole challenge of consigning class exploitative society to the dustbin of history. ☘



NAVY

12 “regionally superior” new submarines. Design and construction will soak up at least \$50 billion, while fit-out of weapons and systems will cost at least \$5 billion.

9 anti-submarine warfare frigates and weapons. Cost \$ 4 billion.

3 Air Warfare Destroyers. In addition to the \$9.1 billion construction bill, the destroyers will also require a further \$5 billion to cover the installation of combat systems.

12 offshore patrol vessels. At a cost of \$3-4 billion;

7 PA-8 Poseidon spy planes

Drones to assist warships

Mine defence and countermeasures equipment

Land based anti-ship missiles

Maritime Anti-Ship Missiles. Cost \$ 5 billion;

AIR FORCE

72 F-35A Joint Strike Fighter. US manufacturer Lockheed Martin will charge \$15.3 billion. The F-35 is the first Australian defence purchase with the explicitly stated intention of improving interoperability with the US. Australia will be dependent on US technicians to keep the aircraft in the air. The planes have technical problems, there are questions about their suitability and ability to operate effectively in combat. Many of the problems with the F35 relate to its extraordinary, computer-based complexity.

12 E/A-18G Growler attack planes produced by Boeing at a cost of \$2.1 billion. These aircraft have unique air-to-air weapon capabilities and advanced radar detection.

New missile and missile defence systems

Cocos Islands. Airport to be upgraded to accommodate the P8 Poseidon surveillance planes, 7 new Triton long-range surveillance drones, and land-based missiles.

ARMY

Tanks. The army will upgrade its current fleet of 59 US-manufactured Abrams battle tanks at a cost of up to \$15 billion.

Drones

Armed reconnaissance helicopters. Cost \$5-\$6 billion

PERSONNEL

Uniformed personnel to increase by 4,900 to 62,400.

An extra 1,200 civilian jobs, including 900 special positions for cyber and surveillance

SURVEILLANCE AND CYBER WARFARE

7 MQ-4C Triton surveillance drones

Jindalee over the horizon radar system to be upgraded

Increased cyber defences

Long range Gulfstream jets for electronic war

"Sounds like fun"

Australian diplomats mocked reports of Indonesian rape and murder of Timorese

Andrew Alcock*

Dear Friends in support of justice and freedom in our region of the world.

Today (February 22) MSN News and the *Sydney Morning Herald* listed an article that revealed that Australian diplomats had ridiculed the rape and torture of East Timorese at the hands of the invading Indonesian military as something that "sounds like fun".

The annotations made in 1976, less than a year after the occupation began, were found on a memo sent to the Australian embassy in Jakarta from colleagues at the embassy in The Hague. They were discovered by Monash Uni researchers Sara Niner and Kim McGrath.

Australian East Timor Friendship Association SA believes that rape can never be considered as "fun" and is, in fact, a brutal crime against humanity. This is especially so when it is being committed on a mass scale along with the crime of genocide. If such remarks had been made about the victims of the Nazis during World War 2 (gypsies, Jews, unionists and socialists), there would have been righteous outrage.

How come it was thought as acceptable by Australia officials to hold such attitudes towards the victims of Indonesian fascism?

AETFA SA has released the following statement about the story:

Sara Niner and Kim McGrath are to be applauded for revealing these

notes made on official Australian documents by Australian officials regarding the crimes committed against humanity by the Indonesian military (TNI) in East Timor.

No matter what arguments are made to defend these attitudes held by a number of Australian diplomats and politicians during the time of the Indonesian occupation of East Timor, most Australians who value human rights and the rule of international law have every right to be appalled by them. After all, they are very cynical, callous and arrogant attitudes for officials to hold towards a people who are facing genocide and human rights abuses. This was a very shameful period of our nation's history.

During World War 2, the East Timorese were slaughtered by the Japanese Imperial Army because they gave great assistance to Australian commandos who fought there. The East Timor lost about 70,000 lives out of a total population of 500,000 during the war while Australia lost 40,000 out of 7 million.

For Australian officials to make fun of a people who showed us great friendship and sacrificed so much because of that support, it is nothing short of disgraceful that they were suffering genocide and sickening human rights abuses again.

It is well-known that the TNI used rape as a strategy in East Timor as it does in West Papua today.

Of course, there is a certain irony about this revelation. Many conservative Australians who want Australia



to follow US policies without question because of the assistance given to us in World War 2 by the US, are amongst those who want us to forget the great sacrifices made by the East Timorese for Australia.

History shows that in 1965 it was the CIA that assisted the TNI to overthrow democracy in Indonesia and to install the brutal Suharto dictatorship. During its 33 years in power, the military dictatorship was responsible for massive loss of civilian lives and sickening abuses of human rights in Indonesia, West Papua, East Timor and Aceh.

On December 6, 1975, the eve of the TNI's full-scale invasion of East Timor, former US president, Gerald Ford, and former US secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, met with

General Suharto and gave support to his planned invasion of East Timor. The fact is that the support by the US and its allies of the invasion and occupation of East Timor is something of great shame and indicates that those justifying the invasion and the cynical attitudes to the crimes that were committed show that they have little regard for international law, democracy, human rights and social justice.

The highlighting of the term "impotent" in the FRETILIN report to describe the ability of the TNI is understandable if one knows the background. I have had discussions with former East Timorese and West Papuan resistance fighters and they have told me that the TNI performed very poorly in the field but that it was very effective at torture, rape and mass executions of civilians.

It is also ironic that these facts have come to light at a time when Australian officials, in violation of international law, are justifying the stealing of oil and gas from Timor-Leste's half of the Timor Sea. Because Timor-Leste has raised this issue at the International Court of Justice, the current Australian government has sought to pervert the course of justice by stealing papers from an Australian lawyer representing Timor-Leste and withdrawing the passport of a vital witness to the

court case – dishonestly claiming the actions were taken because of national security.

Many courageous Australians and East Timorese fought side by side in the struggle against fascism during World War 2. Those who sacrificed so much in that struggle would feel betrayed if they knew that Australian governments were supporting terrorist organisations like the TNI or were appointing officials to represent us who show an irresponsible attitude to the principles of democracy, human rights and social justice.

Humanitarian Australians who take a responsible attitude to fair dealings between nations call upon the Australian government to:

- cease its cynical and callous attitude towards the people of Timor-Leste who have suffered so much at the hands of the TNI and US and Australian complicity
- work towards making Australia an independent and non-aligned nation that promotes democracy, peace, social justice and fairness between nations
- only employs Australians in its diplomatic service who have a proven commitment to the principles referred to above.

*Andrew (Andy) Alcock is Information Officer, Australia East Timor Friendship Association (South Australia) ☺

Sydney
Latin American House Inc

We commemorate International Women's Day with a

CAFE CONCERT

6pm to 11pm Saturday March 12

Construction Union (CFMEU), 12 Railway St, Lidcombe

Enjoy our music, poetry and typical Latin food and tributes to outstanding women of the Latin American and Australian community

Guest artists: Olga Vega, Hugo Leal, Liber Osorio (music and singing), Zulema Pegue & Miriam Marquez (presenting the work "WOMAN"), poetry and other surprises ...

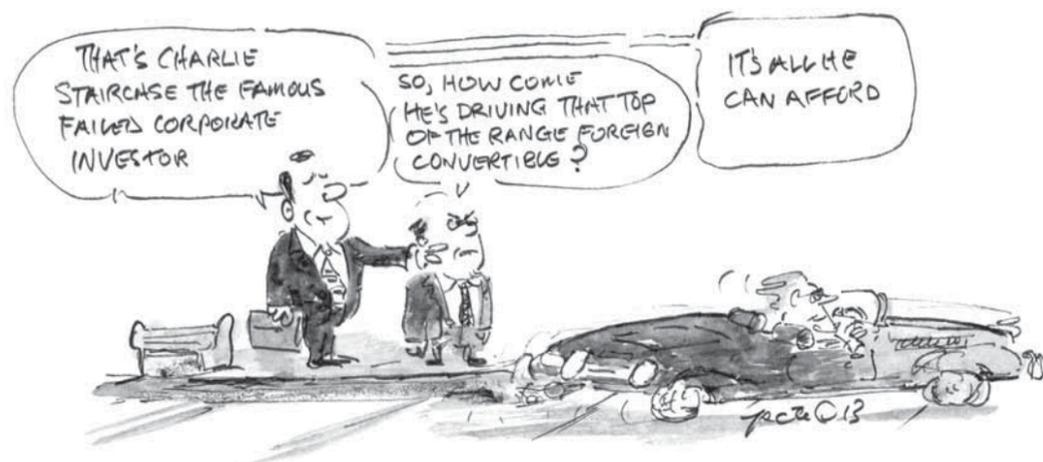
Latin American food available

All funds raised on the night will go to purchase school supplies for Mapuche children in Chile

Come and share with us – Free Entry

For more information: casalatina2010@yahoo.com.au or Marta Olea: 0421153442

Pete's Corner



International Women's Day 2016

Melbourne International Women's Day rally and march:

"Women of the world unite for women's liberation, decolonisation and economic justice!"

Tuesday March 8, from 5:30pm
State Library of Victoria, Swanson Street

Sydney International Women's Day rally and march:

"Stop violence against women!"

Saturday March 12, from 11:30am
Archibald Fountain Hyde Park North

"March in solidarity with women all over the world who experience patriarchal inequality and injustice. This year we will show our opposition to domestic violence and walk to 'Stop Violence Against Women'. All women, men and children striving for gender equality and a fairer and more peaceful society are encouraged to attend."

"Women at the forefront of struggle for women's and workers' rights"

Sydney International Women's Day Forum: hosted by the Communist Women's Collective

Saturday March 12, from 2:00pm

Maritime Union Hall, 365-375 Sussex St, Sydney

Come and hear our inspiring speakers and join us in celebrating the work of courageous and powerful women fighting for justice for women and workers around the world.

Afternoon tea. Cost: any donation appreciated.

For more information contact Linda at 02 9699 8844.

A death too many

Time for a renewed national Stop Deaths in Custody campaign

Len Waster

On Saturday August 2, 2014 Julieka Dhu, a young Yamatji woman from Geraldton WA, was arrested for unpaid parking fines and locked up in the South Hedland watchhouse. This was not unusual – in Western Australia it has become a habit to lock up those too poor to pay their fines.

Women and Indigenous people are hit hardest by this and Indigenous women – doubly so. The number of Indigenous women jailed for fine default in Western Australia soared from 33 in 2008 to 223 in 2013. One in six Indigenous people in jail in WA are there because they could not pay fines.

