Defusing the aged care time bomb

Peter Mac

The National Aged Care Alliance, a peak body of organisations involved in aged care, has warned that urgent action is needed to prevent the care of Australia's older citizens. The aged care system is certainly failing, with many people unable to gain access to care services, or unable to afford an appropriate level of care. Many aged care facilities are chronically under-staffed. Staff to aged person ratios appear to be low across the board. Last year the federal Productivity Commission released a report on the current situation and prospects, with regard to aged care in Australia. By 2050 the number of people over 65 will have risen from 13 to almost 25 percent of the population, and the number seeking access to home care or nursing home beds may be expected to rise in proportion.

A maze of problems

One of the biggest problems concerns the staff to resident ratios, and the lack of staff to staff. Last week newspaper columnist Adelle Horin cited the experience of an 84-year old friend who looked after her dementia-afflicted husband into a nursing home but was shocked to find that staff were almost impossible to find when needed.

Ms Horin’s friend spoke of: “residents roaming around, looking for a way out; residents left for hours unattended and with no members of staff in sight. The place looked abandoned, as if no one was in charge.”

The number of nurses was simply inadequate to look after the patients. Afterwards Ms Horin's friend transferred her husband to a more luxurious and expensive nursing home, only to find that the problem was exactly the same.

Ms Horin observed “There is no mandated staff-to-patient ratio in aged care facilities.”

Struggles have been waged to gain compulsory staff to child ratios in childcare institutions “but in aged care, apparently, staff numbers are irrelevant.” There are caring staff… but they are run off their feet. All work for slave wages and there is high turnover.

Reaching the “ageing well” objectives

The National Aged Care Alliance (NACA) claims that its programs entitled Agewell will implement all the reforms outlined in the Productivity Commission’s report, “Blueprint for Aged Care Reform.”

Specifically, it claims that the Agewell program will enable older people and their families to gain information and be assessed for their aged care needs. Aged care accommodation and services will be available to gain a place in the facility. The bond may be paid in full as a lump sum or a monthly fee, or as a combination of a part sum and part fee. As well, the service provider charges a government-regulated fee for basic care, plus a tax deductible fee based on income and in some cases an additional fee for extra services or facilities.

On the death or discharge of the resident the deposit is refunded, but only after subtraction of an administration charge. Interest earned on the deposit goes to the service provider, not the resident or their estate. Periodic fees have to be paid by the patient, and/or family members and supporters. In many cases the family home has to be sold in order to meet these costs.

Moreover, the provision of government assistance is limited to 113 care places for every 1000 people over 70. As Martin Laverty from Catholic Care remarked bluntly: “…if you are 114 or over, it’s bad luck.”

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Aged care organisations are arguing that the aged care crisis could be dealt with by a continuation of the user-pays principle to meet nursing home running costs, an increase in the current level of government subsidies for construction of new facilities, and the lifting of the current government-imposed limit on accommodation charges.

The outstretched hand

Implementing the Productivity Commission recommendations would undoubtedly require massive extra government funding, and the private sector already has its hand out for a hefty slice.

Martin Laverty from Catholic Care complained: “Current laws limit a high care resident’s accommodation charge to $32 a day. Even at the Sydney Backpackers at Central Station the daily charge is $69 per day. … an average high care bed built to contemporary standards operates at a loss of $62 each day. (This) is the reason that some providers are not building new services to meet growing demand.”

But is it? Laverty enthusiastically endorsed the bond system, which he said had facilitated the provision of services for low-care residents. What he didn’t mention is that the system has also yielded service providers with remarkably handsome returns from the interest on huge capital reserves.

NACA claims that the reforms will rectify the nursing shortage by providing decent wages for nursing staff. But will they? In a distinctly ambivalent statement, Ian Yates commented that aged care workers would be paid “fair and competitive wages”.

But who? Australian taxpayers certainly resent their taxes being used for unpatriotic initiatives, such as never-ending wars in Afghanistan and elsewhere. However, they’re overwhelmingly in favour of the Medicare levy, whose single, stated purpose is to fund universal medical care. A similar levy to be imposed on those aged 28 to 60 to fund the care needs of older Germans. A tax like this in Australia would be impossible to sell to the electorate.”

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Continued on page 4
Denis Doherty

For many years a picture of Aliens has hung in the CPA office in Sydney. Recently it was found that it was not a print but a lino cut block which was showing some signs of decay. Award winning print maker Trish Yates was called to bring her expertise to bear.

Trish was excited by the find and showed it to the other print makers in her circle. They all commented on its excellence and insisted the history should be researched and the block preserved. Trish undertook the research and the lino cut block and its mounting.

Then the research began. Lino cut prints have often been used as a working class art form as they can depict in a powerful way the emotions present in the struggle for liberation. The most famous Australian print maker of the last century was communist Noel Counihan. The CPA has some prints of his Eureka study.

The research revealed a most significant and precious gem. The lino cut block was carved by artist Len Gale, a life long Marxist and member of the Socialist Party of Australia (SPA) (NSW). It shows the hands of a pakeha (white Kiwi) and a Maori clasped together in struggle. It was created during the 1951 New Zealand waterfront lockout when Len was involved as part of the underground media group and was used for banners and placards.

It was given to the CPA during its 100th anniversary of Eureka – reprinted by the CPA for 150th anniversary (2004).

Trish Yates used the block to print three copies of the image. They are hand printed on acid free Japanese kozo paper which means they will not yellow.

Trish mounted and framed the lino cut for the CPA where it sits proudly in a prominent part of the party office. This is a precious piece of working class history and the party is proud to be its owner.

The other two have also been mounted and framed. One is currently a prize in the May Day Guessing Competition 2012.

The Party would like to thank Trish Yates for her advice and greater spend on the artwork he produced for the 100th anniversary of Eureka – reprinted by the CPA for 150th anniversary (2004).

