Intergenerational Report

Plan for a failed system

Anna Pha

The Coalition government’s 2015 Intergenerational Report is yet another attempt by Treasurer Hockey to sell their 2014 budget cuts and privatisation. It uses an ageing population as a political pawn to try to get across policies that are strongly opposed by the Australian people. The media ran with warnings of budget deficits for 40 years to come and no future for today’s youth.

The report, produced by Treasury, is unashamedly pro-big business and political. In part it is yet another regurgitation of the all-too-familiar “we are living beyond our means”.

A closer study reveals that the real agenda behind the budget cuts is the reduction of business costs and making investment in Australia more internationally competitive.

It is an attempt to coxa a boom out of the profound bust the system is in.

The government’s intent is clear. Its projections of major budget items over the coming 40 years reveal that military spending will rise to almost double the total of that for education which will not increase in real terms.

Aged and service pensions, family tax benefit, New Start Allowance (unemployed), Youth Allowance and Austudy will all be cut in real terms. (page 100) The amount on schools will be halved and tertiary education subjected to a 40 percent cut (schools and tertiary, training, etc).

It takes a swipe at Labor, forecasting huge tax cuts and privatisation – the subject of an inquiry. There are strong divisions within Coalition ranks over privatisation – the subject of an inquiry. There are strong divisions within Coalition ranks over this cuts and privatisation. It uses an ageing population as a political pawn to try to get across policies that are strongly opposed by the Australian people. The media ran with warnings of budget deficits for 40 years to come and no future for today’s youth.

The report signals an overhaul of superannuation – the subject of an inquiry. There are strong divisions within Coalition ranks over this cuts and privatisation. It uses an ageing population as a political pawn to try to get across policies that are strongly opposed by the Australian people. The media ran with warnings of budget deficits for 40 years to come and no future for today’s youth.

The report devotes considerable space to lifestyle choices – a reference to “enhance governments’ autonomy, flexibility and political accountability”.

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Treasurer Joe Hockey.

It aims for businesses to be “flexible, competitive and robust in the face of dynamic global conditions.” Towards these ends it advocates further deregulation and reforms to competition policy and further trade and investment liberalisation such as through free trade agreements. It is looking at life after the resources boom and has latched onto the IT sector at the same time as proposing cuts to science, research and innovation funding!

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Tax cuts

The report reviews the past 40 years and attempts to make economic forecasts for the next 40 years during which time it estimates that the population is set to almost double.

• Higher wages for workers, resulting in increased productivity such as higher output per worker and cutting wages and conditions. It also touts the old capitalist myth that private sector is more efficient and privatisation can result in increased productivity.

It refers to a forthcoming White Paper on Federalism in which the government is seeking to “enhance governments’ autonomy, flexibility and political accountability.” This is a reference to states and territories assuming many of the functions of the federal government, including setting their own labour laws and competing with each other for domestic and foreign investment in a race to the bottom for workers.

The tax base will shrink as a larger percentage of the population (the older generation) pays less or no tax creating a budget deficit. So, how does it solve that “problem”? It adopts a two-prong approach:

• The first prong is to cut the taxation of companies and the rich! That of course, only exacerbates the situation.

So the second prong is to cut spending in selective areas to fund the initial deficit and the tax cuts. In addition, it has set a cap on government revenue at 23.9 percent, limiting the potential to make surpluses, pay off government debt or put away some savings during a boom for bad times. This implies regular tax cuts in line with inflation – for corporations.

When it comes to the budget deficit, the government fails to look beyond cuts to working people and the most vulnerable. There are other options for balancing the books or paying off debt. These include:

• Increasing company taxation – not just the rate but ending the rorts
• Abolishing negative gearing
• Phasing out the government rebate on private health insurance
• Slashing military spending by at least 10 percent
• Abolishing the fossil fuel rebate for mining companies
• Higher wages for workers, resulting in increased productivity

The government’s focus on cuts and its victims reveal its class position. As far as it is concerned retirees can fend for themselves as their labour can no longer be exploited by the capitalist class: Hockey’s “the age of entitlement is over”.

#1677 March 18, 2015

ISSN 1325-295X

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The science is undeniable

The environmental crisis has been largely created by the rapacious exploitation of the Earth’s resources. The response of governments in the developed capitalist countries such as Australia is all about safeguarding profits over the needs of the environment. In Australia, the effects of climate change are real and happening now. Soil salination, desertification and deforestation, pollution of the air and freshwater systems, destruction of waterways and a major loss of biodiversity began after the country’s occupation by Britain in 1788.

Our transition to a sustainable economy will bring healthier economic outcomes and a healthier environment. In addition, sustainable production requires more workers, not less. And we are now dealing with a federal government which is unabashed in its climate change denial.

Scientists around the world are calling on urgent action on climate change. Here in Australia last week a group of top scientists published an open letter over the name of Dr Andrew Glikson, earth and paleoclimate science, Australian National University and 74 distinguished scientists and academics. It states: "We are concerned the 2015 Intergenerational Report underestimates the serious threat of global warming. Based on the basic laws of physics, direct measurements and empirical observations in nature, the current rise in atmospheric greenhouse gases by about 40 percent since the 19th century is inducing a shift in the state of the atmosphere-ocean-land-ice sheets system, seriously endangering future generations, and nature’s life-support systems."