Within three days Julieka Dhu was dead, a death that would never happen in a decent society.

What has happened since shows how a deeply ingrained racist culture in many institutions, combined with increasingly anti-people policies by successive governments has been lethal for peoples of the First Nations.

Julieka was the 339th Indigenous person to die in custody in Australia since the Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody delivered its report and recommendations in 1991. Central to its recommendations were measures to stop Aboriginal people ending up in custody in the first place and to establish custody notification services for those cases where they did.

These recommendations have largely gone unimplemented.

Calls by the WA Aboriginal Legal Service for funding to host a 24-hour hotline have so far fallen on deaf ears. A promise by WA Premier Barnett to establish one is yet to be acted on.

Since 1991, Indigenous deaths in custody have increased by more than 150 percent, from about 10 to about 15 a year and Aboriginal people are being jailed more than ever before.

The Indigenous prison population has grown from 2,140 in 1991 to 9,300 in 2015, with Aboriginal women being the fastest growing number of prisoners.

Much of this growth must be attributed to law and order policies of federal and state governments, which predominantly entrap Indigenous people, economic-social policies that have massively cut into Indigenous programs, as well as other programs affecting the less well off, and specific, racist policies such as the Northern Territory Intervention and closure of remote Indigenous settlements, that disempower Indigenous communities and bring them under a pervasive control regime.

This is movement in the opposite direction from that the 1991 Commission recommended. It called for a transfer of resources into Aboriginal communities to develop community self-management.

Julieka's traumatised family have been campaigning for justice and to find out the truth surrounding her



death. It took 16 months for a coronial inquiry to commence and this was suspended for a further three months after the first week. It looks like the police needed that time to prepare their case in response to the damning evidence of their inhumane and brutal treatment of a young woman they picked up as she was about to receive medical attention for infected injuries.

The police did take Julieka to the Port Hedland hospital three times, in response to her constant cries of pain and pleading for help, but told the staff she was "faking" her injuries.

The staff obliged by recording her problem as "behavioural issues" and did not bother to take blood tests, x-rays or even her temperature.

The third time the police dragged Julieka to the hospital it appears she was already dead, possibly at police hands, according to other witnesses in the lock up.

That Julieka's family has even made it as far as a coronial inquiry in this time is exceptional in Western Australia. The normal course of action in this process, which is based on police investigating police, is that the inquiry starts only once police complete their investigation and they routinely draw this out until the "heat" goes out of the issue.

Only her family's relentless campaigning has kept Julieka's case alive and kept pressure on the WA government. Her uncle Shaun Harris has endlessly crossed the country and spoken at rallies organised to keep Julieka's case in the spotlight.

"We had to rely massively on social media, because the mainstream media yet again fails us black people

of Australia on the really important black issues", he says, adding, "These aren't just black issues, but Australian issues as well ... We can't keep being pushed aside or shoved under the carpet. They have to stop being in denial about how they're treating us, how they're murdering us."

A National Day of Solidarity is being planned for March 14, 2016, the day the coronial inquest re-commences.

Harris sees this as one more step in gaining truth and justice, not only for his niece Julieka, but for the many others who have died in custody. It is a step in the struggle to prevent all deaths in custody in future.

April 15 marks 25 years since the release of the Royal Commission's findings and recommendations. It is a good time to renew the campaign to stop Aboriginal deaths in custody, by fighting institutional and systemic racism, not only in Western Australia but Australia wide. ☘

Congress looking down the barrel

Rudi Maxwell

The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples is likely to have to close its doors by the end of the year, if it cannot find more funding. Congress, which represents about 9,000 individual members plus 200 organisations, was set up in 2010 as a national Indigenous representative body. It is independent of government and free to join.

The *Koori Mail* understands that in 2013, the board failed to accept a \$15 million funding offer from the Federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs under Labor Minister Jenny Macklin.

After Labor lost the election, the Coalition government made the decision not to fund Congress and it has struggled for a sustainable financial plan ever since. Congress co-chair Jackie Huggins, who was elected to the role in October last year, told the *Koori Mail* the organisation was running on a shoe-string.

"Because we weren't funded by the Abbott government, our resources are pretty low. We've gone from 30 to five members of staff," she said. "We have a massive organisation in terms of constituents, nearly 9,000, but unfortunately unless we find some way of bringing in funding, we are probably due to finish at the end of the year."

A spokesperson for Indigenous

Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion said the federal government had already provided Congress with \$30 million (the money the former Labor government provided for its establishment).

"This is a large amount for a body that sees itself as fiercely independent of government and provides no advisory services to government," the spokesperson said.

"The Coalition government has already extended Congress's funding agreement until June 30, 2017, to allow it to use its substantial cash reserves to support its operations and achieve financial independence.

"The government's position in relation to funding for Congress has been consistent since the 2014-15 Budget."

Huggins said it was important that Indigenous voices were front and centre in any discussions about a referendum on constitutional recognition and that Congress was in the process of surveying its membership.

"We want to find out what their views are, and opinions," she said. "I think it's been a very difficult time and in the past two years some people have changed their minds about Constitutional recognition.

"People are frustrated, wanting to know what is the question, when will it be, which road do we take - do we take treaty, sovereignty, Constitutional recognition?"

"I think they're quite separate items and we can look at treaty as well as looking at if we want to be recognised in the Constitution. Things seem to have become a lot bigger, a lot more complex for our people.

"We would hope from Congress' point of view, that as many of our members as possible really voice their opinions. We have members and organisations that have very different views. We are depending on information provided by our constituents and members – and that's what we'll be saying in this debate."

Huggins said she and fellow co-chair Rod Little were hoping to reinvigorate Congress' relationship with members, member organisations and also the Federal Parliament.

Since former Prime Minister Tony Abbott appointed the Indigenous Advisory Council, made up of prominent Indigenous people and non-Indigenous business people, Congress has been largely sidelined by the federal government.

"We want to have a relationship with the Parliament," Huggins said.

"We want to work with stakeholders in the field and we've been very buoyed by the reengagement of some disaffected organisations. We're hoping we can make a difference in the timeframe that we have left."

Koori Mail ☘

Sydney

CPA Port Jackson Discussion Hour

You are warmly invited to join us
An informal discussion of contemporary issues

Tuesday March 15
Women's rights

All classes 5:30 pm until 6:30 pm
at 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills
ALL WELCOME

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The homeless are still homeless

Statement, Homelessness Australia

Last December, the most recent figures from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare underlined that more Australians had received assistance from homelessness services this year than last.

Almost 256,000 people, more than a quarter of a million of us face a daily battle for survival. They are young and old, mothers and children, families and single people.

Domestic violence is still the main reason they seek assistance (25%) while another 21% need help due to a housing crisis. Housing affordability, financial difficulties, relationship breakdowns, health and mental health issues are all still significant drivers into homelessness.

More than 70,000 children received assistance; this includes 42,000 who were under 10. Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders are still over represented with 1 in 4 clients being Indigenous. A link between mental health issues and homelessness is still evident with a quarter of clients having an identified mental health issue.

Remote/very remote areas had the highest rate of homelessness service use and the largest growth in use over the past four years: 41,780 lone young people (aged 15-24) approached homelessness services. More than 8,500 people slept rough in the month before, coming to

homelessness services (that is 1,000 more than the previous year).

Housing is still problematic: 70% of the unmet requests included the need for accommodation. For a single person with children, this rose to 93% of cases.

Despite the number of people who needed accommodation being similar to the previous year, the proportion who were able to be provided with accommodation has decreased to 60%; 6% received long term accommodation of the 33% of people who needed it.

Homelessness services provided more than 6.5 million nights of accommodation in 2014-15, about 0.4million fewer than 2013-14.

"The lack of exit points from homelessness remains the biggest challenge for homelessness services," CEO of Homelessness Australia, Glenda Stevens, said. "A lack of affordable housing is a double edged sword. It drives people into homelessness and is a major barrier to exiting homelessness."

"The biggest positive out of the data is the reduction in the number of people turned away from services," Ms Stevens said. "The number of people unable to be assisted reduced by 22% in 2014-15."

Homelessness services are proving they are essential. In addition to providing accommodation and tenancy support they provide health,

family, drug/alcohol legal and financial services, assistance with education, employment and advocacy and practical support such as meals, transport and laundry facilities.

"The data shows that homelessness services are helping a significant number of people into a better life situation," she said "The number of people in education, employment and housing is higher after receiving support."

Action needed

Homelessness Australia has called on all Australians, especially the media, to pay ongoing and close attention to the scale of the human trauma that is unnecessarily being allowed to happen within our first world society. While the number of people turned away did decrease, almost 120,000 people had their needs unmet, left to stay in unstable housing, or homelessness or try and utilise other networks.

"Just because we have heard it before, does not mean we can ignore homelessness," she said. "We urge government to see investment in homelessness services as essential. While there are positives coming from the data, the fact remains that 256,000 people needed assistance, and a further 120,000 were turned away. ✪"



The Defence White Paper which envisages spending billions of dollars on new military equipment, personnel and God knows what else has made military contractors very, very happy. They don't have to beg for funds and put up with diminished services. Everything they want, they get. The track record of military waste is legendary and the latest project will be no different. We are told there is no money for the sick, the poor, the homeless, the young and the old but there is always plenty for another submarine. Mind you, there is no military threat, even according to the military itself. There are real dangers that are not dealt with. Sydney with its current population of 4.5 million has lost five of the six leading scientists in charge of monitoring the quality and purity of Sydney's water. How this is not putting at risk the health of Sydneysiders is not made clear by the NSW government. "When minor things go wrong they will turn into major disruptions," Dr Stuart Khan, an associate professor at UNSW and a water contamination expert, warned. We are experiencing unusual weather conditions and the impact of climate change is still largely unknown.

Taking of national threats – BP is planning to drill for oil in Australia's remote, wild and pristine Great Australian Bight off the coast of South Australia. The drilling will start as soon as an environmental plan is approved by regulator the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA). The environmental plan is prepared by – wait for it – BP, and it is unavailable for public scrutiny! The responsibility for overseeing the preparation of the environmental assessment for BP drilling was taken from the Federal Environment Department following the election of the Abbott government in 2013. Early in 2014 Environment Minister Greg Hunt formally delegated responsibility for environmental assessment and approval to NOPSEMA as part of the Abbott government's initiative to remove the national government's responsibility from environmental decision-making as part of "green tape" reduction. NOPSEMA was originally established to oversee workplace health and safety for workers on offshore drilling rigs. BP's Deepwater Horizon oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico exploded in 2010 with 11 workers missing, presumed dead. The oil rig sank to the bottom and oil gushed out of control for 87 days. By the time the oil stopped gushing, the US government estimated that about 4.9 million barrels of oil had contaminated the Gulf of Mexico. An inquiry established by President Obama found the disaster could have been prevented and "the immediate causes can be traced to a series of identified mistakes by BP, Halliburton and Transocean that reveal such systemic failures in risk management that they place in doubt the safety culture of the entire industry". After all this – welcome to Australia to drill in more severe conditions and in deeper waters without any environmental assessment or control. With politicians and policies like that, who needs enemies?