The CPA welcomes the new coalition and supports its determination to resist the new focus of US imperialism on our region, the militaristic stance of the Australian government and its subservience to the US, and the excessive military spending of the Australian government, making Australia the sixth largest military spender in the world.
Bad management to blame for company collapse

The former director of a Victorian automotive component manufacturer should look in the mirror instead of blaming workers for the company’s collapse.

More than 100 Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union (AMWU) members were stood down without pay when APV Automotive Components, from Coburg in Melbourne’s north, entered administration.

AMWU Victorian Vehicle Division secretary, Paul Difelice, said that workers who recently negotiated to keep their redundancy provisions were not the cause of APV’s collapse, as claimed by former managing director, Harry Hinckling.

“I find it very offensive my members are being blamed for the collapse of APV. When the company was taken over he [director Harry Hinckling] knew what the liabilities were.”

Hinckling has publicly argued a company plan to seek voluntary redundancies was rejected by the workers. However Mr Difelice accused the company’s directors of poor management and being unwilling to cooperate.

“We haven’t had access to their financials and for many years we’ve tried to sit down with the company and they’ve continually refused to work with us.

“The company could have put any terms for voluntary redundancies to their workers but instead they’ve tried to get an across-the-board reduction in entitlements.

“In the end it came back to a position of trust between the employees and Harry Hinckling and the manager out there.”

Meanwhile AMWU delegate, Marco Randone, who has worked at APV for 18 years, said many of his workmates had phoned him in tears.

“I’ve worked there since I left school. This is the only job I have ever had.

“I’m shattered. I was on parental leave,” he said.

“My wife just had our third daughter two weeks ago, and I have a $400,000 mortgage to pay. How am I going to do that?”
Terminal impacts

Summary of 4th Coal Terminal Impacts

Port Waratah Coal Service’s 4th Coal Terminal (T4) is a proposal for a massive new terminal in Newcastle, NSW. If approved, T4 would allow an additional 120 million tonnes per annum of coal to be shipped out of Newcastle. This would boost existing coal export capacity by 84 percent, in what is already the world’s biggest coal port.

Impacts on habitat, endangered and threatened species, and migratory birds

An area within the 4th terminal site is within a National Park. National Park lands must not be included in the proposed development. • The 312 hectare project site includes 91 hectares of valuable native vegetation and 24 hectares of open water habitat. The project site is home to 18.8 hectares of saltmarsh (an endangered ecological community under the Threatened Species Conservation Act (TSC)), 28.9 hectares of mangrove and 27.3 hectares of freshwater wetland, 4 hectares of which are listed as an endangered community under the TSC Act.

• Loss of habitat for 23 threatened fauna species including the Australian bittern (listed under the EPBC Act), and the Green and Golden Bell frog (also listed as vulnerable under the EPBC Act).

• Loss of habitat and disruption to an ecologically significant proportion of the population of four migratory shorebird species listed under international conservation conventions. At least 11 species of migratory birds recognised by international treaties rely on the habitat of Deep Pond and its proximity to the RAMSAR listed wetlands.

• Offsets cannot hope to compensate for loss of habitat at the site. The proposed offset site at Ellalong has already been identified as critical for conservation in its own right. Furthermore, the offset site fails to compensate for the loss of Deep Pond because it is over 50 kilometres away from Kooragang Island. Deep Pond is critical because it provides key foraging and roosting habitat due to its proximity to RAMSAR listed wetlands in the Hunter estuary.

• Deep Pond is the only freshwater drought refuge in the Lower Hunter Estuary system. It is relied upon by at least 15 species of waterfowl, three of which are listed as threatened under the TSC Act.

• Because of the valuable habitat that Deep Pond provides to numerous threatened and protected species and its critical function to the nearby RAMSAR listed wetlands, Deep Pond should be protected and its management should be coordinated with the ongoing conservation efforts in the Hunter Estuary.

Air quality

• The Environmental Assessment of T4 downplays impacts on air quality stating: “The T4 project is not expected to result in any criterion exceedances on any additional days of the year.” It defies belief that extra, uncovered coal stockpiles will not increase the amount of coal dust effecting Newcastle suburbs.

• The EA only considers the impact of increased coal train movements on residences within 20 metres of the rail line. However, the impacts of coal dust are likely to extend far beyond this area.

• The current guidelines are outdated and fail to account for the findings of recent health studies which demonstrate that total suspended particles (coal dust) are a greater detriment to human health than when the T4 guidelines were put in place. The precautionary principle should be applied to potential health impacts of the T4 proposal. Approval should not be allowed until a more conclusive health and air quality study is undertaken for the Newcastle LGA.

Dredging and Water Pollution

• There is no plan to fully remediate the heavily contaminated T4 site. The proposal will therefore cause the leaching of existing toxic material into ground water and surrounding surface waters via a “squeezing effect”. The result will be a positive feedback loop for both the neighbouring (National Park and RAMSAR listed) wetlands and the Hunter Estuary.

• An increase in shipping will negatively impact harbour water quality with sediment disturbance (some of it contaminated), release of bolge water, more antifouling agents, chemicals and oil spills, and dumping of debris. It will also reduce the number of harbour users and increase the risk of introduced species.

• The T4 proposal would realign the runways of the South Arm of the Hunter River and construction of a “turning circle” or “swinging basin” to accommodate the world’s largest ships. The proposal also requires dredging of the South Arm of the river from its natural depth of 2.4 metres to 16.2 metres with 17.8 metres deep shipping berths along each bank.

• The dredging will have massive impacts including the removal of aquatic habitats and impacts on estuarine habitats via changes to tidal hydrodynamics and salinity. Also, it has the potential of creating stagnant deep holes, altering currents, causing rivered erosion and releasing pollutants that are currently trapped within the bottom sediments.

• The area that will be dredged has changed significantly after the state government gave the dredging approval. PWCS should apply for a new license for dredging, given that the proposal for dredging has changed significantly.