They continue, “Our concern is based on the scientific peer-reviewed literature as summarised by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and on observations by the world’s national science academies and geophysical research societies of leading nations, including Australia.” They warn, “At the current emission rate, carbon dioxide concentration would rise to about 480 parts per million by 2055, through the 21st century and beyond and approaching ice age conditions that existed on the planet about 2 million years ago, before the appearance of the genus Homo.”

The CPA proposes some basic steps that need to be taken to confront the looming disaster:

- Develop a national emission plan, with legislated timetables and targets, for transition to an ecologically sustainable energy system;
- Nationalisation of Australia’s electricity generation, distribution and supply infrastructure;
- Massively invest in research and development of alternative renewable energy resources and water for public ownership. Transfer of government subsidies from the fossil and nuclear sectors to energy efficiency and renewable energy and conservation programs;
- Make energy efficiency and conservation key determinants of urban planning and central to government economic and industrial policy.

The need to act is urgent. The crisis is already causing immense human suffering and death, while diminishing resources threaten global peace and security.

Torture charges

A UN Special Rapporteur on Torture report has confirmed the Abbott government’s mistreatment of asylum seekers. The report showed the government has been breaching global anti-torture conventions, PM Abbott, in response, said that the country was “sick of being lectured by the United Nations”. The first thing to be noted is that now Australia is no longer on the UN Security Council, and that it has ceded to its UN position.

As for his claim in the same response that “we have stopped the boats, and by stopping the boats we have ended the deaths at sea”: what he doesn’t say is that the boat arrivals simply go or are taken elsewhere. Rather than stopping deaths at sea he is placing deaths elsewhere. Abbott doesn’t say where the boats have gone, just that for a while they have stopped coming to Australia. As human rights lawyer Julian Burnside put it last week: “It is a matter of profound regret to see where the country is being taken by a man whose defining characteristics are bullying and dishonesty.”

Increased US aggression against Venezuela

The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) condemns in the strongest possible terms the increased aggression being meted out by the US administration towards the democratically elected government of Venezuela. US President Obama’s statement that Venezuela presents a “threat to US interests and foreign policy” deserves, and has received, the unequivocal rejection of those who are familiar with the domestic achievements and the regional role of the government of Venezuela since 1999. The CPA calls on the Australian government to use its relationship with the US to dissuade it from its current belligerent course.

In spite of US interference, including an economic blockade, the coordination of opposition groups to cause havoc and hardship to the point of plotting coups against the legitimate government of the country, Venezuela has made impressive progress during its Bolivarian Revolution. The lives of previously excluded people have improved markedly. The health and education indicators for the population don’t lie. Present difficulties have not shaken support for the revolution and “no volverán” — they (the former ruling elites) shall not return — is a popular slogan among the people. Venezuela’s role in Latin America, its pursuit of integration and economic relations on the basis of mutual benefit, stands in stark contrast to that of the US. Successive US administrations have manipulated the political processes of countries in Latin America and sought to force those countries into exploitative “free trade” agreements. Venezuela has joined a long list of governments to request “regime change” for defending its sovereignty and the well-being of its people.

The CPA adds its voice to the millions across the globe saying “hands off Venezuela”!

Bob Briton
General Secretary
Communist Party of Australia

NSW Elections 2015

Throw out the privatisers!

The Communist Party of Australia calls on NSW voters to reject the Baird government’s privatisation plans on March 28. The Liberal/ National government is trying to lure NSW citizens with false promises of $20 billion to fix infrastructure to be paid for by privatising the poles and wires of the state-owned electricity industry. Labor and Liberals both have their hands on their hearts, promising relief from the housing stress suffered by so many people in NSW. The crisis reaches from the homeless to the well paid.

However, both the Coalition and the ALP rely on the market and the private sector to solve the problem. This neo-liberal approach to economic and social issues is typical of both Liberal and Labor policies. They reject the effective positive solution of concentrating on providing a massive increase in public housing.

There are many challenges in NSW but they will not be dealt with by any pro business party, whether Liberal or Labor. The Communist Party calls on its members and supporters to work and vote for your local Green, Socialist Alliance or progressive independent in both the lower and upper houses. Do not be fooled by any of the right-wing minor parties like the Shooters and Fishers or the Christian Democrats.

On March 28, vote for Green, progressive independent or Socialist Alliance candidates, followed by a vote for the ALP and put the Liberals last.

PRESSEX

Two weeks ago the Abbott government hosted a function in a man’s only club to commemorate International Women’s Day! Not content with that, last week the PM claimed that people lived in rural areas are not the same as those in urban areas as a “lifestyle choice”, rather than because of their deep ancestral connection to the land. For example, a man or woman off their country through the cessation of funding would certainly be good news for the mining industry. This week will doubtless bring us another crass insult — or another blustering attack — on the government’s real ideological agenda.

But in the meantime the Press Fund needs all the help it can get, so please send us something for the next issue if you possibly can.

The CPA is implacably opposed to energy exploitation and trade union pressure on the government to use its relationship with the US and its allies to dissuade it from its current belligerent course. Labor and Liberals both have their hands on their hearts, promising relief from the housing stress suffered by so many people in NSW. The crisis reaches from the homeless to the well paid.

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Concern for trapped workers

The International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) was concerned for the welfare of workers trapped on Barrow Island as they prepared for the arrival of Tropical Cyclone Owyn. More than 1,000 workers were stranded on Barrow Island, off the north-west coast of Australia, after the Chevron-stuffed up plans to evacuate its workforce ahead of the arrival of the Category Three Cyclone.