Protest against Rio's actions

More than four hundred workers from several unions, most notably from CFMEU construction, have taken their fight straight to multi-billion dollar miner Rio Tinto for its complicity in sacking Australian seafarers and replacing them with foreign workers paid as little as \$2-an-hour.

Last month in the port of Newcastle five crewmembers were marched down the gangway of the CSL *Melbourne* by more than 30 police. Those same police escorted the foreign replacement crew onto the ship to sail it away.

The CSL *Melbourne* carried alumina from Gladstone to Newcastle for Rio Tinto subsidiary, Pacific Aluminium for more than five years. However, the route between Queensland and New South Wales is still being utilised, only by non-Australian workers not subject to the same rights and conditions as their Australian counterparts.

The rally on February 14 began outside of Brisbane's Central Station and made its way through the

city streets to Rio's offices on Albert Street.

Speeches came from CFMEU assistant state secretary Jade Ingham, Queensland Council of Unions secretary Ros McLennan, ACTU president Ged Kearney, ETU assistant secretary Peter Ong and sacked seafarer from the MV *Portland* Dale Eaton.

Maritime Union of Australia Queensland deputy branch secretary Jason Miners said the federal government was complicit in Rio Tinto's actions in granting them a licence to exploit a loophole in domestic shipping legislation.

"Rio made US\$806 million in just six months," Miners said.

"A massive chunk of that US\$806 million was made here from the minerals that all Australians own and we're being repaid by being unceremoniously sacked from our jobs. To me that's abhorrent."

"These jobs aren't offshored, they still exist. However, Pacific Aluminium has been given the green light by the government to

have foreign ships of shame with dodgy environmental, safety and labour practices on our coastal trade."

Following the speeches MUA assistant national secretary Ian Bray, along with A contingent, then marched into the Rio Tinto offices and handed a letter to the management demanding replacement jobs for the displaced seafarers.

Following the brief meeting in the glass foyer, surrounded by hundreds of angry workers, Bray reported the outcomes back to the crowd.

He said that Rio has agreed to meeting with the MUA and other maritime unions. "We will continue to agitate, we will continue to organise, we will continue to push the fight, not only here, but around the country and Canberra, or wherever we have to go to make sure our message and our voices are heard," Bray said. ✪

Sydney

Vigil demanding that the USA stop the blockade on Cuba

Thursday March 17 at 5:30 pm outside the US Consulate in Martin Place

Also to stop the subversion funds against Cuba

& to return Guantánamo to its rightful owners – the Cuban people.

Book review by Thomas Kilkauer

The Most Good You Can Do

Living up to his moral philosophical tradition of utilitarianism, US-Australian philosopher Peter Singer's latest instalment is *The Most Good You Can Do* enhancing utilitarianism's "greater good" principle. The book – endorsed by software monopolist and corporate philanthropists Bill and Melinda Gates – is based on Singer's "Castle Lecture" delivered at Yale University in 2013.

The book approaches "the most good" idea in four parts: effective altruism; how to do the most good; motivation and justification; and choosing causes and organisations, finishing with an afterword addressed to "readers in Australia and New Zealand". Peter Singer, according to the book's cover, "may be the most controversial philosopher alive; he is certainly among the most influential" (*New Yorker*).

Singer's argument follows a three-fold logic: capitalism remains with us for the time being; it creates social, economic, and moral pathologies such as extreme poverty; and as a consequence, we have a moral duty to alleviate the worst impact of capitalism (a word that hardly ever appears in this book) by doing – individually – the most good we can do. For utilitarians, there is a moral duty demanding that we can live up to our moral obligations by donating whatever we can to charities that work for the poor.

But Singer also discusses what makes a good charity, e.g. Oxfam. In this sense, his book is quite often rather political than moral in its philosophical character.

Given the recent problems of "phony generosity" of the super-rich, Singer's book provides a timely examination of the "charity industry". But before discussing charities – a "US\$200 billion industry" in the USA alone – and without highlighting the evolutionary and moral origins of altruism, Singer dives into his concept of "effective altruism". He defines it as "we should do the most good we can".

Perhaps dating back to his seminal 1972 article on "Famine and Affluence", Singer acknowledges – and this seems to be despite the good intentions of neo-liberalism – that today, still "millions of children die each year from diseases that we can prevent or cure" but the democratic majority – carefully guided by corporate mass media – is choosing not to prevent this.

On the non-corporate media Singer also delivers a late but forceful vindication of Australia's public broadcaster the ABC's *Chaser* program that was heavily criticised in 2009 for a sketch on the "make a wish foundation". Singer notes – most likely with this particular charity in mind – "saving a child's life has to be better than fulfilling a child's wish to be Batkid".

But equally and, above all, correctly, Singer does not shy away from directing the critical torch on his own institutions: Princeton University where he is a professor and Yale University that invited him for the lecture. Singer writes, "Princeton has an endowment, at the time of writing, of \$21 billion and Yale of \$23.9 billion ... the money you donate to one of them could probably do more good elsewhere" (all amounts in US dollars). Perhaps the

term "could probably" is actually more like a "will most definitely" do more good elsewhere than donating money to super-rich elite universities reserved predominantly for the US and global "excellent sheep" (Deresiewicz 2014) in the need to "show-off" the decorating ornaments of a prestigious degree.

Many, if not nearly all examples in Singer's book are from the global elite when, for example, he discusses the case of an Oxford University student "living on a £14,000 a year scholarship [which places him into] the richest 4 percent of the world's people". But Singer also discusses questions like "is it okay, he asked, for us to be going to the movies and drinking chai lattes while 1.4 billion people are living in extreme poverty".

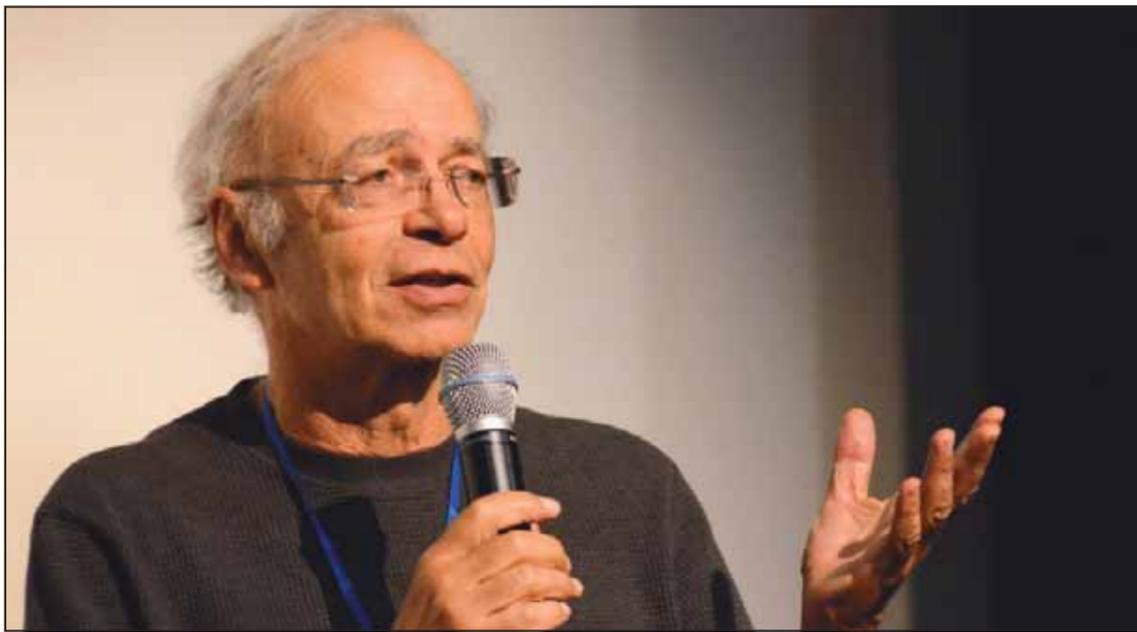
Perhaps movies and chai lattes are rather small fish compared to the global military spending of around \$2,000 billion (this is not a typo) in 2015 (www.sipri.org). But Singer stays away from big numbers. He keeps his discussion rather individualistic noting that "strong social ties to family and to friends are a basic source of happiness". So best not to think about the money wasted on militarism, wars, and, for example, senseless advertising making us "buy things we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't like".

Throughout the book one gets the impression that Singer accepts that "capitalism in its current global form is worsening inequalities". He is also convinced that "those who think the entire modern capitalist economy should be overthrown have consciously failed to demonstrate that there are ways of structuring an economy that has better outcomes".

There seems to be no awareness that capital and its political executors have worked really hard to make this possible when, for example, lynching the Paris Communards in 1871, when liquidating the German revolution of 1918-19, when massacring Spanish anarchists in 1936, when killing Allende and replacing a socialist-democratic government with the crypto-fascist dictatorship of Pinochet, while in-between hacking to death a million Indonesians shortly before carpet bombing and Agent Orange-ing Vietnam in a global anti-communist hysteria. The list seems endless but it assures that comfortable professors in their chairs at elite universities come to conclusions capitalism has pre-engineered for them.

Another engineered problem may be elite university's (Stanford) Alexander Berger. On Berger's problem, Singer writes that "on average 14 people on the waiting list die each day" in the USA before receiving a kidney transplant. That this has something to do with capitalism, privatised, insufficient, and non-existing healthcare, the hegemonic ideology of individualism, and neo-liberalism escapes Singer. After discussing additional charity cases from Yale University, Princeton and MIT, Singer reaches the conclusion that "we can speculate that people with a high level of abstract reasoning ability are more likely to take the kind of approach to helping others that is characteristic of effective altruism".

But unfortunately unlike almost all examples in his book and Singer himself (Oxford), most people are



Peter Singer.

not graduates of elite universities. Neither utilitarianism nor Singer's effective altruism offer a solution to "the Blindspot of Western Marxism" (Smythe 1977), i.e. the distorting powers of mass media assuring the deliberately engineered and mass-broadcasted non-awareness of the pathologies of capitalism. Perhaps even after "Band-Aid" and decades of charity it may just not be enough that "effective altruism is what we are passionate about".