Social and economic impacts on Newcastle and Lower Hunter

• After construction, T4 will provide no additional long-term employment. Rather, T4 is likely to result in the loss of other economic activities in the port, such as tourism, fishing and other shipping.

• T4 would facilitate an increase of at least 41 additional coal trains per day through the suburbs of Maitland and into Newcastle. This would increase congestion on the rail lines as well as increasing noise and dust.

• T4 will increase noise and light pollution. Noise, vibrations and light pollution from onsite operations will occur 24 hours a day, 7 days per week.

• T4 will cause increased traffic congestion during the construction period.

• T4 is likely to have impacts on commercial fishing due to the loss of habitat and the increased contamination caused by the dredging.

Impacts of increased coal mining in NSW

• When completed, T4 would facilitate the development of at least 15 more large coal mines in the Hunter Valley and Liverpool Plains.

• The costs of more mining to the state include: greenhouse gas generation at mines, loss of agricultural lands, blasting, noise, air quality, loss of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage, visual impacts, loss and pollution of surface water and groundwater, damage to aquatic ecology, flora and fauna loss.

• Research shows the health impacts of coal activity are estimated to be around $2.6 billion dollars per year. Pollution from coal affects all major body organ systems and contributes to the leading causes of morbidity and mortality. In the Hunter Valley this impact is all the more prevalent due to the close proximity to communities of coal mining, transport and infrastructure. The 4th terminal project would increase negative health impacts in the region. For this reason alone, the negative contribution of the project far outweighs any merits.

• T4 will mean 22 more coal ships would visit Newcastle every week, pushing out other port users.

• T4 would provide coal for the equivalent of 15 more large power stations around the world, generating an extra 288 million tonnes of carbon dioxide per year and fuelling the global climate crisis.

• To make a submission to the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure go to majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au and in the “Search Projects” field enter “Port Waratah”. Fill out the submissions form and don’t forget to select the option “I object to it” in the drop-down box.

Defusing the aged care time bomb

Continued from page 1

Moreover, there is no reason why nursing homes – or aged care centres – should not be subject to the same variety of accreditation services, as the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme has recommended – could not be government-run. After all, governments manage public transport and other services – not to mention superannuation schemes that have outperformed private schemes, many of which suffered massive losses during the recent financial crisis.

The fundamental reason for the current crisis is that aged care is dominated by the private sector, whose values and practices have been adopted by many of the church-run organisations.

Moreover, governments have not tackled the chronic lack of the aged care system, which include lengthy prior notification by the government to the institution concerned of accreditation inspections.

As Adelle Horin commented: “Providers might argue that the current system is failing because of lack of funds. But enriching the providers in a fixed-up market is no panacea – not without more transparency, a better accreditation system, including public reporting on unannounced (inspection) visits, and better staffing”.

The Productivity Commission’s objectives would certainly require extremely tight control by government over the profit-motivated firms that currently dominate the aged care industry. But it would be better still to begin to replace the current arrangements with a new Medicare-style aged care regime dedicated to providing a first class service for our older fellow-countrymen. They deserve it, and so do we.
Aboriginal Elders in northern New South Wales say they’ll mobilise community support for their anti-mining messue, after meeting with the statewide land body over its hopes to explore the region for gas and petroleum.

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) sparked a flurry of protests when it announced last month that it had applied to the state government for three exploration licences; one covering a 368,340 square kilometre area near White Cliffs, one covering a 47,040 square kilometre area south south-west of Grafton, and a third covering a 1,330 square kilometre area outside Murwillumbah.

The umbrella body for more than 100 local Aboriginal land councils throughout the state, NSWALC conceded the applications represented “a paradigm shift” in its activities but said they had the potential, if granted, to greatly enhance the economic fortunes of Aboriginal people in those areas.

It is negotiating with a major developer who it has so far declined to name.

A fortnight ago, NSWALC chief executive Geoff Scott fronted a meeting in Lismore to hear Elders and other community representatives vent their frustration at not having been consulted before the applications were lodged, and the potential for any eventual related mining activity to involve extraction of coal seam gas (CSG) via fracking.

A major community-driven campaign has continued to draw attention to the negative impacts of the controversial mining of Kyogle and this whole district are opposed to the NSWALC’s attempts to involve extraction of coal seam gas and mining,” she said.

However, he said NSWALC wanted to hear what local community members had to say on the subject and they would be listened to.

Mr Nagas said she had invited organisers of a local anti-CSG group to come to Murwillumbah to meet with community members soon after the announcement.

“This is both an environmental and cultural issue; they want to come here and discuss what happens to the land, but I’m still against it,” he said.

Mr Scott told the Koori Mail there was little opportunity to consult communities before lodging the applications, literally a window of just a few hours.

However, he said NSWALC wanted to hear what local community members had to say on the subject and they would be listened to.

Ms Nagas said she had invited organisers of a local anti-CSG group to her local Gugubba land council at Kyogle, “so they can further educate my people as to why we have to stand against this.”

“I’m doing this for our young people. They need to learn now about environmental destruction before it’s too late,” she said.

Don’t forget to get those Guardian tins sent in. They should be cut open and the money collected sent into the party for The Guardian. If you live near the party office, drop the tin off with your name on it and we will count it and acknowledge it in the Press Fund. If you cannot visit the party office convert the contents of the tin into a cheque made out to The Guardian but mention it is from a Guardian tin.

ACTU President Ged Kearney has welcomed the passage by Parliament of two bills to improve the pay and conditions of truck drivers and clothing outworkers. “The two pieces of legislation which have been passed in Canberra... highlight the plight of insecure work, which now affects 40 percent of the entire Australian workforce”, Ms Kearney said. “Truck drivers and clothing outworkers endure some of the worst effects of insecure work, with the fear they will not have a job in the morning prompting them to work long hours, risk their safety and sacrifice valuable time outside work just to make a living... Many home-based outworkers work 12-hour days or longer, for just $5 an hour – less than one third the minimum wage – sewing items of clothes that earn distributors and retailers huge profits”, Ms Kearney said.