ITF President Paddy Crumlin said many of these workers are now expected to sleep on blow-up mattresses on floors and in corridors in what appear to be sub-standard conditions.

"Chevron missed its window in evacuating workers who are now unnecessarily stranded on Barrow Island in the midst of a severe tropical cyclone," Mr Crumlin said.

"You’ve got to wonder why Chevron kept people working until it was unsafe to evacuate them. There needs to be a proper investigation into why this has happened because it is Chevron’s fault that the workers are still there."

A support vessel for the Gorgon Project, the Europa, has done its best to avoid the cyclone but the union is being told the vessel has been battling eight metre swells.

"An email from a Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) member says many onboard are sea sick and unable to leave their rooms. "Half the staff are sick to their stomachs due to the outrageous weather conditions. The glass window shattered on the galley near the dining room, and the waves are nearly as big as half the boat," the email says.

"People are just getting weaker/sicker by the day and don’t know how to react!"

Mr Crumlin said Chevron has mishandled the Gorgon project since its inception. "Gorgon is a multi-billion dollar project requiring thousands of workers on Barrow Island yet there is not enough accommodation to house the workers adequately in an emergency."

"Workers were left scared and confused and you really have to question Chevron’s management of this entire episode."

"It’s not the first time Chevron’s management has been called into question – after all the Gorgon project is already 18 months late and more than $17 billion over budget."

Mr Crumlin, who is also MUA national secretary, recently wrote a joint letter with the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) to Chevron Chief Executive John Watson. An excerpt reads:

"We are writing to you directly because we are concerned about Chevron’s Gorgon LNG Project in Western Australia. As you know, this project is of high importance to our unions because it is a significant employer of our members who work in Western Australia."

"In your recent earnings conference call with analysts (January 30, 2015) Ed Westlake, an analyst from Credit Suisse, asked you: ‘And then specifically Gorgon, you’ve kind of reiterated the timetable I mean can you give us any nuggets to give you confidence that we will get that first gas in Gorgon mid-year and the first LNG cargo this year?’"

"Mr Watson replied: ‘We’re monitoring very closely contractor performance and productivity. On the Island we’re working with the unions on contracts and industrial relations. We’ve been able to manage through those things fairly well and we’re planning for a flaw-less start up commissioning and start-up process.’"

"As unions covering both the construction and maritime workers on the project we don’t believe that the response that you provided to Mr Westlake is correct."

In fact members were telling the unions that the ongoing industrial issues on the site were having an impact on the start-up process.

"We do not believe that Chevron’s local managers and contractors are managing these issues effectively nor are they reporting them accurately to you."

"We understand that senior Chevron managers are expected to visit the project in the next month and we would like to make a formal offer to you for them to meet with us to discuss the outstanding industrial and project management issues on the project."

The letter was sent on February 6, 2015 and we are yet to receive a reply. ©
Legal services face funding cuts threat

Rudi Maxwell

If the federal government refuses to reinstate funding, Aboriginal legal services will be forced to wind back dramatically, including closing the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (NATSILS).

Calls to reinstate funds to Aboriginal legal services have been made by all seven state and territory attorneys-general, the Australian Bar Association, the Australian Council of Social Services, the federal opposition and the Greens.

NATSILS chief executive Eddie Cubillo told the Koori Mail that without more funds the peak body would have to shut in June.

The government has been receiving independent reports – including from the Productivity Commission and the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report – that highlight the desperate need for more money in the sector, but they’ve been ignored,” he said.

The federal government has cut more than $3 million from the Aboriginal legal sector. NATSILS successfully applied for funding under the government’s Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

“We had to cease policy reform work and, while the government claims the cuts wouldn’t affect frontline services, they have,” Mr Cubillo said.

The Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) NSW/ACT has launched a petition calling on the Prime Minister to reverse the funding cuts of nearly 20 percent. ALS NSW/ACT chief executive Phil Naden said the cuts will have devastating effects on Aboriginal families, particularly children.

“Everything we do at the ALS is free, so a 20% cut to our annual budget is a 20% cut to our frontline services,” he said. “We’re a not-for-profit organisation running on a shoestring budget and, compared to other legal services, we are understaffed and underfunded.”

Mr Naden said cuts to services will have “terrible ramifications” for Aboriginal children, parents and carers. “Every day in Australia some 40 Aboriginal children are removed from their families, and now there’s over 15,000 Aboriginal children sitting in out-of-home care,” he said.

“Life after removal is not always a happy ending. Evidence shows a large cohort of those kids who were removed ended up in the juvenile justice system, and then adult jail.”

“Not only are we experiencing rates of child removal faster than at any time during the Stolen Generations, we’re also determining a path for so many of these kids which is straight into the criminal justice system.”

“ALS frontline services are there for those kids. We operate a care and protection practice that fights to keep children and families together.”

“We run a family law practice that works with families and the best interests of the child. We run a criminal justice practice that helps divert young people from the juvenile justice system and adults from entering prison. If the ALS is cut, more kids will be taken away and more of those kids will end up in detention and then prison.”

All seven state and territory attorneys-general have reportedly written to their federal counterparts to guarantee no further funding reductions would be made to the Legal Aid Commission, community legal centres, and the Aboriginal Legal Service.