What utilitarian philosophy is passionate about is happiness and on this Singer notes, "studies of the relationship between income and happiness or well-being indicate that for people at low levels of income, an increase in income does lead to greater happiness, but once income is sufficient to provide for one's needs and a degree of financial security, further increases have either much less impact on happiness or no impact at all".

But for Singer, all this does not lead to, for example, a push for higher minimum wages, progressive taxation, taxing multinational corporations, and more drastic political measures. It does not even lead to a critique on rampant consumerism and capitalism other than to say, "perhaps we imagine that money is important to our well-being because we need money to buy consumer goods, and buying things has become an obsession that beckons us away from what really advances our well-being".

At no point is all this linked to capitalism. The idea that it is related to consumer capitalism supported by a global marketing behemoth and a neo-liberal ideology that converts every eventuality of life into a marketable good escapes Singer. Since the advent of Fordist mass-production and mass-consumption, capitalism virtually runs on making us believe that one plasma screen makes you happy – two plasma screens make you twice as happy. But global capitalism not only creates rampant over-consumption, it also creates "more than a billion people [who] are living in extreme poverty". While I (the reviewer), like Singer (the author) are "donating to Oxfam", we have yet to see an end to extreme poverty.

Meanwhile Singer laments "a new museum wing [that] will cost US\$50 million". What remains unnoticed is the fact that the USA alone

will spend \$57.52 million on defence "per hour" during 2016 (nationalpriorities.org). But despite these staggering numbers, Singer continues using the wrong cases. He continues that the "renovation of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, completed in 2004, cost \$858 million". The US military will spend more money than this museum renovation before Mr Singer has lunch – every day.

The avoidance of facts like these even leads Singer to false hypothetical questions such as "if US\$100,000 can prevent blindness in 1,000 people, is that better than using US\$100,000 to feed the starving?". \$100,000 is really small change for Eisenhower's "Military-Industrial Complex". Is all this too complex for a philosopher? The US military alone spends about one million dollars per minute while the morally worthless global advertising ogre is spending – or better wasting – half a billion dollars per year globally. Singer's hypotheticals are nice for philosophical articles in utilitarian journals but they camouflage the realities of the causes of global poverty, the wastefulness of society (advertising), and the lavishness of military spending.

But Singer is also correct when noting that "most gifts to charities are emotionally based. Two-thirds of donors do not research at all before giving". Starving babies on the TV around Christmas – some say Capitalism – work well for charities. While increasing donations, it does not seem to alleviate global poverty. But emotional advertising also works well for marketing as most buying is done without much thinking.

It makes people buying and donating even to charities like "the Children's Charity Fund, Inc, a small Florida-based organisation, spending 84 percent of its revenue on fundraising activities and nearly 10 percent on administration expenses, leaving just 6.1 percent for its programs". No wonder there are millions of charities.

More towards the end of his book Singer seeks to pre-empt some of the critique outlined above by emphasising, "political advocacy is an attractive option because it responds to critics who say that aid treats just the symptoms of global poverty". Perhaps this is what charities, donations, and philanthropy does – it makes the super-rich (Gates, Zuckerberg, etc.)

feel good, gives IT monopolists a positive media image while simultaneously, as the philosopher Wittgenstein once said, "leaves everything as it is" with capitalism.

In his afterword, Singer almost admits as much when saying, "as I complete this book, the most recent UNICEF estimate is that 6.3 million children will die while the number of children dying from preventable diseases has dropped from 27,000 to 17,000". Undeniably, this makes a difference not just to plain statistical numbers but also to children who do not die as well as those who still die (poverty.com) because we – collectively – chose to stand by.

But if Stephen Hawking's most recent and most dire prediction about capitalism is correct (Lynch 2015), perhaps not even Singer's capitalism accepting notion of "the most good we can do" will be able to compensate for what is ahead of us. In the end Peter Singer's book reminds one of Brazilian Roman Catholic Archbishop Hélder Câmara's (1919-1999) who once said: "When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist". Many regard Peter Singer as a saint because he will give food to the poor while never asking "why are they poor".

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For the total elimination of nuclear weapons

SPECIAL DECLARATION 21: on the commitment to advance in the multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament

The Heads of State and Governments of Latin America and the Caribbean, gathered in Quito, Ecuador, on the occasion of the 4th Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), on January 27, 2016:

1. Reaffirming our commitment to the consolidation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a "Zone of Peace" proclaimed during the Second CELAC Summit held in La Havana, Cuba, on January 29, 2014, where it was declared the continuous obligation of the States in the region to promote nuclear disarmament as a primary objective and to contribute to the complete and general disarmament as well as to strengthening trust among nations;

2. Reiterate the validity and relevancy of the CELAC Declaration on Nuclear Disarmament adopted in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on August 20, 2013; the Havana Special Declaration on Nuclear Disarmament, of January 29, 2014; as well as the CELAC Special Declaration on the urgent need of a Nuclear Weapon Free World, issued in Belén, Costa Rica, on January 29, 2015;

3. Reiterate the value and contribution to international peace and security of the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (Treaty of Tlatelolco) and its protocols, which established the first Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in a densely populated area, and we express, again, our full support to the efforts of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL). In that regard, we reaffirm the importance of collaboration and cooperation between CELAC and OPANAL, specialised body of the region, in order to articulate common positions and joint work on nuclear disarmament. We celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials – ABACC – and stress the importance and pioneering of this initiative of transparency and confidence building;

4. Identify as a legitimate interest of the non-nuclear-weapons States, that nuclear weapons States give unambiguous and legally binding guarantees to not use nor threaten to use such weapons. We urge to adopt, as soon as possible, a universal and legally binding instrument regarding negative security assurances. We urge nuclear weapons States to withdraw the interpretative declarations to Protocols I and II of the Treaty of Tlatelolco and to respect the denuclearised status of Latin America and the Caribbean;

5. Emphasise our condemnation to the enhancement of existing nuclear weapons and the development of new types of nuclear weapons, which is inconsistent with the obligation of adopting effective measures towards nuclear disarmament;

6. Recall our deep concern for the threat to humanity caused by the ongoing existence of nuclear weapons, their use or the threat of their use, due to the potential damages on health, food security, climate change, among others as well as the lack of capacity of countries and organisations to face a humanitarian catastrophe of such magnitude. We recall the results of the Conferences on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons held in Oslo, Nayarit and Vienna and we declare that such weapons must not be used again, under any circumstances. Also that the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons constitutes a violation of the United Nations Charter, a violation of International Law and International Humanitarian Law, and a crime against humanity. They are thus the only effective guarantee against the use or the threat of use of nuclear weapons is their total prohibition and elimination in a transparent, verifiable and irreversible manner and within a clearly defined time-frame. We also recall that the International Court of Justice expressed itself in this regard in its Advisory Opinion of 1996;

7. In this regard, we note that during the Community Summit held in Belén, Costa Rica, on January 28 and 29, 2015, the Heads of State



and Government of CELAC endorsed the Austrian Pledge, now the Humanitarian Pledge. We welcome its endorsement by 121 States and, therefore, CELAC urges States that have not endorsed the Humanitarian Pledge to do so;

8. We are committed with the beginning of a multilateral diplomatic process for the negotiation of a legally binding instrument for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons in a transparent, irreversible and verifiable manner, within a multilaterally agreed time-frame, as it was proposed in the Third Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, held in Vienna in December 2014. Such instrument is a necessary measure on nuclear disarmament and would fulfil the obligation of States Parties to the NPT, as stated in Article VI of the Treaty. It is the intention of the CELAC Member States to start exploring concrete and practical ways in which this instrument could be negotiated and adopted as soon as possible;

9. Regret the continued non-fulfilment of the obligations of the nuclear-armed States relating to nuclear disarmament under Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (the NPT) and the commitments of the NPT Review Conferences. We recall that the NPT does not establish any right to the indefinite possession of nuclear weapons by any state, but recognises a transitional status, subject to compliance with Article VI;

10. Reiterate, on the 20th anniversary of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the vital importance and urgency of the entry into force of that Treaty and urge those countries listed in Annex II that have not done so, to sign or ratify this important international instrument as soon as possible. We also underline the urgent need for progress on this and other effective measures of nuclear disarmament, so to give effect to Article VI of the NPT;

11. In this regard, we welcome the establishment of the Open Ended Working Group in accordance with resolution A/RES/70/33 approved on December 7 by the United Nations General Assembly, which will convene in Geneva in 2016. And we pledge to work in said forum in an active and constructive manner, in accordance with the Latin American and the Caribbean political and moral leadership on this subject. This in order to contribute towards the fulfilment of the Group's mandate to substantively address effective and concrete measures, dispositions and legal regulations that will be necessary to adopt with a view to the urgent approval of a comprehensive convention providing for the prohibition and total elimination of nuclear weapons and to establish and maintain a nuclear free world.

Quito, January 27, 2016. ✪

Symptoms of a dysfunctional system

SACP-COSATU bilateral statement

The South African Communist Party and the Confederation of South African Trade Unions senior leaderships, led by SACP general secretary comrade Blade Nzimande and COSATU president comrade Sidumo Dlamini respectively, met in a high-level bilateral on February 19. The two formations shared perspectives on the current national and international situation.

Everywhere, monopoly capital seeks to make its own crisis the crisis of the working class, of the urban and rural poor, and of a wide array of the middle strata. In South Africa the offensive against the organised working class persists as capital and its ideologues seek to respond to falling profits and sluggish growth by dismantling the hard won rights of the trade union movement.

The bilateral also identified the emergence of a parasitic bourgeoisie that seeks to entrench itself within key sectors of the state and particularly within strategic state-owned corporations as an imminent threat to our democracy, our broader movement, and indeed to the ability of our democratic state to drive forward an inclusive and sustainable growth path. Our two formations committed to exposing and fearlessly dealing with those associated with state capture through parasitism in

public sector formations and indeed within any of our own movement structures.

The SACP and COSATU delegations agreed that the situation called for a closing of ranks between our two formations, and for the intensification of joint political, ideological and mass campaigning work.

Indeed, in the current circumstances, the two working class formations within the ANC-led alliance have particular responsibilities. The bilateral agreed that, in the coming week, we will take back to our respective decision-making structures (the SACP Central Committee and COSATU Central Executive Committee) a proposal to campaign around the transformation of the financial sector and link this to the struggle for a comprehensive social security system.