The NSW electricity agency TransGrid has admitted its contractors sprayed herbicide across the Kosciusko National Park killing thousands of alpine plants. The agency did not report the herbicide use to government agencies. National Parks and Wildlife Service staff spotted dead vegetation in December and there is an ongoing investigation into the incident and the possible remediation proposals.
Bob Treasure

Maximilien Robespierre is a name still reviled in polite French society today. It is disconcerting to imagine him, or indeed the revolution in which he was so famously identified, in contemporary France. Many oh his contemporaries and his legacy are not so clear. He was the most famous figure of French revolutionary struggle, but few Marxists embrace him. Even now, as the new wave of expulsion at the hands of a "socialist" candidate, many rightists and "moderates" live in dread of a revival of rhetoric in order to develop his speaking skills, which Robespierre was supposed to have inspired.

The Monarchy cracks

Maximilien Robespierre was born in 1758 in the northern border city of Arras. His family was associated with legal practice and his grandparents were reasonably well off, but his father, a notary, died when Robespierre was six. The father promptly disapproved of Maximilien’s education and his children were farmed out to other relatives. Maximilien came to appreciate the critical philosophy of the age, and with his declining status, he could see his own advantages being flattered away.

Despite scrupling to get by, Robespierre graduated first in his class in the local school and won a scholarship to the elite College Louis-le-Grand in Paris, once recently run by the Jesuits. In 1762, Louis XIV expelled the "subversive" Jesuits, allowing the University of Paris (the Sorbonne) to take over the running of the college and reinvent it for scholarship students “whose means do not allow them to enjoy the same advantages as others”. Some early associates included Raynal, Diderot, Voltaire, and the Marquis de Sade, while some of Robespierre's classmates were also high profile revolutionaries: Freron, Desmoulins, Petion. A unique curriculum, indeed.

JJ Rousseau

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Rousseau’s famous saying: “Man is born free, but everywhere is in chains”, framed the radical districts of Paris into “sections” where they could be observed and the founding democracy could remain under the watchful eye of the people.

Robespierre – Friend of the Sans Culottes

As the power of the common people of Paris grew, so too did Robespierre’s profile. At first, the uppity bourgeois found themselves leading a revolution – yet still these were masons, plasterers, coach-drivers, smithies, washer-women, labourers, seamstresses, candle-makers, hair dressers. They comprised “respectable” trades such as tailoring, as well as unseemly ones such as prostitution.

Politically the Sans Culottes were the vanguard of the revolution. Being the poorer proletariat, they had an incentive for launching into daring new policy that provided greater liberty and equality for themselves. They could read, as is evidenced by the popular wildness of the pro-Sans Culotte papers such as "Marat’s L’ami du Peuple and Hebert’s Le Pere Duchese as well as Robespierre’s more high-brow publication: La Defenseur de la Constitution.

Despite being short on rhetoric, they attended debates in the Cordeliers, Jacobins and Feuilleins club and when they could, they would attend meetings in the Jacobins. They would also depend upon the gendarmes to protect their city for their survival. The staple of their diet was bread. The old regime had failed to guarantee a reliable supply of bread to the capital, and its price continued to fluctuate wildly.

This issue was a major stimulant to the formation of the Cordeliers, Jacobins and Feuilleins club and when they could, they would attend meetings in the Jacobins. They would also depend upon the gendarmes to protect their city for their survival. The staple of their diet was bread. The old regime had failed to guarantee a reliable supply of bread to the capital, and its price continued to fluctuate wildly.

The Jacobins

“The Jacobins” have often been referred to in the sense of a modern political party. They were the most important group within the French National Assembly who formed the National Assembly elected in 1792; and the Jacobin club formed when the National Assembly moved to Paris. The “radical” deputies who wanted to defend the revolution rejected some large rooms in a Dominican monastery near the Assembly meeting hall – the monks were called the Jacobins because their building revealed in its very structure: it cost 12 livres a day, after the debates and resolutions of the Assembly, the deputies would report and make their position known. Observers, including many Sans Culottes, came to the club after work to boo the heretics and cheer their heroes.

Robespierre encouraged the spread of Jacobin Clubs across France, and tried to ensure that his speeches were printed and distributed throughout the country. In this way, Robespierre sought to spread the radicalism of Paris to the Nation and stave off counter revolution – his greatest fear.

The class nature of the Jacobin Club was revealed in its very structure: it cost 12 livres to join and 24 livres annual subscription, a lot of money in those days (by contrast, Danton’s Cordeliers Club cost a penny a month to join), and it was restricted to males. Women and Sans Culottes could sit in the galleries surrounding the seated members and the speaking tribune and express their position – but they could not speak in any formal sense.

The Bourgeoisie fractures 1791–1794

In the years following 1791 representatives of the bourgeoisie found themselves leading a revolutionary government. As the nation, and especially Paris, became radicalised the bourgeoisie leadership groped for its most powerful comfort zone in the new emerging society. Scarr details well the atmosphere as successive factions: moderates, "Girondis", "Bantonistes", "Jacobins" and "Enrages" struggled for supremacy.

The French masses, confronted with issues such as the flight and execution of the King, the formation of a new Republic, the conflict between Church and State, the declaration of war on the tyrants of Europe and its dreadful rebound, as well as counter-revolution, drove the momentum of new policy, new extremes, and new measures.