The Prime Minister’s Parliamentary Secretary, Alan Tudge, told Sky News the government had an “absolute commitment” to providing funding for frontline legal aid services for vulnerable people. He said the government was reconfiguring how legal services organisations were funded.

“Instead of the Commonwealth funding them directly, we will fund them via the state governments,” Mr Tudge said.

Greens spokesperson for legal affairs Penny Wright said NATSILS advocacy was crucial to addressing shocking levels of Indigenous incarceration.

“More than one in four prisoners are Aboriginal, despite making up only a fraction of our population,” she said. “Too many are in jail because of inadequate legal understanding and representation.”

These cuts demonstrate an appalling lack of concern about shameful over-incarceration of Aboriginal peoples. Without the national coordination, advocacy and front-line assistance NATSILS provides, we believe we will see imprisonment rates rise even further,” Mr Cubillo said he would like to see politicians take heed of the independent reports into Aboriginal legal services and come and speak to the people working in the sector.

President Joko Widodo – behind the sham democracy the old Javanese fascist and feudal military regime is still the real power in Indonesia. And as long as its reactionary policies dominate the country nothing will really change in Indonesia. As was the case in South Africa, East Timor, Burma, etc, pressure and actions from outside did play a role in supporting and encouraging fundamental change.

The West Papuan people continue to struggle against oppression and for freedom and independence and deserve support. Our actions in speaking up on this vital issue and exposing the oppressive situation that exists in West Papua can play a constructive part in helping to promote genuine change there.
Film reviews by Jim Lane

Birdman, Turner, McFarland USA

The Academy Award Best Picture-winning movie, Birdman, directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu, is a pretentious movie about pretentious people. In fact, the tension between the different characters develops from accusations of pretentiousness against one another. There is the pretentious former movie star who decides to produce and star in a Broadway play that explains all about love, playing off against the Broadway star who admits to being a phoney in all things except his stage performances. Suffering from all this pretentiousness are the producer’s daughter, girlfriend, and ex-wife, plus the Broadway star’s ambitious girlfriend.

Michael Keaton, usually one of the most dynamic of screen characters, plays a delusional and melancholy has-been who was once famous for playing in a series about a comic-book character named Birdman. The inside joke is that Keaton was effective, years ago, in one of the better Batman movies. He even uses his Batman voice. Edward Norton, who usually exploits his excellent ability to play many-layered characters, plays the shallow Broadway star.

The film interrupts the talky scene-by-scene narrative with animated comic book movie scenes, to show how delusional Keaton’s character has become.

My movie buddy and I didn’t really mind seeing a movie about pretentious people, but we felt that the entire movie was pretentious. Why were we supposed to care about the broken-down movie star, either about his artistic success or about his love life?

One of his main decisions has to do with mortgaging his house in Malibu. Should we care what he does with his house in Malibu? If the movie has a message or a point, it is something about how difficult it is for artists, and how far they will go, to find some foundation for their continuing pretentiousness.

Also features Emma Stone, Naomi Watts, and Zach Galifianakis.

Mr Turner, written and directed by Mike Leigh, isn’t about Mr M JW Turner. It’s a 150-minute period piece, but it’s not directly about the period in which Turner lived and painted his famous seascapes.

It isn’t that Turner wasn’t pretty interesting. His dalliances with his housekeeper and his probably bigamous married life were interesting enough. It was quite nice to see actor Timothy Spall interpret the painter’s interest in his contemporaries and his devotion to his craft. At one point, he has himself tied in the crew’s nest of a sailing ship so he can experience a storm firsthand. His work was sometimes controversial, too. One of his paintings depicted a storm in which seamen on a slave ship are throwing their living cargo overboard.

JMW Turner painted when painting was at its apex. It was the best possible, almost the only way, to reproduce what people saw. During the movie, Turner himself goes to see an early camera – he calls it “the contraption” – and likes it well enough to have a couple of daguerreotypes made. The movie thus puts us on notice that, as far as simple visual reproductions go, painting was starting to slip behind.

I don’t think I’ve ever seen such interesting period settings or costuming. The mid-19th century outfits really stand out. And that brings me to what Mr Turner is really about: It’s in the cinematography, artfully presented by Dick Pope. Pope brings us some of the same sea scenes that Turner painted, landscapes that are breathtaking and, on the big screen, visual impressions that are far beyond what a 19th-century painter, or any painter, might have hoped for.

My movie buddy and I didn’t go to see Mr Turner because we are interested in painting, although those interested in art history would like it. We went because we are interested in movies, and director Mike Leigh has never let us down. He is the master of the best modern art methods today, just as Turner was the master of what was available in visual art in his own time. It’s a movie for moviegoers and it’s about art. Features Dorothy Atkinson as Turner’s faithful housekeeper.

McFarland USA, directed by Niki Caro, at 128 minutes, is more than sports and Kevin Costner. My movie buddy wanted to see it, frankly, because Kevin Costner is in it. She’s never missed a Costner film. For my part, I can’t remember being disappointed in one. We knew from the trailers that Costner plays yet another over-the-hill sports figure as he did in, for instance, Tin Cup and Bull Durham. We knew from the trailers that he was going to coach a winning cross-country running team.

We were happy with those expectations and glad, when the movie was over, to see our expectations fulfilled. But McFarland USA has quite a bit more to offer. It isn’t just an old high-school coach, near the end of his career, who takes on a near-impossible project. It’s also a white guy, with no experience in culture clashes and no direct interest in overcoming them, thrown into a different world.