Over 10 million credit-active South Africans have impaired records, being three months and more in arrears. Unsecured

credit in South Africa grew from R40 billion (AU\$3.5 b) in 2008 to R172 billion (AU\$15 b) in 2014. Much of this credit is for immediate consumption. An estimated 40 percent of loans from micro-lenders is to buy food. Fifty-five percent of consumers of non-mortgage loans earn less than R8,000 (AU\$695) per month. With mass retrenchments in the mining sector, with rising food prices, the household debt crisis will deepen. It is a crisis that is affecting the unemployed, the under-employed and casualised, unionised workers, families supporting students, and, indeed, large swathes of the so-called new black middle class; whose middle-class status is typically only possible through unsustainable indebtedness.

This situation is a symptom of a dysfunctional financial sector and of the failure to provide affordable housing and accommodation, public transport and public health-care. The situation is further aggravated by the predatory behaviour of capital with the collusion of corrupt elements in the courts and police. There is widespread abuse of garnishee orders, for instance, and of housing evictions. The struggle for a transformed, people-friendly financial sector and the review of the appropriate approach to provident fund reform are both

inextricably linked to the need for a comprehensive social security system that responds to the reality of our situation.

It is a situation in which mass unemployment is not a temporary phenomenon for many, and in which worker retirement funds and different social grants are typically not used only by the individual recipients but are needed to support extended households.

The bilateral reaffirmed that both the SACP and COSATU will be actively supporting the ANC in the forthcoming local government elections. It is critical that both the neo-liberal centre-right DA and the dangerous, demagogic EFF are roundly defeated. In expressing our support for the ANC, our two formations warned however that we will not be able to support candidates thrust upon local communities through perverted, undemocratic processes that are in flagrant defiance of the ANC's own clear nominations procedures.

We call on the ANC national leadership to ensure that where they have occurred these practices are reversed. The bilateral noted the Constitutional Court hearing earlier this month into the powers of the public protector. We expressed our full support for the Constitutional Court. ✪

Irish voters grade austerity

Conn Hallinan

What looked like a smooth path to electoral victory for the Irish government has suddenly turned rocky, and the Fine Gael-Labour coalition is scrambling to keep its majority in the 166-seat Dail. A series of missteps by Fine Gael's Taoiseach [prime minister] Enda Kenny, and a sharply critical report of the 2008 Irish "bailout," has introduced an element of volatility into the February 26 vote that may end in a victory by an interesting, if fragile, coalition of leftists and independents.

(As the *Guardian* went to press the Prime Minister had conceded voters had rejected the coalition. Independents, Sinn Fein and Fianna Fail made gains. A hung parliament may spark a new election.)

The centre-right Fine Gael and centre-left Labour Party currently hold 99 seats, but few observers see them maintaining their majority. Fine Gael has dropped from 30 percent several months ago to 26 percent today, and Labour is only polling at 9 percent. That will not translate into enough seats to control the Dail, and putting together a ruling coalition will be tricky, particularly when polls indicate that the independent bloc has picked up three percent and is now the number one vote getter. In general, the independents are left or left-leaning.

The country is in the middle of an economic "boom," but that is a relative term. Ireland is still reeling from years of European Central Bank (ECB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed austerity that doubled the rate of childhood poverty and saddled working people with onerous taxes, painful rate hikes and high unemployment. Wages have fallen 15 percent. Since 2008, almost 500,000 Irish – the majority of them young and educated – have emigrated from the country in search of jobs.

The government's trouble began in December, when torrential rains swamped parts of the country and Kenny's slow response to the disaster angered rural voters. Flood victims blamed the government for failing to invest in flood control, an infrastructure improvement that fell victim to the austerity regime.

Then the Fine Gael-Labour coalition was hit with a double whammy: a report by in-house auditors for the European Union and an Irish parliamentary study of the collapse of Irish banks from 2008 to 2010. The

The Fine Gael-Labour coalition is scrambling to keep its majority in the 166-seat Dail.



Fine Gael's Taoiseach [prime minister] Enda Kenny.

EU study found that the European Central Bank (ECB) had pressured the Irish government not to impose losses on "senior bondholders" and, instead, put the burden on taxpayers. According to the parliamentary study, the ECB threatened to withdraw emergency support for Irish banks – thus crashing the economy – if wealthy bondholders were forced to take losses. All of this came as news to most of the Irish.

The centre-right Fianna Fail Party was in power when the great crash came in 2008, a crash that had nothing to do with government spending or debt, but was instead, the result of real estate speculation by banks and financial institutions. Irish land values jumped 800 percent, which should have warned the banks that a bubble was inflating. But the bondholders, speculators and banks did nothing because they were making enormous amounts of money. When the bubble popped, Irish taxpayers were forced to pick up the US\$67 billion tab.

Fianna Fail was crushed in the 2011 election, losing two-thirds of their deputies, and Fine Gael-Labour took over.

Part of the government's problem is that for the past five years it has been saying that it had no choice but to enforce the savage austerity

regime of the ECB, but it is now trying to take credit for the recent improvement of the economy.

The coalition's mantra has been "stay the course," good times are ahead. The term the government is using is "fiscal space," or the estimated amount of money that will be available for investment if Ireland continued its economic recovery. According to Fine Gael that figure would be US\$12 billion between 2017 and 2021.

First, no one understood "fiscal space," a term used by the IMF. Even Deputy Prime Minister Joan Burton, a Labour Party leader, called it "a new kind of 'F' word" and said voters hadn't a clue what it meant. Asked to define it, Kenny said the Irish voters wouldn't understand it, a statement that managed to insult everyone. The government subsequently knocked the figure down to US\$10 billion, and the opposition said it was more like US\$8 billion.

And while Fine Gael is taking credit for the economy, critics are pointing out that it wasn't austerity, but a fall in world oil prices and a decline in the value of the euro that favours Ireland's export industry; that got the economy going.

Finally Kenny muffed a question about whether Fine Gael might consider a coalition with Fianna Fail

because the Labour Party was dropping in the polls and might not hold its 33 seats. This enraged Labour and Kenny had to mend fences and pledge that Fine Gael would never go into a government with Fianna Fail.

In short, the government is looking inept, and it is taking fire for its shift from "we had no choice in applying the austerity" to "we take all the credit for the current situation." Fintan O'Toole, the sharp-tongued columnist for the *Irish Times* and author of *Ship Of Fools*, chronicling the financial greed that led to the 2008 meltdown, wrote of the government, "If you had no power, you can claim no credit; if you did have power, you have to account for how unjustly you used it."

Behind the cover of "It's not our fault," the government cut funds for caregivers, threw people off National Health, cut support for the disabled and education, and did nothing about rising homelessness. As O'Toole points out, the improvements in the economy were because of oil prices, low interest rates and the falling euro, all "entirely outside the control of the Irish government."

In any case, the country is still deeply in debt and, while the jobless rate is no longer 15 percent, it is still just below 10 percent.

The Dail is a motley affair, with a host of small parties and a bloc of independents. Currently, the governing coalition of 99 seats consists of Fine Gael's 66 and Labour's 33. The centre-right Fianna Fail (that inched up slightly in recent polls) has 21, and the leftist Sinn Fein has 14. The latter dropped three points in the poll from 20 percent to 17 percent. Other left parties include the Social Democrats, the Anti-Austerity Party, and there is a mix of mainly leftists in the independent bloc. The centrist Greens are showing some growth, as is the small rightist Renva Party.

Right now various stripes of the left hold 41 seats, a figure that is likely to go up. To control the Dail requires 80 seats, but if the independents do well, Sinn Fein holds its own, and Labour jumps ship, an anti-austerity coalition is possible.

In the end it may be a hung parliament, with no bloc of parties able to cobble together an effective government. Kenny may double-cross Labour and join with Fianna Fail. But whoever takes over, the policies of austerity have been deeply discredited during this election and anyone who tries to "stay the course" is in for stormy weather.

People's World ✪

"We're not safe with Trident"

Zoe Streatfield

BRITAIN: Trident whistleblower William McNeilly warned last week that the nuclear weapons system was a "risk to the people and a risk to the land."

The former nuclear submariner spoke out in an interview with *Russia Today* before the huge Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) protest against Tory plans to renew Trident at a cost of £167 billion.

McNeilly said that Trident had "huge" disadvantages and argued that rather than acting as a deterrent, the nuclear submarines "create a target" for extremists. He said it was "an attraction to the people who were radicalised to carry out an attack on our

homeland that could bring the UK to its knees."

Last May McNeilly leaked a report exposing 30 safety and security failures documented over his three-month tour onboard one of Britain's Vanguard submarines. He was dishonourably discharged after the leak.

He told *Russia Today* that the media were quick to try to discredit him by claiming he was on the run and trying to learn Russian and said he feared that he would be "set up" for crimes that he didn't commit.

Giving an insight into potentially fatal security breaches at the Faslane naval base, McNeilly warned that the navy "doesn't check your bags [at Faslane]" because "its attitude is it will take too long."

He added that "all you need to get on board is a couple of fake IDs. Terrorist groups like ISIS have already shown it can produce legitimate documents," he said. "Thousands of Royal Navy IDs go missing every year as well, so it could come across one."

McNeilly said that around 180 people are onboard for patrols, warning that "they're all bringing on big bags unchecked. All it would take would be for one of them to have a bomb."

He accused the Royal Navy of being "willing to lie just to protect the image of nuclear weapons just so they can keep them" and said that disarmament "may encourage others to disarm."

McNeilly also spoke of the

staggering cost of Trident renewal, saying the government "doesn't have to make as much cuts if it cuts out Trident."

He said: "You've got floods, police, fire brigade, NHS [National Health Service], our real defences that we use every single day that people need. People don't want the boats and we don't need them. We've not needed them in the wars we've been fighting."

McNeilly called for action to protect future generations, adding "times have changed. It's a new world and they need to wake up, create real change, create a sustainable system."

Thousands of anti-war campaigners and trade unionists descended on Parliament last Saturday to call for the cancellation

of the Trident nuclear submarine system.

The CND Stop Trident demonstration was the largest anti-nuclear demonstration in a generation, as Trident renewal costs skyrocket to a staggering £167 billion (AU\$335 billion).

CND general secretary Kate Hudson said the huge public interest in the event revealed that stopping Trident was "not a minority protest" but a rational demand "from across society, from every corner of our beloved lands, from every age, faith and walk of life."

Hudson said: "We are the majority and we will prevail." *Morning Star* ✪

Problem of union members voting for Trump

Mark Gruenberg & John Wojcik

SAN DIEGO: Why do working-class people vote for Donald Trump? In the wake of the real estate billionaire's virtual sweep of the latest Republican presidential vote – his 47 percent win outdoing the next two finishers combined – in the Nevada caucuses, national union umbrella body the AFL-CIO is trying to tackle the problem.