Thorough, Robespierre, the "incomparable", remained loyal to the principles of Rousseau and natural justice, and grew in prominence as a prominent ally of the Sans Culottes.
WFTU International Campaign for Palestine

For the immediate release of all political prisoners held in Israeli jails

When it came to the execution of the King, the man who a year before had argued for the abolition of the death penalty now sought justice swift and clear for Louis’ treachery: execution by guillotine. He judged it to be the popular will. When it came to war, Robespierre (in the minority) fought the Girondin faction to stop it, but when the conflict was declared and turned into debacle, he urged complete and utter commitment to victory: the arming of the common people, with pikes if necessary: “total war”, in fact.

Throughout the foreign invasion and counter-revolution, Robespierre argued an iron-clad logic: one cannot expect the common foot soldier at the front to risk their lives for a cause that was not pure, that did not guarantee rights, justice, equality, and total support. Any profiteering, any speculation, any soft dealing with the enemy, in short, any corruption would corrode the army’s morale and undermine the revolution.

During even the most desperate and dangerous times of 1793-94, however, Robespierre maintained his bourgeois appearance: his powdered wig, his natty blue satin vest and blue coat, his stockinged legwear, though he only maintained a dual change of the outfit. He remained rudely steadfast in not accepting money or gifts for anything whatsoever – even if offered in the most trivial or innocent situation. He continued to rent his room in a loyal cabinetmaker’s house near the Convention hall and ate simply. After an early affair, he denied the company of women.

Meanwhile, many of his compatriots in the government lived high on the hog, in extravagant mansions and finery. Danton was a passionate womaniser and people like Petion, the mayor of Paris, entertained luxuriously, despite the hardships being suffered across the country.

In the bitter struggle between the federalist Girondins and Paris-central Jacobins, the former attempted to prise Sans Culotte support away from Robespierre by accusing him of “tyranny”. Their gambit failed, and several thus came to face their fate on the scaffold.

Next week: The Guillotine

Dear Colleagues,

Today in Israeli prisons there are 4,600 Palestinians imprisoned militant. Of these:

- 560 have been convicted to life imprisonment by Israeli courts.
- 220 are children.
- 24 are Members of the Parliament.
- 204 prisoners have died in Israeli prisons.

Among the prisoners there are great Palestinians and Arab militants who have dedicated their lives to the struggle of the Palestinian People to get their own independent homeland.

The World Federation of Trade Unions since the first day of its establishment is firmly on the side of the Palestinian People. April 17 is the International Day of Action for Palestinian people for the release of all prisoners in Israeli jails. All of those militants kept illegally and undemocratically by the imperialists and their organs.

For years now the international community has been limited to words. It shows indifference. It allows the government of Israel to kill, to imprison, and to terrorise the people of the region.

The WFTU in a joint meeting with the General Union of Palestinian Women held recently in Ramallah decided to call upon all our affiliates and friends to act on April 17. To submit statements to the Israeli embassies in their countries, as well as international organisations and to demand the immediate release of all the militants from Israeli prisons.

We ask you all to act. To express active solidarity calling for:

- The immediate lifting of the unfair and inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip, the withdrawal of the Israeli army from all territories occupied there since 1967, including the Golan Height and the Shebba area of southern Lebanon.
- The demolition of the racist wall.
- The creation of an independent, democratic and truly free Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital and the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homeland.
- The international community to undertake its responsibilities and to implement all decisions of the United Nations and the Security Council!

Send your protest letters, photos and statements to the following email addresses:

- mohammad_yahya2007@yahoo.com
- mohiqn62@gmail.com,
- international@wftucentral.org
- UN Human Rights Council: civilsociety@ohchr.org
- Israeli Foreign Minister: sar@mfa.gov.il
- High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy: COMM-SPP-HRVP-ASHTD@ec.europa.eu

Palestinian girls shows photos of relatives held in Israeli jails.
Roman workers defy pension assault

Tony Gill
Workers took to Rome’s streets last week to tell the government exactly what they think of plans to strip hundreds of thousands of Italians of their pay and pensions. The protest is the latest in a series of campaigns raised by the retired-age, leaving “younger” retirees without pensions.

Mauro Neri, director-general of state-backed pension fund INPS, told MPs that the reckoned 130,000 people were in a worse position.

Labour Minister Elsa Fornero now claims only 65,000 people are without pay or pension, even though she said that the number at the time was as high as 350,000.

The CGIL, UIL and UTT trade union confederations accused the government of fiddling the figures to play down the extent of the problem. CGIL general secretary Susanna Camusso told marchers in the capital: “The government must have the courage to say how many people have retired.”

“People who have generously chosen to leave the workplace to make room for the young – today the government says we do not know how many are in the situation – are people who are coming to their end.”

“We are fed up of hearing people who have worked many years and then were forced to leave their jobs because of the crisis described as ‘private and personal.’”

“If the government does not immediately open discussions with us, it knows that we will be in the streets again. We will not let the workers down.”

ILO condemns detention of Ivory Coast unionist

The International Labour Organisation has called on the government of Ivory Coast to release jailed union leader Basile Mahan Gahé in the latest report of the ILO’s Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations. The Committee referred to Basile Gahé’s April 2011 abduction, torture and detention as “a grave violation of the principle of freedom of association”, adding that “a genuinely free and independent trade union movement can develop only if fundamental human rights are respected.”

Furthermore, the report notes, “The guarantees set out in international labour conventions, particularly those relating to freedom of association, can be effective only if the civil and political rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, are genuinely recognised.”

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights require companies to take stock of the human rights risks in their supply chains and to engage in corrective action. No cocoa trader or confectionery maker can say they didn’t know that the government they deal with is arbitrarily and harshly imprisoning a national trade union leader. What are they doing about it? Amnesty International considers Basile Mahan Gahé a prisoner of conscience. Following an ILO mission in June 2011, absurd charges were announced – sedition, insurrectionary activity etc – and he was transferred from Abidjan to his cell in Boundiali. He has not been brought to trial, he is isolated from his family, colleagues, lawyers and international visitors and the government has failed to respond to international calls for his freedom. The ILO has now formally added its voice to these international protests.