McFarland, in central California’s agricultural lands, is a town where pickers live. The pickers, including high schoolers, rise before dawn to work in the fields. At school time, they hurry into town. After school, they rush back to the fields.

Hardly any of the boys know anyone who went beyond the ninth grade. Whatever academic ambitions they might have entertained were eroded away from them by hot, sweaty field work. Whatever regard or trust they might have had toward their teachers has long been replaced with deep, bitter cynicism. They call Costner’s character, Coach Jim White, “White,” or “Blanco.” They barely, if at all, listen to his responses.

It’s that distrust and cynicism that Coastner, a real guy who carries his own baggage, has to overcome. He also has to deal with his own fear of the strange new culture that he and his family are thrown into.

Of course he succeeds all around. We knew that from the trailers. But how does he do it, that’s what’s especially good and worth a high recommendation, for McFarland USA.

People’s World

“It’s a very strategic site with good opportunities for urban renewal,” said Mike Baird the NSW premier referring to the Powerhouse Museum. It is an extremely crude attempt for a land grab in the heart of Sydney. The Powerhouse Museum has been in Ultimo since 1893. Moving it to Parramatta as suggested by Mike Baird is to deprive the city of one of its visitors’ attractions and an important educational centre for children. There is nothing wrong with building a facility in Parramatta to display the many exhibits that are now in storage. The proposed closure has not been widely and openly discussed. There is no mention of what is going to happen to the existing heritage-listed building either. It is “a very strategic” site and it should remain so for the enjoyment of the people of Sydney, not for the profiteering by developers.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has spent more than $260 million on private military contractors to protect high risk diplomatic posts, such as embassies in Kabul and Baghdad. One of the main reasons why the Australian government employs mercenaries was “to outsource much of the risk associated with running a large team prepared to use lethal force against a local attack”, according to former Australian army officer and analyst at the Lowy Institute for International Affairs James Brown. “Security contractors are responsible for their own insurance, and if a contractor is injured it is the company and not DFAT that bears responsibility of providing medical aid, evacuation and ongoing rehabilitation,” Brown said.

Outsourcing government responsibilities seems to be the name of the game. Recently Fiji PM Frank Bainimarama sharply criticised Australia for resettling asylum seekers in the Pacific – “outsourcing its human rights responsibilities” was how Mr Bainimarama described it. Four hundred people were released from detention centre into the community. Trying to survive in a hostile environment without any support is a huge challenge for anybody, let alone asylum seekers who had been traumatised by their experience. Nauru authorities arrested 200 of them for organising a protest. The population of Nauru is about 10,000 people. The number of asylum seekers in the detention centre there was 955 in November 2014. Nauru is getting money from Australia to keep asylum seekers there. It’s a poor nation which can hardly support its own population. Dumping displaced people fleeing war and persecution there who are not able to support themselves because Australia does not want to fulfil its international obligations is a crime.

Fracking in Oklahoma, USA, has led to a huge increase in earthquakes. The number of perceivable earthquakes increased from an average of two each year to 567 last year – an increase of 28,250 percent between 2009 when fracking began and last year. Something to think about.
Mr President:

Seventy years ago, the United Nations Organisation proclaimed the purpose of the United Nations, which is: "In their determination to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, and to afford all of the peoples of the United Nations the ends of peace and security..." This is something for which we must constantly strive.

I was present when in 1984 world military expenditures increased to the astronomical figure of US$1.75 trillion dollars, while the survival of humankind is continuously jeopardised by the existence of more than 16,000 nuclear weapons. This should make us question, what are the weapons being spent on being destined to promote peace, economic and social development and a decent life for all human beings. The issues related to disarmament, which are of utmost importance in the 21st century, are of utmost importance and demand greater attention.

The International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons was first commemorated on September 26 last. It is a day to remember that there has been no significant international support given to that initiative and reiterates the call made by ICAN's and Hugo Cabrera, the Colombian Peace Commissioner. It is a day to remember the 1986 buenos Aires declaration and the commitment made by the 133 states to make the world safer.

The Conference on Disarmament should urgently adopt a comprehensive and balanced working program that takes into account the real priorities related to disarmament. It is important for this forum not to give in to the lack of political will of a few countries. If this Conference on Disarmament were to fail in its mandate, it could definitely have a catastrophic effect on the world.
that offers effective security guarantees to time, including a treaty that eliminates and pared to negotiate several issues at the same time, of the paralysis of the disarmament machinery contribute to break the status quo and get rid of the wider community.

The of waterside union had a proud record of defend-gle for their jobs and their future. Thuggery thugs with balaclavas and dogs to confront MUA dispute of 1998 where Reith organised on thuggery, intimidation and links to unsavoury individuals”.

Indeed, as an example if you need one, in The Age (25/11/2014) there was a feature article from Peter Reith, former notorious workplace relations minister in the Howard government, accusing the now Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews of being under the thumb of the CFMEU that he referred to in the media as “a union of thuggery, intimidation and links to unsavoury individuals”. Peter Reith and his mates are an authority on thuggery, intimidation and links to unsavoury individuals. Cast your minds back to the MUA dispute of 1998 where Reith organised thugs with balaclavas and dogs to confront wharfties to “intimidate” them in their strug-gle for their jobs and their future. Thuggery and intimidation in full, Reith and his Liberal government had close links with “unsavoury individuals” from Patrick [stevedoring]. The waterside union had a proud record of defend- ing members from appalling exploitation and an even prouder record of supporting the needs of the wider community.