To start, union leaders here this weekend were presented with a report that analyses the reasons white working-class people back a billionaire who really has none of their interests at heart. Those workers, once a key part of organised labour, are disillusioned with the economy, the government and politicians and many are falling hard for Trump.

The report labour leaders at the AFL-CIO executive council meeting here this week were given, titled "Fighting Right-Wing Populism," was prepared by Working America, the AFL-CIO's affiliate that reaches out to working people who agree with many of labour's economic positions but can't or won't join unions. The report focuses on white voters who are seen as susceptible to the Trump message.

Working America's success at reaching these voters, particularly in the suburbs of western Pennsylvania and Ohio, was key to winning as many as half of them voted for President Obama. Many of those voters now, however, are turning to Trump.

What Working America found, in a 1,689-voter survey of the white working class in suburbs between Cleveland and Pittsburgh is disturbing. The canvassers spent between five and 15 minutes conducting "front porch focus groups" with each voter.

While 53 percent of voters surveyed in January had yet to decide on a presidential hopeful of either party, Trump had a lead among those who

"The Trump candidacy is legitimising a hard-right agenda among working-class voters, similar to the re-emergence of right-wing political parties throughout Europe."

had already made up their minds. The blowhard billionaire got 18 percent, leading the 16 percent for Democrats Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders combined and 13 percent for other Republican presidential hopefuls.

These are the same voters who went 48.4 percent for President Obama in 2012, the report adds. But they feel Obama, like other politicians, has failed them.

"The working class constituents with whom we talk every night are fearful about their economic circumstances and prospects, angry about politicians who fail to address their concerns and sceptical about the role of government," Working America's report said.

"Candidates and organisations" – unnamed – "are exploiting these anxieties with their right-wing rhetoric

that combines populism and bigotry. This targeted strategy has our core constituency directly in its cross-hairs," it warns.

"Worry is more prevalent than bigotry on voter choice" and Trump's personality trumps his stand on issues, the report says.

The way to trump Trump, the report advocates, is extensive, time-consuming and expensive: individual one-on-one conversations with workers and their families. Some one-third of Trump supporters – ideological conservatives – will not be swayed.

But the other two-thirds of Trump backers are a combination of "fed-up voters" who are concerned with particular issues but who back Trump "because he says what he thinks" and voters who form their impressions of the business mogul from the extensive TV coverage of him, his rallies and his statements.

With Trump apparently on his way to the Republican presidential nomination, Working America recommends the best way to trump Trump is to talk about his real stands, at length. The report says that when this was done with individual voters who knew the Working America canvassers with whom they were speaking, voters began to reconsider their positions. The long and short of that is that it will take a massive ground operation of the type only labour and its allies can mount to defeat right wing populism in 2016.

"The disparity between what he says and what he actually does gives voters pause and opened the way to more nuanced conversations" with them about issues ranging from worker rights to immigration to foreign policy, the report says. And as an example of how little voters know or care about Trump on the issues, it reports only four percent list immigration – a big Trump cause – as their top issue this year.

"Fed-up and low-information voters were especially open to new information. For these voters, facts

about Trump's business practices" – including bankruptcies of four of his projects – "implications of his policy positions and questions about the effect his shoot-from-the-hip approach might have on international issues were effective in changing the conversation from simplest initial responses to a more-thoughtful framework."

Many white working-class voters, the Working America canvassers reported, used their extensive conversations "to dig deeper into their own views" and to eventually change their minds about the big mogul.

While recommending that Working America in particular and organised labour in general continue such extensive discussions with the white working class voters Trump targets,



Donald Trump.

the report did not say how much staff and resources should be put into the effort. That was a topic the council discussed behind closed doors, and staffers declined to put numbers on its plans.

Working America director Karen Nussbaum had to leave the session early and could not be reached for immediate comment.

The report warned that since Trump announced his candidacy last June, "he has opened up a vein of right-wing rhetoric that has appealed to many Republicans and to middle-of-the-road white working-class Democrats as well." The dangers of this, the report said, extend beyond the Trump candidacy. "Whether or not Trump becomes the Republican nominee, his candidacy is legitimising a hard-right agenda among working-class voters, similar to the re-emergence of right-wing political parties throughout Europe."

During the five weeks of the survey, from December 18, 2015 to January 22, 2016, canvassers reached the 1,689 voters in households with incomes of \$75,000 or less in working-class neighbourhoods outside of Cleveland and Pittsburgh.

The report ended on a note of hope, however, saying the white working-class voters could trust the Working America canvassers as honest purveyors of factual information. They're "hungry for an independent voice to deliver information and with whom they can discuss issues" Trump raises, the report says. Working America can be that voice, it advocates.

"Many who said Trump appealed to them 'because he speaks his mind' didn't see a way forward other than through a firestorm of his rhetoric. For some, however, our engagement – a combination of validation and information – gave them pause. The longer we spoke with people, the more opportunity there was to talk issues, not personalities."

And it views that task as absolutely necessary.

"Without a countervailing pull of authentic engagement about issues and a progressive vision for the future of the country, the appeal of right wing rhetoric" – including that coming from Trump – "will continue," the report warns.

People's World ☺



Region Briefs

At least ten people were killed and another 150 injured in a riot in India's northern state of Haryana. The riot entered its second day after a week-long protest. The protesters threw rocks at police, set houses, train stations and police cars on fire, as well as damaging the water supply system. The local government has proposed to negotiate with the rioters. The rioters were mainly students from a higher class of the Indian Caste System. They demanded the government abolish favourable policies toward people from lower Caste classes, as the government preserved some government work and university positions for them. The Caste System was preserved by the British colonists for the purpose of helping them to maintain India's social hierarchy under the pretext of cultural preservation. The Indian government made favourable policies to lower Caste classes after gaining its independence, but in practice the lower Caste hardly benefited from any policies or protection by any law, due to ingrained social discrimination. That riot was an inevitable outcome.

More than 400 workers at India's Tata Motor Nano plant recently went on strike last week, demanding the company rehire 28 workers who had been sacked on the pretext of discipline. Twenty-six workers went on a protest a month ago to support another two sacked workers, but the company then sacked them all and accused the workers of damaging cars in the plant. The company transferred easy-controlled workers from another plant where there are no unions.

Hundreds of Japanese students at student organisation T-nsSOWL21 went on a protest to fight against the Abe government. The students shouted "Abe administration steps down", opposing the Prime Minister's war legislation and reactionary policies. The Japanese opposition parties were also actively campaigning on the streets, trying to block Abe's Liberal Democratic Party winning the upcoming upper house parliamentary election in summer.

China's State Council has announced a set of new policies to promote the use of a New Energy Vehicle (NEV), aiming to upgrade the automobile industry and reduce pollution. According to the policy, the government will increase investment and subsidies to build more than 12,000 new battery charging stations for the NEV before 2020. It will increase the share of the NEV in the public transportation system. It also requires that more than half of the government and public institutions that purchased new vehicles must be the NEV. A total of 331,100 NEVs were sold in 2015, tripling the number from 2014.

A generator recently exploded at a power plant under construction in Indonesia's North Sumatra. The explosion killed seven workers and seriously injured six while they were working in a tunnel nearby.

Letters to the Editor
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Fight back

Re "Stop TAFE cuts! (Guardian February 24) the cuts on TAFE shouldn't be shrugged off as "normal". TAFE shouldn't be considered public as now 70 percent is left for the students to pay. If we accept that this is the norm, we are surrendering to class warfare being imposed on the everyday family and worker and we as a class need to wake up and fight back.

This also directly affects teachers and students as they won't be getting quality education and the implication for teachers is, being fully qualified, having less value than trainers who replace them, as trainers can suffer increased exploitation, paying them the minimum wage as they aren't fully qualified. The education unions rejected this action in 2013.

Cuba's education system is something to look up to: free universal education for all. Consider the amount of doctors the small island nation produces. It is so astonishing even the US president commented "the problem is we send soldiers, they send doctors". A truly educated country, Cuba fully funds its free quality education.

We can see that in the United States their totally underfunded and private-for-profit education system has taken its toll: just look at the imbalance between government spending on education compared to their military. This creates working class kids with a lack of education

and are prey for enlistment in the military.

Every year our basic necessities are being taken from us, from the attacks on our education, schools and colleges to our Medicare, our rights are being taken away.

We must fight back!

Anne Brinkley
Hobart

Free Robert Seth Hayes

Robert Seth Hayes has been incarcerated since 1973. A victim of the FBI's illegal COINTELPRO program, he has been behind bars for 43 years and is currently in his sixties. Seth has maintained an exemplary prison record throughout this time. Seth – a husband, father, grandfather, brother and friend – is nearing his tenth parole hearing in 2016.

During the 1960's and 1970's, Robert Seth Hayes was a free man,

closely involved in the nation-wide struggles for racial equality and social justice.

Seth worked in the Black Panther Party's free breakfast for children program and began dedicating his life to the betterment of Black people. His knowledge of the effects of racism on the Black community convinced him that the Black Panthers' program of community service and community self-defence was what was needed.

The FBI and numerous police departments have since apologised for the massive illegal campaign (COINTELPRO) against social movements that left dozens dead and hundreds behind bars. However, the victims of these campaigns are still incarcerated, torn away from their families and communities years later.

Seth is a man who has refused to allow his years of incarceration to embitter him. He has used it to deepen his commitment to humanity and self-betterment.

While in prison, Seth continues to work for the betterment of the community in which he lives. He has participated in programs with the NAACP, the Jaycees and other organisations and has worked as a librarian, pre-release advisor and AIDS counsellor. Whenever possible, he has taken college courses. He has been a mentor and leader to youth both inside and outside prison walls.

Seth finally received treatment for his hepatitis C this year, and no longer has hep C. However, he has developed congestive heart failure and emphysema this year. Seth also suffers from type II diabetes and high blood pressure. He has been extremely ill and has had great difficulty procuring necessary healthcare. He has needed the help of his lawyers and some state political leaders in order to get adequate treatment.

To help free Seth Google "Free Robert Seth Hayes" and sign the petitions.

Steven

Culture & Life



British Prime Minister David Cameron said Britain should be proud of the role it had played in securing the global Arms Trade Treaty.

"Illegal, immoral, indefensible"

UK government breaking the law supplying arms to Saudi Arabia, say leading lawyers

As Britain continues to supply weapons and related items to Saudi Arabia for the prosecution of the Arab kingdom's murderous military campaign against Yemen, a group of legal experts have warned that Britain's action is in breach of national, EU and international law.