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Roman workers defy pension assault

Tony Gill
Workers took to Rome’s streets last week to tell the government exactly what they think of plans to strip hundreds of thousands of Italians of their pay and pensions. The protest is the latest in a series of campaigns raised by the retired-age, leaving “younger” retirees without pensions.

Mauro Neri, director-general of state-backed pension fund INPS, told MPs that the reckoned 130,000 people were in a worse position.

Labour Minister Elsa Fornero now claims only 65,000 people are without pay or pension, even though she said that the number at the time was as high as 350,000.

The CGIL, UIL and UTT trade union confederations accused the government of fiddling the figures to play down the extent of the problem. CGIL general secretary Susanna Camusso told marchers in the capital: “The government must have the courage to say how many people have retired.”

“People who have generously chosen to leave the workplace to make room for the young – today the government says we do not know how many are in the situation – are people who are coming to their end.”

“We are fed up of hearing people who have worked many years and then were forced to leave their jobs because of the crisis described as ‘private and personal.’”

“If the government does not immediately open discussions with us, it knows that we will be in the streets again. We will not let the workers down.”

ILO condemns detention of Ivory Coast unionist

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**Syrian insurgents violate ceasefire**

Stephen Vendler

On day one, insurgents violated the ceasefire calm. Blame Washington’s dirty hands. It manipulates everything going on.

It won’t tolerate peace and stability. Regime change plans need violence blamed on Assad. That’s imperialism’s ugly face. Behind it lurks a menace too threatening to ignore.

International, constitutional, and US statute laws are spurned. Independent regimes are toppled. War is policy. America is no democracy. It’s a killing machine, a police state.

On April 12, Obama and French President Francois Hollande again called for a peaceful solution in Syria. They warned: “We won’t intervene our support for the opposition.”

Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel urge “more resolve” action.

On April 13, The New York Times headlined, “Cease-Fire Tested by Reports of Syria Clashes,” saying: “Reports of deadly clashes were reported.”

Pro-West “activists” claim violence wrecked areas “under various martial law, tank deployments, armed checkpoints and rooftop snipers.”

In fact, we never see hyperbole. On issues mattering most, managed news substitutes for truth and full disclosure. Protection Syrians need is denounced. Imagine how out-of-control things would be without it.

Consider: “The Annan plan is not a menu of options. There is a six-point plan in the open presented by Annan. I do not think this six-point plan has been implemented. There is nothing like this out there.”

One day today’s Zaman article headlined, “Turkish opposition slams government over Syria warmongering,” saying:

“Opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) leader, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, said ‘The Turkish Republic has never done as much warmongering as it has today.’

‘He rejects Syrian intervention. He’s against interfering in the internal affairs of other nations.

He accused Erdogan of “beating the war drum”. He added that Erdogan has been working with other regional mediators, not peace. They’re responsible for violent incidents. He accused so-called Friends of Syria of plotting “to overthrow” the government.

Arming and funding insurgents reveals their real agenda. Syria is “a victim of diplomatic, political, and terrorist aggression,” and terrorist aggression.

He also says nations sceptical about Syria’s resolve want conflict, not peace. They’re responsible for violent incidents. He accused so-called Friends of Syria of plotting to overthrow the government.

In this light, the appointment of the anti-corruption leader of Kosovo engaged in corruption is not surprising.

**Kosovo administration bogged down in crime**

Anton Kuklov

In Kosovo, the chief prosecutor of the anti-corruption agency of the area Nazmi Mustafi was arrested on suspicion of corruption. The arrest was backed by former head of the so-called “Kosovo Liberation Army”.

The absurdity of the situation is not only the fact that he took bribes, and did so blantly that

point fingers the wrong way. Assad is blamed for insurgent violence. From Geneva, Ban said “The onus is on the government of Syria to prove that their words will be matched by their deeds at this time.”

In fact, Washington plans more violence. Eruptions will follow imperial plans. Reality will replace optimism. Assad, of course, will be blamed.

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In fact, Washington plans more violence. Eruptions will follow imperial plans. Reality will replace optimism. Assad, of course, will be blamed.
The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has previously called on the US government to take action over the glaring racial inequalities exemplified in the country’s prison system, but instead of improving, there has been an increase in the prison population of the poor and people of colour.

Capitalism in the US cannot cure a problem of which it is not only the cause but which it constantly renews.

**The energy wars**

Meanwhile, imperialism, especially US imperialism, continues its efforts to gain control over the world’s energy resources. From Iraq to the Horn of Africa, Libya to Nigeria, oil-rich countries are being helped to undertake “regime change” and to rebuild their oil exports to comply with US and EU preferences.

Apart from jockeying among themselves for the chance to dominate global energy, the imperialists are also trying to do with events in 2012 which see Syria at the forefront of defeating imperialism. He claims Syria, and Iran, are repressive. So says who? The imperialist-murdering mafia, or the 5th-column Quislings who go under the name of “Free Syrian Army” and are treated like royalty by imperialists like the US, UK, and Turkey? Or is it the mercenary stooges of the Arab League? A year ago we had the exact same situation in Libya. Imperialism owned Libya, murdered at least 50,000 people, but the social chauvinists told us that if we did not give support to evil Gaddafi, he will impose imperialist meddling, don’t support the Libyan government’s “anti-imperialist struggle, let’s just hope and pray a magical ‘leftist’ force can appear and fix tyrant Gaddafi and imperialist interference”.

Twelve months later, we hear the same nonsense towards Syria! Now, Libya is in the hands of a pack of bloodthirsty, racist, medieval thugs. Are we still waiting for the emergence of “leftist, progressive forces” to be the third road? If we fail to support Assad’s anti-imperialist regime, soon Syria will be in the hands of CIA-Quisling gangsters like the “Free Syrian Army”.