This became apparent with the extraordi-nary display of comradeship and support from the many thousands of ordinary Melbournians who descended on the wharf to support the wharfties. My lasting memory is of being there with my family and watching with anger as the mounted police rode toward us to remove us, when behind those representatives of the state marched 500 hardhat-wearing CFMEU mem-bers, not thugs, to support their fellow unionists whose only crime was struggling to maintain their jobs. The police were forced to retreat. Nobody will ever destroy my faith in the union movement.

Unsavoury individuals

Our nation state is in the hands of unsa-voury individuals – many politicians who do not hesitate when it comes to lies, misinforma-tion and introducing brutal policies that affect the most vulnerable in our community in order to increase the power and profits of their mates. The treatment of people seeking asylum – this is the real thuggery. Corruption among politi-cians, corporations and individuals has been publicly exposed, but like icebergs, what lies below the surface unexposed is far greater than the little we have become aware of.

I have said before and I say again that Aus-tralia is a capitalist society and therefore a class society despite the efforts of both major par-ties to deny this. The struggle goes on between those who have power and those who don’t, and if this struggle didn’t occur, if there was no struggle to defend ourselves, we would be pushed back to the slave labour of Third World countries, which is exactly where this govern-ment would like to take us. The state of our nation is dire. The gap between the rich and the poor has never been wider and will continue to grow under these policies.

A new Oxfam survey has revealed a great and growing disparity between Australia’s rich and poor. According to Oxfam’s report “Still the Lucky Country?” the gap continues to grow as Australia’s wealthiest were found to be not paying enough tax. Tax evasion by these con-glomerates is rife, and while government gives lip service to the need to tackle it, very little is ever done. There is growing concern about the inequality in Australian society as a result of people who have “too much influence”. The report said Australia’s wealthiest one percent is richer than 60 percent of the population. The nine richest people in Australia have a net worth equal to the entire bottom 20 percent of the nation. The state of our nation means that vast numbers of people, particularly young people, are either unemployed or underemployed.

Youth unemployment is particularly acute. The Brotherhood of St Laurence has released a new report on the growing scourge of youth unemployment and underemployment in Aus-tralia, which is at the worst level since records began in 1978 with more than 580,000 Aus-tralians aged 15 to 24 either underemployed or unemployed.

Today, young people are more likely to be underemployed – to have some work but want more hours – than at any time in the last 36 years ... There is an old saying that a country should be judged on its attitude to the young and the old, and on this basis our country should be judged harshly. Youth are being scraped by this government and so are the elderly.

We live in a punitive society. We punish without looking at cause. We marginalise Ab-originals, Muslims, youth, the poor, and blame them for their position in our society. If our society provided affordable education, secure work, socially just programs, and if we didn’t tie our foreign policy to greedy adventuristic US wars, there would be less chance of our young people becoming antisocial or wanting to be involved in foreign wars.

State of the world

It is my view that the state of our nation is also the state of many nations of the world. That is why we are truly do live in a global world exploited by such organisations as the World Bank and the IMF, manipulated by US imperialist forces in order to serve the interests of world capital. So please note that more than half the world, nearly 3 billion people, live on less than $2 per day. The GDP of the poorest 48 nations (a quarter of the world’s countries) is less than the wealth of the world’s three richest people combined. Nearly a billion people entered the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their name. The poorer the country, the more likely it is that debt repayments are being extracted directly from the people who neither contracted the loans nor received any of the money. The underdeveloped world now spends $13 on debt repayment for every $1 it receives in grants. Twenty percent of the population in the developed nations consume 86 percent of the world’s goods. A few hundred millionaires now own as much wealth as the world’s poorest 2.5 billion people. Approximately 790 million people in the developing world are still chroni-cally undernourished, almost two-thirds of who reside in Asia, and they die quietly in some of the poorest villages on earth, far removed from the scrutiny and conscience of the world. That is around 11 million children per year.

The issues of concern about the state of our nation and the world are so many that one talk simply cannot cover them all in one address, but I want to conclude with a statement from a much loved and well-read book, which is at the same time, a source of pride and a warn-ing. That book is The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England by Raymond V Holt. Holt concluded his book with the follow-ing statement that I believe can still teach us valuable lessons today.

“The 19th century almost to its close was a century of hope and those who lived in it found it easy to believe in progress. They knew that immense changes for the better had been made in it. They could point not only to the physical improvements in health and housing and the comforts of life, but to a better educa-tion, a higher degree of freedom and a sense of responsibility spread among millions who in previous centuries had no share at all in the shaping of their own lives. They could rejoice in an increasing humanitarianism in all aspects of life and they hoped for still better things to come.”

They even dreamed of a world in which the satisfaction of men’s common needs by trade would lead to cooperation and not antagonism and make an end of war ... Men and women in the 20th century will try to solve their problems in their own way, but if they abandon those ideals of truth, liberty, humanitarianity and democracy which animated the best minds of the 19th century, the time may come when the historians of the future will look back with longing on that century as in some ways a little oasis in the history of man. And as later genera-tions painfully take up again the work of striving to create a society in which the head is held high and the heart is free, and to struggle for those who came before them lost their nerve and threw away the gains of centuries.”