The UK government is breaking national, EU and international law and policy by supplying weapons to Saudi Arabia in the context of its military intervention and bombing campaign in Yemen, according to an analysis by eminent international law experts commissioned by Amnesty International UK and Saferworld, both members of the Control Arms coalition.

The lawyers, Professor Philippe Sands QC, Professor Andrew Clapham and Blinne Ni Ghralaigh of Matrix Chambers, conclude in their comprehensive legal opinion that, on the basis of the information available, the UK government is acting in breach of its obligations arising under the Arms Trade Treaty, the EU Common Position on Arms Exports and the UK's Consolidated Criteria on arms exports by continuing to authorise transfers of weapons and related items to Saudi Arabia within the scope of those instruments, capable of being used in Yemen.

They conclude that "any authorisation by the UK of the transfer of weapons and related items to Saudi Arabia ... in circumstances where such weapons are capable of being used in the conflict in Yemen, including to support its blockade of Yemeni territory, and in circumstances where their end-use is not restricted,

would constitute a breach by the UK of its obligations under domestic, European and international law."

They also conclude that the UK government can properly be deemed to have "actual knowledge ... of the use by Saudi Arabia of weapons, including UK-supplied weapons, in attacks directed against civilians and civilian objects, in violation of international law", since at least May 2015.

The UK government asserts that it is not taking an active part in the military campaign in Yemen. However, the UK has issued more than 100 licences for arms exports to Saudi Arabia since the state began bombing Yemen in March 2015. That includes more than £1.75 billion worth of combat aircraft and bombs for the use of the Royal Saudi Air Force.

In 2013, British Prime Minister David Cameron hailed the Arms Trade Treaty as a landmark agreement that would "save lives and ease the immense human suffering caused by armed conflict around the world." He said Britain should be proud of the role it had played in securing an agreement that would make the world safer for all.

"The UK has fuelled this appalling conflict through reckless arms sales which break its own laws and the global Arms Trade Treaty it once championed," said Kate Allen, Amnesty International UK Director.

"This legal opinion confirms our long-held view that the continued sale of arms from the UK to Saudi Arabia is illegal, immoral and indefensible.

"Thousands of civilians have been killed in

Saudi Arabia-led air strikes, and there's a real risk that misery was "Made in Britain".

"The UK government must halt these arms sales immediately."

Saferworld Executive Director Paul Murphy said: "UK government policy on Yemen is in disarray. The UK gives aid to help the victims of war while illegally supplying weapons that cause their misery.

"If the UK seriously wants to sit 'at the heart of the rules-based international order' as claimed in the recent National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review, it must itself abide by the rules to which it has signed up.

"It's time the government acted as a peace broker, rather than an arms broker. The first step would be to suspend further licences and transfers of weapons to the Saudi Arabia-led coalition. With the start this week of peace talks, the UK government should help turn the ceasefire into a permanent peace by stopping its support to one side of the conflict."

Although the focus of their opinion was on the UK government's legal obligations regarding the authorisation regime for weapons transfers to Saudi Arabia, the lawyers underscored that all sides to the conflict in Yemen are accused of serious breaches of international law.

The conflict in Yemen has turned the country into one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. Civilian targets including hospitals, schools, markets, grain warehouses, ports and a displaced persons camp have been hit in air strikes by Saudi Arabia-led coalition forces.

Since the conflict escalated in mid-March 2015, more than 5,800 people have been killed and tens of thousands wounded. Two-and-a-half million have been forced to flee their homes. More than 80 percent of the population (21 million people) are in need of humanitarian aid, including two million children at risk of malnutrition.

The UK is not alone in sending arms to and supporting parties to the conflict. Several other countries have also supplied arms to the Saudi Arabia-led coalition now fighting in Yemen, with supplies to the Huthis shrouded in secrecy.

The agencies called on the government to immediately take the following steps:

- Immediately suspend arms transfers and military support to Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners which could be used to commit or facilitate further serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Yemen.
- Carry out a thorough and independent investigation into UK arms transfers and reported war crimes in Yemen.
- Make every possible diplomatic effort to help bring the conflict to an end.
- Continue to push for an end to the de facto blockade so that vital humanitarian and commercial supplies enter Yemen and reach those most in need.
- Fully implement the provisions of the Arms Trade Treaty, and encourage all other arms exporters to do the same. – Amnesty International.

Third World Resurgence ☪

Documentary review by Chauncey K Robinson

The Black Panther Party: Vanguard of the Revolution

“You can jail a revolutionary, but you can’t jail a revolution.” So said the iconic founding leader of the Black Panther Party, Huey P Newton. This year marks the Black Panthers’ 50th anniversary. Founded in Oakland, California in 1966, the black nationalist organisation came out of the growing Black Power movement to empower African Americans in the US, and across the globe, against the ills of oppression and poverty under a structurally racist system.

Newton’s quote highlights the importance of the existence of the Black Panther Party beyond one single member or leader, showing what this organisation represented for a people and the struggle against inequality. The US PBS network has aired the documentary *The Black Panther Party: Vanguard of the Revolution*. The film showcases the history of the Black Panthers in all its various shades. As one former member, Phyllis Jackson, states in the film when referring to the life and times of the Panthers, “It wasn’t easy, it was complex.”

The two-hour documentary, by director and producer Stanley Nelson, details the rich history of the party, which was its most active from 1966 to 1982. This is an ambitious task that although has its impressive moments, often leaves much to be desired, especially when it spends an extensive amount of time on a few leaders of the party, leaving a good amount unsaid about other key players. Despite this shortcoming, the rare footage, interviews by former members and written letters make for a stylistically pleasing introduction to this important organisation.

The film begins by explaining the origin of the party and why it was needed in the late ‘sixties. It sets the background by showing the racism faced by black Americans, including: rampant police brutality in cities heavily populated by African Americans, (in particular Oakland California); poverty; and an overall “rage in the streets,” (as former party chairperson Elaine Brown puts it).

It explains that the party began as a militant defence organisation, expressly exercising the Second Amendment right to bear arms.

From this highlight alone we see that history can often repeat itself, or is ongoing, as police brutality and the value of black lives in the United States is still a hot topic some 50 years later.

From there, the documentary moves chronologically, highlighting some key moments in the movement. Some of these moments include: the national fight to release Huey P Newton from prison, and how the slogan “Free Huey” came about.

We see evidence of the shoot-out involving Black Panther Party members Bobby Hutton and Eldridge Cleaver, which resulted in Hutton being the first Panther member killed by police.

We witness leader Fred Hampton’s rise as a public figure to become Chairman, and his brutal assassination at the hands of law enforcement; and also the shifting of the Party into electoral politics with the campaign of leader Bobby Seale for Oakland Mayor and leader Elaine Brown for Oakland city council.

The film also extensively talks about the infiltration of the Party by law enforcement, led by former FBI director J Edgar Hoover. The film explains, through interviews with former FBI agents and police officers, that the Black Panther party was one of the main targets of the government’s Counter Intelligence Program known as COINTELPRO. COINTELPRO was a series of covert, and at times illegal, projects conducted by the FBI aimed at discrediting and disrupting domestic political organisations.

This ties into the narrative the film presents that the fall of the Panthers was greatly orchestrated by the US government, as it was seen as a major threat to the system. It goes further to argue that although the FBI set the stage for the demise of the party, it was the clashing of large personalities within the organisation, mainly between Huey P Newton and Eldridge Cleaver, that ultimately dealt the death blow. Impressively, with examinations like this, the film does not shy away from the darker parts of the Panthers’ history and shortcomings.

Another example of this, though brief, is the documentary taking a moment to discuss the role of

women within the organisation. The film cites that at the height of the party’s popularity a majority of the rank and file members were women. Yet, as Elaine Brown notes in the film, sexism was not overcome within the organisation.

As she puts it, “We didn’t get these brothers from revolutionary Heaven,” despite the fact that gender norms were challenged in the Party by allowing the women to carry weapons.

The film itself falls short on the gender issue in that it highlights many of the major male figures of the party but does little to profile the first and only woman chairperson of the organisation, Elaine Brown herself.

Brown appears in a few snippets of recent interviews and a short highlight of her campaign for Oakland City Council, but unlike her male counterparts, her rise to leadership and contributions aren’t covered extensively, despite the fact that she was chair of the Party for three years in Newton’s absence.

Brown actually has an autobiography *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman’s Story*, which does a great job of addressing the intersectionality of being a woman and black within the revolutionary struggle. It is a shame that none of this is truly detailed in the documentary.

At its best, the film shows an organisation, mainly made up of young people initially, who wanted to stand up and fight back against the oppression they faced. It shows the contributions they made in uplifting a community through public programs and revolutionary ideals.

In the year 2016, we have the emergence of Black Lives Matter, and a society that still faces much of what the Black Panthers were fighting against in the 1960s. That is what makes this documentary so timely and powerful even if it only chips away at the tip of the iceberg regarding the complexities of the movement.

If nothing else it can encourage those that watch the film to dig deeper into the history of the party, which will forever be remembered as a key influencer in the struggle for black liberation.

People’s World ☪



Elaine Brown.

Sydney POLITICS IN THE PUB

March 3

GLOBAL REFUGEE CRISIS – MILLIONS OF PEOPLE ON THE MOVE IN EUROPE, MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA. HOW WELL IS THE WESTERN WORLD, INCLUDING AUSTRALIA, RESPONDING?

- John Dowd, President, International Commission of Jurists;
- Paul Power, CEO Refugee Council of Australia

March 10

THE RUSSIAN BEAR – A PUTIN PROBLEM? – FEAR, FIGHT OR ACCOMMODATION?

- Professor Graeme Gill, Sydney University;
- Associate Professor Ben Goldsmith, Sydney University

March 17

SURGING POKER MACHINE/GAMING INDUSTRY. PROFITS TAKEN FROM THE POCKETS OF THE POOR. WHAT NEW GOVERNMENT CONTROLS ARE NEEDED URGENTLY?

- James Robertson, Jacob Saulwick, SMH Investigative journalists

March 25

LIFE IN A SUBURBAN COAL SEAM GAS FIELD – THE HEALTH EFFECTS ON LOCAL RESIDENTS

- Holly Creenaune, Coordinator NSW Campaigns against Coal & Coal Seam Gas;
- Oan Robins, Campaigner for Lock the Gate and Our Land, Water, Future

April 7

INCLUSION & COHESION – CHALLENGES CONCERNING THE ALLEGED RADICALISATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN NSW SCHOOLS

- Jihad Dib, Labor MP for Lakemba;
- Linda O’Brien, School Social Sciences & Psychology, University of Western Sydney

April 14

WHAT LABOR SHOULD DO TO WIN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT IN 2016

- Meredith Burgman, Former Labor President NSW Legislative Assembly;
- David McKnight, Academic, Author several books on social & political issues

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Open letter to Obama

US President Barak Obama,

Dear Mr Obama,

Greetings from Australia. I am writing to you about an issue that I consider very important and very close to my heart, the situation of quite a few long-term prisoners being held in the USA.