The CPA is a Marxist-Leninist party, thus it is our fundamental duty to support the anti-imperialist government led by President Assad. Mr. Katsiris states that Syria inspected and opposed the USA and other western i.e., imperialist, powers and supported the Palestinian resistance in the face of resistance doesn’t change [their supposed] tyranny”. On the contrary! Their battle against imperialism (like Libya’s) DOES make a fundamental difference! Because Assad doesn’t talk about socialism or ending capitalism, we mustn’t support him? Let comrade Lenin answer that: “Whoever expects a ‘pure’ revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip service to revolution without understanding what revolution is”. And Syria’s stance IS a revolutionary fight against imperialism.

The CPA must climb down off the fence of “third-pathism”.

**Mark Window SA**

**Plane hypocrites**

With the overthrow of Libya, one BBC propagandist in an attempt to demonise Gaddafi did a segment on his decadent wealth. The same media report that France has asked Russia, Oman and the United Arab Emirates to mediate to obtain their agents’ release. The capture puts France on the back foot: to acknowledge that the agents are in fact combatants with POW status is to acknowledge that what everyone already knows but politely does not mention: that France (and its NATO allies) are waging an undeclared war against Syria, a UN member state.

If France washes its hands of them, there is no telling what they might do – or say – in return for being abandoned by their government. Australians might remember when French agents let off a bomb that sank the Rainbow Warrior in Auckland harbour in July 1985, killing Fernando Pereira, a photographer, who died after the sinking ship. The ship was going to take part in protests against French nuclear tests in the Pacific.

Two of the perpetrators were caught and sentenced to prison. The French government, however, did not release them, nor was the ship returned to France. From this, they were received as heroes by the Right and they certainly never saw the inside of a French prison.

In company with several Sydney comrades, I subsequently met the French agent who negotiated their release. A nice chap, married to a member of the French CP, he revealed that the French government thought sufficiently well of his errors on their murderous agents’ behalf that they gave him the Legion of Honour for it. Gives a whole new meaning to the word “honour”, don’t you think?

NATO, meanwhile, has imposed economic sanctions on Syria while weeping crocodile tears for the plight of the Syrian people, supposedly crushed underfoot by the Syrian army. At the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Syria’s Ambassador Faysal Al-Hamwi denounced the NATO bloc for “inciting sectarianism” and fomenting civil war by arming the opposition in his country. He pointed out that the economic sanctions imposed by some NATO countries against Syria hindered the procurement of medicine, vaccine, food and fuel. “Unilateral economic sanctions are the ugliest violations of human rights because they target first of all civilian populations, including women, children and the elderly.” Syria has been a steadfast ally of Russia and China in the Middle East, and a thorn in the side of the oil princes, opposing US scheming and Israeli expansionism. “Regime change” was clearly overdue.
John Doyle and Tim Flannery made a success with their previous travel series, *Two Men In A Tennis* and *Two In The Top End*, so now they have a third series, *Two On The Great Divide* (ABC1 Sundays from April 22 at 7.30pm).

The semi-autocratic style of the previous series, with the mixture of scientific information (from Flannery) and light-hearted banter (from Doyle), is repeated in this series, but seems to be wearing thin. The way they relent-lessly call each other John and Tim, where normal friends on a trip like this would say “mate” or some such expression simply emphasises the artificiality of the seemingly casual series.

John Doyle, who once famously declared on television that he would be voting Communist in the federal election that was coming up at the time, is the voice of the Common Man, while Tim Flannery supplies education and culture. However, although they intend to visit “all the major peaks” of the Great Dividing Range in the course of their journey, one is acutely conscious that these are not very high, and although the journey should prove interesting, it is unlikely to be as spectacular as they make out.

When a program that is advertised as a “comedy-drama” turns out to be simply stereotypingly dull, one thinks first that it must be the fault of the cast, then the fault of the director and then the fault of the writer or writers.

In the case of *Dirk Gently* (ABC2 Mondays from April 23 at 9.30pm) the cast (Stephen Mangan, Darren Boyd, Helen Baxendale) is probably not to blame: they have track records perfectly capable of sustaining lively comedy at least. The dead hand that lies heavily on this series seems to belong to a director who is incapable of striking sparks from Howard Overman’s leaden script. Overman won a BAFTA award for his scripts for the series *Meats*, but seems to have met his match in attempting to adapt Douglas Adams’ novels about Dirk Gently’s holistic detective agency.

The novels are the type usually described as “cult novels”, to explain why they are so popular with a limited range of readers. Adams made his name with *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, which my eldest son found hilariously funny when I thought its whimsy was so heavy handed it could have been a German TV comedy.

English whimsy, like French farce, requires a light touch to be really amusing, so you laugh at a situation because it is comic, not just because you recognise that it is meant to be comic.

Adams wrote *Dirk Gently’s Holistic Detective Agency* in 1987. He died in 2001. He had become known not just as a successful author but also as an advocate for environmental and conservation causes. He was a staunch atheist, famously imagining a sentient puddle who wakes up one morning and thinks, “This is an interesting world I find myself in— an interesting hole I find myself in— fits me rather neatly, doesn’t it? In fact it fits me staggeringly well, must have been made to have me in it!”

Biologist Richard Dawkins dedicated his 2006 book, *The God Delusion*, to Adams, writing on his death that, “Science has lost a friend, literature has lost a luminary, the mountain gorilla and the black rhino have lost a gallant defender.”

Nevertheless, I still find his whimsy leaden-footed and the TV adaptation of *Dirk Gently* just plain boring.

Two In The Top End

Two On The Great Divide

Young Dracula

Mondays from April 23 at 9.30pm

Visa

$20 minimum on cards

April 20

COURAGE IN PUBLIC LIFE

Barry Jones, author & former Hawke Cabinet Minister in conversation with Maree Kostakidis, journalist & former SBS newreader

April 27

THE BEGINNING OF THE THAW IN THE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP?