Our task as Unitarians is to continue to take up that work in 2015.

The Beacon

Contribution to break the status quo and get rid of the paralysis of the disarmament machinery that only benefits the powerful.

The Conference on Disarmament is pre-pared to negotiate several issues at the same time, including a treaty that eliminates and prohibits nuclear weapons; another that pro-hibits the arms race in outer space; another that offers effective security guarantees to those States like Cuba which do not have nuclear weapons; as well as a treaty that prohibits the production of fissile material required for the manufacturing of nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices, which would also comprise nuclear stocks.

All the Conference members should take on the commitment to contribute to the suc-cess of the United Nations High Level Inter-national Conference on Nuclear Disarmament to be held in 2018 at the latest.

Mr President:

The official proclamation of the Latin American and Caribbean Region as a Zone of Peace at the Second Summit of the Commu-nity of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) held in Havana in January of 2014 marked a historical milestone. This proclama-tion emphasised the firm commitment of all CELAC member countries to the promotion of nuclear disarmament as a priority goal. This Conference on Disarmament has the important responsibility of measuring up to the legitimate expectations of the interna-tional community and making a decisive con-trIBUTION TO INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY AND THE SURVIVAL OF THE HUMAN SPECIES THAT IS CURRENTLY THREATENED BY THE EXISTENCE OF HUGE NUCLEAR ARSENALS AND CLIMATE CHANGE.

A new world order based on peace, human solidarity and social justice is indispensable.

Thank you, very much.

Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba.
Venezuela

US sanctions condemned

Emile Schepers

On March 9 President Obama announced a “special state of emergency,” saying that the situation in Venezuela is one that represents an extraordinary danger to US interests and foreign policy. He also imposed sanctions on seven Venezuelan officials, claiming that they were complicit in repressing Venezuelan civil society and freedom of the press.

Worldwide, and within the United States also, this set off an epidemic of head scratching, as people tried to figure out how internal developments in Venezuela behaves regarding a danger for the United States. In Latin America, the reaction was more intense, as leaders and left-oppositionists pointed out instances in which US interventions have led to “regime change” involving the deaths of thousands.

In the 1950s the United States seized more than half of Mexico and all of Puerto Rico, plus the Guantánamo Bay area to Cuba. In the decade of 1960, direct US troops directly intervened in all of the countries of Central America, plus Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic and some South American countries. In these interventions peoples’ movements for democracy got crushed, dictators put in and propped up in power, and dissident leaders murdered, such as Augusto Cesar Sandino in Nicaragua and Charlemagne Peralte in Haiti.

The CIA-engineered the overthrow of Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, set off decades of civil war in which at least 200,000 people, mostly poor Indigenous farmers, died. Multiple projects to destabalize Cuba besides the Allen brothers’ failed Cuban Revolusio n in 1959, including the disastrous Bay of Pigs adventure.

In 1965 President Lyndon Johnson ordered the invasion of the Dominican Republic to prevent a dictator from being overthrown by people who were 97% US citizens, after having done everything possible to destabilize the Chilean economy, backed a military coup against Socialist Party President Salvador Allende which led to the death of at least 3,000 and the imprisonment or exile of tens of thousands.

In the 1970s, the US government collaborated in “Operation Condor” in which South American dictatorships carried out the killings of dissidents. In the 1980s, US interventions in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras created more bloodbaths. The United States was complicit in coups in Venezuela (2002) Brazil (2004) and Honduras (2009).

In all of these interventions the purpose was to protect US corporations’ ability to exploit oil and natural gas and carve up countries’ national resources. But always a pretext was proclaimed that the United States was defending human rights, democracy and good government. Today it’s “humanitarian intervention.”

So when this past week US State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki faced a press conference and claimed that the United States does not interfere in other countries’ internal politics, she was met with incredulous responses from the reporters.

An appeal for support from Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro got an immediate positive response. Governments of Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and all linked to Venezuela through the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) issued support statements denouncing Obama’s announcement and especially the sanctions, as did Argentina and the People’s Republic of China, a major rival of the United States in South American trade.

On March 6 Evo Morales expressed the views of the region when he said “We condemn, we repudiate, in the 21st century we will not accept this kind of intervention by the United States ... All of our solidarity, all of our support goes to President Maduro, and the rev eal of the violence and quizzical looks.

However, Netanyahu’s ultra-right in Israel have all served belligerent then Herzog and Livni exposed Livni’s contempt for her opposite number and her determina tion to expand Israeli control, irrespective of the cost for Palestinians. If Netanyahu is an ultra-belligerent then Herzog and Livni are “belligerence-lite.” Both have supported Israel’s human rights violations against the Palestinians, from the apartheid wall in the West Bank to the various attacks against people in Gaza.

The Zionist Union’s election platform commits it to a continu ation of the existing policies of siege on Gaza and expansion of the settle ments across the West Bank. Ironically, given that the Zionist Union is fighting the Israeli election on the issue of a housing crisis inside Israel, no mention is made of repairing the damage done to thousands of homes destroyed in the latest offensive against Gaza.

On the other hand, Benjamin Netanyahu is increasingly the global face of the ugliest side of Israeli politics. Successful attacks against Gaza, sabre-rattling about the Irani an “threat” and coalescing with the ultra-right in Israel have allowed him to turn public – and elite – opinion further from Israel than ever before in both Europe and the US.