Though I realise putting forward progressive change is hardly ever easy and I know a leader of a country, especially a big power such as the USA, must balance many things, your presidency has witnessed some significant policy changes. Among other things, I welcome your sensible and enlightened reconciliation efforts in replacing the past frozen and ineffective policy relationships with Cuba and Iran into a new stage, a real step forward in international relations.

I also read that you have instigated a reassessment of the position of the island of Puerto Rico, which is another encouraging policy shift. Whatever the risks and outcomes, the past US administration's policies were futile and untenable with new flexible thinking required.

I note that these changes included some expressions of goodwill, such as the release of prisoners held by the USA, Cuba and Iran. I think this was a very welcome, humane and compassionate gesture by all the nations involved. A similar prisoner's issue is the plight of several long-term prisoners held in the USA. These prisoners are imprisoned for their political beliefs, for their former associations or actions.

They are in prison due to their activism during the Civil and Human Rights campaigns, the anti-war and anti-apartheid movements, support of the liberation struggles in Latin America and Africa, as well as their participation in the Black/New African, Native American, Puerto Rican, Chicano and other minority's social movements in the era of the 1960s and '70s. Some people, like me believe it is apt to call these people political prisoners.

The 1960s and '70s was a time of great upheaval, as minority peoples who were marginalised, discriminated against and abused organised themselves and fought back against entrenched racism, injustice and discrimination. These oppressed and powerless people became empowered by the ideals of equal rights, fairness and freedom. They bravely imagined and demanded radical changes and they stood up and struggled for a better world.

Alarmed by these emerging movements in pursuit of their rights, the powerful and the privileged elites fought back. The demands for respect, equality and for their civil and human rights by minority peoples were often met with violent opposition by racist groups and some in the dominant power structures. Several militant organisations were the subject of harsh repression and many

leaders and hundreds of rank and file members were killed, arrested, framed or entrapped in covert operations against dissent. Using a variety of suppressive measures, brute force, deception, repressive laws, frame-ups and coercion the intelligence, police, military and paramilitary forces conducted a campaign to crush these progressive movements. One component of this strategy was the FBI's Counterintelligence Program known as COINTELPRO.

I can understand that during those turbulent times, some of those passionate, principled people seeking fundamental change could be caught up in the circumstances and feel distraught and angry. And some came to believe that the only way to defeat the powerful forces railed against them was to take direct action and fight back against an unjust system. I'm not excusing the actions that some of these people took, but trying to put it in the context of those chaotic and difficult times they were swept up in. These were highly ethical people motivated by genuine, deep concern for the welfare of other people and for the planet.

While the Vietnam War and apartheid in South Africa and many other conflicts did end and with political prisoners in a number of places released, in the USA there are still political prisoners from this era in jail.

For instance, the cases of long time activists Leonard Peltier and Oscar Lopez Rivera, both 71 years old, are among dozens of people incarcerated for actions they took as part of progressive and radical social movements. Leonard Peltier has served more than 40 years in prison and Oscar Lopez Rivera has been imprisoned for over 33 years.

Peltier is considered by the American Indian Movement to be a political prisoner and has received support from individuals and groups including Nelson Mandela, Rigoberta Menchú, Amnesty International, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, Tenzin Gyatso (the 14th Dalai Lama), Zack de la Rocha, the European Parliament, the Belgian Parliament, the Italian Parliament, the Kennedy Memorial Centre for Human Rights, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Reverend Jesse Jackson, the National Congress of the American Indians, Pete Seeger, Harry Belafonte, Jackson Browne, Danny Glover, Michael Moore, Mos Def, Rubin Hurricane Carter, Margo Thunderbird, Bill Miller and Tom Poor Bear, among others.

Those calling for Oscar Lopez Rivera's release include the Puerto Rican government, the Puerto Rican Governor, politicians from all Puerto Rican political parties, prominent Puerto Rican artists, actors, sports people, singers such as Ricky Martin, 10 Nobel Peace Prize winners, Coretta Scott King, former

President Jimmy Carter, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Amnesty International, American politicians, as well as an international coalition of human rights, religious, labour and business leaders.

Another is the case of Sundiata Acoli. A New Jersey appeals court ruled that the state had unfairly denied parole to him and that the former Black Panther and human rights activist should be released on parole. He remains in prison as New Jersey authorities appeal the decision. The 79-year-old former NASA employee has been in prison since 1973, serving 38 years, with many of those years in solitary confinement.

Many others, such as Herman Bell, Romaine Chip Fitzgerald, Mondo We Langa, Ed Poindexter, Robert Seth Hayes, Kamau Sadiki, Sekou Kambui, Jalil Muntaqim, Mutulu Shakur, Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin, Russell Maroon Shoats, have been in prison for more than 40 years. These are just some of America's longest held political prisoners. There are also the cases of Mumia Abu Jamal (61), Jaan Laaman (67), both imprisoned for over 30 years, among others.

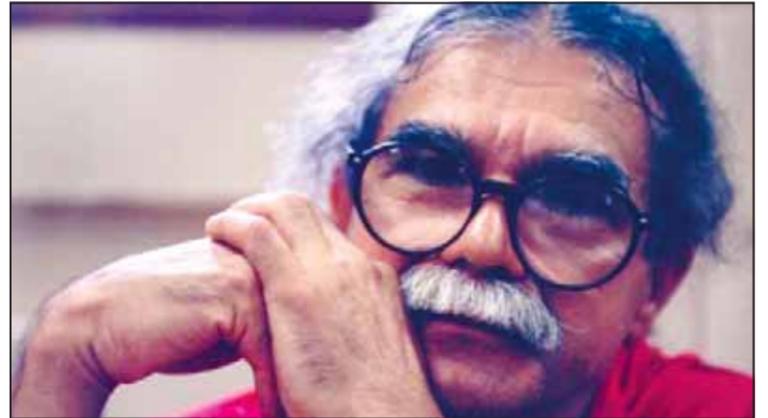
The convictions against many of those imprisoned were obtained despite these various cases lacking of evidence, or evidence withheld, violations of legal rights and other inconsistencies. These people fought for the powerless, repressed, exploited and colonised peoples and they paid a heavy price, punished with many sentenced to excessively long prison terms, held in isolation and treated in other cruel and appalling ways for their opposition to repressive and immoral policies.

Surely any debt they owed society must be fully compensated for by now. As you have done in promoting reconciliation with Cuba and Iran, I urge you to please give careful and compassionate consideration to look at these prisoners' cases and support the same spirit of reconciliation with sections of the American community that these people belong to.

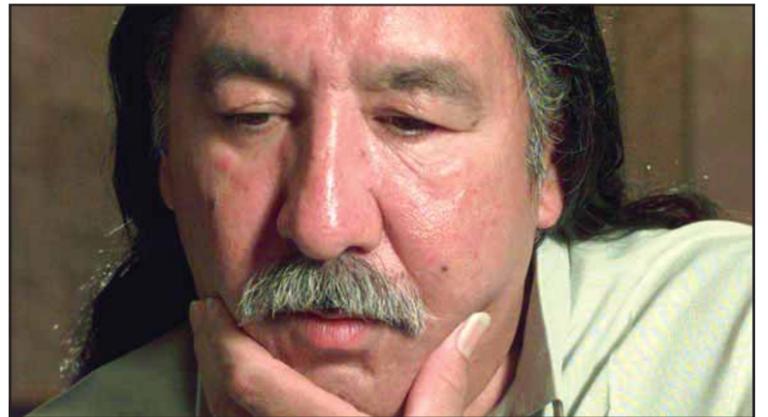
These prisoners have been separated from their loved ones and their communities for far too long and freeing them will greatly help heal, repair and end a dark and divisive era in the history of your nation. The plight of these brave, committed men and women who have dedicated so much to helping others and trying to make the world a better place is unjust and pointless. They don't deserve to rot in prison, to fade away and die there. I would implore you to pardon them and let them finally go free.

Thank you.
Yours Sincerely,

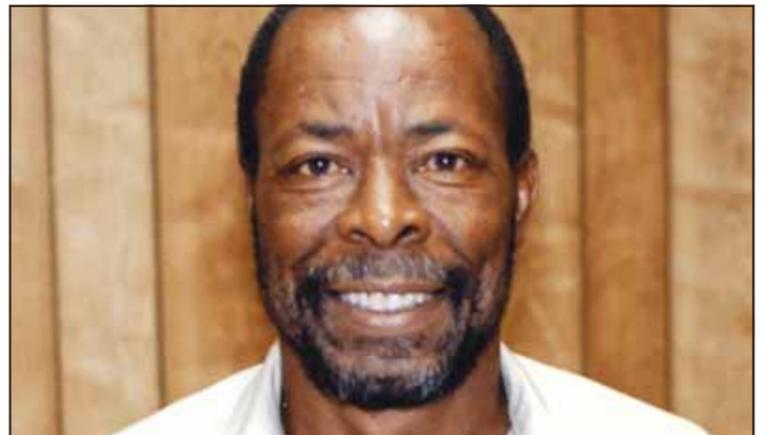
Steven Katsineris
Victoria
Australia



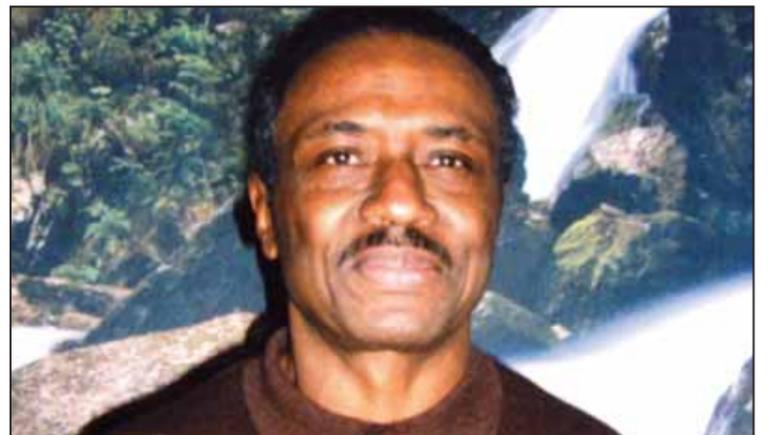
Oscar Lopez Rivera.



Leonard Peltier.



Sundiata Acoli.



Herman Bell.



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