Sean Turnell, Dr, Economics, Macquarie University;
Zetty Brake, Coordinator Burma Campaign, Australia

May 4

THE LABOR - GREEN ALLIANCE – WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR PROGRESSIVE POLITICS?

Ben Spies-Butcher, Dr, Macquarie University;
Troy Batston, author Looking for the Light on the Hill

May 11

AUSRTALIA’S MEAGER UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS – A JUST RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS OF UNEMPLOYMENT?

Maree O’Halloran, Director Welfare Rights Centre;
Peter Whiteford, Prof. Social Researcher SPRC

The Guardian

April 18 2012

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Worth Watching

11
One of my first jobs as a junior reporter was to meet flights bringing famous people to Australia. Growing up in a country far from everywhere (except, as my father would say, “where you come from”), I was led to believe that Australia’s honour was at risk unless a well-known person from Over There said something flattering about us, preferably the moment they arrived at Sydney airport.

There was a designated list of attributes they could comment on. These were: the weather, the beaches, the harbour, the harbour bridge, the happy people, the beer. When an exhausted Elizabeth Taylor stepped off her private-jet flight from California and faced the mandatory barrage of questions, she replied: “Where am I, for Christ’s sake?”

This was understandable but ill-advised. Readers of the Australian press were warned that Taylor and her accompanying husband Mike Todd, the Hollywood producer, were problem people who did not appreciate their good fortune in being among us. Todd’s “dwarf-like and grizzled” appearance and the size of the bus under his wife’s eyes became the subjects of particular tabloid scorn. Their stay was brief.

It was the first scheduled jet flight that drew us closer, the rest of humanity. This momentous occasion gave me my first front page story in the Sydney Daily Telegraph, which declared solemnly, “A new era in civil aviation has dawned….” The inaugural aircraft was a Boeing 707 of the national airline Qantas, an acronym for Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services. Founded in the outback town of Winton, Queensland in 1920, Qantas is today the world’s oldest continuously operating airline and, along with the great cricketeer Don Bradman and the Sydney Harbour Bridge, occupies a place in Australia’s affections. Most important, it is the only major international airline in the jet age never to have lost an aircraft in a fatal accident. Perhaps wary of holding such a distinction to fortune, Qantas advertising never mentions it.

In recent years, however, the safest airline has had close calls, including an Airbus A330 that went into a sudden dive in 2008 and injured up to 74 people, a Boeing 747 engine flap flew up and before landing at San Francisco in 2010 and a new A380 whose engine shattered over Singapore later that year. These, and a series of less scary incidents, have all happened since the aircraft was taken out of public ownership and handed to global banks. The largest shareholders include JP Morgan, HSBC and Citicorp, which are also among the top shareholders of Australia’s major banks and largest mining companies. The national airline, like the Australian economy, is mortgaged: the product of a bi-partisan political system dominated by rapacious business. It was an article of faith that the world’s only island-continent, drained by the two greatest oceans, needed a long-haul airline – until the asset-strippers took control. What followed is a cautionary, universal tale. Last October, without warning, the Qantas Chief executive, Alan Joyce, ordered the grounding of the airline’s global fleet. More than 68,000 passengers were stranded in 22 countries, and the entire Qantas workforce was locked out without pay. Joyce later admitted that tickets had been “mis-takenly” sold for flights that Qantas management would never take off, the grounding had been planned well in advance.

Furthermore, a Senate inquiry supported moving an additional 28,000 single parents onto Newstart Allowance over the next four years. These changes, commencing from 1 January 2013, will mean a single parent in this group on the maximum payment will be $59 a week worse off.

Across the political spectrum and on the street, there is a growing consensus that $244 per week is just $5 million a year. Last year, Qantas recorded a before-tax profit of $552 million, having doubled its net profit and increased its revenue.

In February, the company announced that, as a result of a sharp fall in this year’s profits – caused, not surprisingly, by the grounding of the fleet and the consequential loss of business – it planned to cut 2,500 jobs, including maintenance engineers and pilots. The catch-22 caused barely a ripple and Qantas management was congratulated in the media for its “courageous stand”. According to the Sydney Morning Herald, the loss of revenue is “a case study in Australia’s ability to cope with globalisation”. In a choice of words Qantas passengers might find unsettling, paper said the airline had to “compete or die.”

Unemployed short-changed by 20 cents per day increase

“1.1 million Australians, including 566,000 unemployed people on the Newstart Allowance of just $35 a day have every right to feel short-changed with last month’s $1.45 per week increase in Newstart Allowance,” said Maree O’Halloran of the National Welfare Rights Network (NWWR).

“The increase for Australia’s 3.4 million pensioners is not much better, at $3.35 per week. (People on pensions are not on Newstart.)

The widening gap between the pension and the Newstart Allowance is $132.90 a week. On a yearly basis, job seekers are expected to get by on $6,910 less than that average age, disability and carer pensioners.

Pensioners fought long and hard for the historic and much needed increase of $32.50 to the single pension in 2009. The single pension (including the Pension Supplement) is $377.75 a week. The Newstart Allowance is just $324 a week.

Unemployed people, students and single parents missed out on the 2009 pension increase. This omission, combined with less generous indexation arrangements, has meant that income support payments for the so-called “undererving poor” have barely increased since 2009. While the single pension increased by just $16.55 in the year up to 30 June 2010, the Newstart Allowance over the next four years is only a $16.55 increase per week.

The payment gap between Newstart Allowance and pensions is now $3,129.00 a week. On a yearly basis, job seekers are expected to get by on $6,910 less than that average age, disability and carer pensioners.

Pensioners fought long and hard for these increases in the face of persistent and sometimes unbridled attacks on welfare payments. The 2009 pension increase was reached only because of the sustained campaigning of the unionists and alliance organisations, charities and community organisations, charities and community organisations, charities and community organisations. This was because of the sustained campaigning of the unionists and alliance organisations, charities and community organisations, charities and community organisations, charities and community organisations.