When the history books are written, we may find that Benjamin Netanyahu proved to be the loudest alarm bell of them all.

The Electronic Intifada

Conmemoration of the second anniversary of the passing of President Hugo Chávez, Bolivar Square in Caracas, Venezuela, March 5. (Photo: Anna Pha)

Protests against Obama’s statement occurred in Venezuela and elsewhere, at a point at which the new US approach to Cuba had created some goodwill for change. The Venezuelan government asked for, and got, passage of an enabling law to allow it to deal with any new security threat. At least part of the opposition in Venezuela hurriedly distanced itself from Obama’s proclamation. On April 10-12, Obama will have to face the hostility that this incident has created at the Summit of the Americas in Panama.

Some US officials are now seemingly to say that they did not really mean that Venezuela represents an extraordinary threat to the United States, that this was legalistic language to make possible the imposition of sanctions on the Vene zuelan officials, leading to more head scratch ing and quizzy looks.

People’s World

Elections and Israeli apartheid

Ed Murray

Seven years ago, sitting in the office of a well-respected Israeli human rights group, a friend confided in me that he often wished his organisation failed more often.

“That way,” he argued, “we might be closer to Mao’s principle that suffering helps people to want to help the revolution.”

I was shocked – two weeks later, we had been joined by another young man sitting in an office wishing more suffering on the Palestinian people was a deeply uncomfortable position. I’m sure that if you asked any of those suffering they would declare themselves as having endured more than enough injustice to hasten a multiplicity of revolutions.

But there is an essential truth in my friend’s observation: human beings respond only to crisis. Crisis forces us into action.

We’ve had a lot of publicized the occupied West Bank or Gaza Strip has seen the daily crisis for Palestinian suffering, and people in Gaza.

In a paper on campaign strategy, Chris Rose, formerly a leading Greenpeace activist, cites a 2000 study by Denis Loreti and Lori Peeke in the Journal of Hazardous Materials. Loreti and Peeke examine people’s response to warnings about nuclear power plants.

Their findings are fascinating. People “simply do not act in response to warning messages as soon as they hear the alarm bell is activated. Mostly we look for more information. Unless there is responses from those they know, they are correct.

For example, the Suez Canal.

In a study focusing on Israeli voters from the 2011-12 general election just bad news.

Netanyahu’s attempt to shift the focus of Israeli voters from his talent agenda on to the Iranian question has damaged US-Israeli relationship and present to see an acceptable face of Israeli politics to the European public.

In turn this would allow Israel Herzog and Tzipi Livni, the Zionist Union’s leaders, to resuscitate the endless peace process.

Since the Oslo accords, Israel has engaged in two decades of peace process theatre, where Palestinians are offered little but expected to sacrifice everything. This resulted in the expansion of settlements across the West Bank and a tighter noose around Gaza.

Tzipi Livni formerly served as chief Israeli negotiator with the Palest inian Authority and in 2010 Al Jazeera released documents known as The Palestine Papers which included meeting records between Livni and her Palestinian negoti ating partners.

These leaked documents exposed Livni’s contempt for her opposite number and her determina tion to expand Israeli control, irrespective of the cost for Palestinians. If Netanyahu is an ultra-belligerent then Herzog and Livni are “belligerence-lite.” Both have
Push to curb civil liberties

Tim Pelzer

VANCOUVER: Canadian conserva-
tives aren’t slowing down their
telemarketer appeal to impose
legislation criminalising
seditionists. The right-wing con-
servative government of Prime
Minister Stephen Harper used
its majority in Parliament to end
debate on Bill C-51 and pass it on
February 23, a little more than
three weeks after it was introduced
on January 30. The Conservatives
and Liberals voted in favour of
Bill C-51 while the centre left New
Democratic Party (NDP) opposi-
tion and the lone Green Member
of Parliament voted against it.

The bill is now before the public
safety committee where MPs are
listening to public comments on
Bill C-51 until the end of March.
The NDP MPs have filibustered the
committee to extend hearings on
the legislation. The Conservatives
want to limit hearings so it can be
sent to the Senate where a Conserva-
tive majority will likely end its
pursue. “This really is a reckless
pace for such a sweeping piece of legisla-
tion that will drastically undermine
age-old civil liberties. It’s clear the
Conservative government is moving
breakneck speed in order to ram
this through before opposition can
make a serious case against it.” Open
Media’s Chris David Christopher
told the Peoples World in an
interview. Open Media is a 501(c)(3)
non-profit that campaigns from
the National Firewall’s Associa-
tion to major unions, fighting against
everything from the NSA’s mass
privacy right and civil liberties.

The Conservatives have also
started running TV ads to build
public support for Bill C-51.

A wide range of organisations
and individuals placed outside
of Parliament have opposed the leg-
islation: the Greens, Communists,
NDP, trade union and environmental
movements, civil liberties associa-
tions. Open Media, the Public
Privacy Commissioner Daniel Therrien
as well as groups on the right such as
the Libertarian Party.

— Bill C-51 defines terrorism as
“interference with the capability of
the government of Canada in rela-
tion to intelligence, defence, border
operations, public safety, administra-
tion of justice, diplomatic or consular
relations, or the economic or finan-
cial stability of Canada; changing or
interfering with the capability of
the Royal Canadian Mounted Police
(RCMP) and CSIS to clamp down
on environmental and labour
movements, for example if they
interfere with critical infrastructure
or economic and financial stability.
It will also allow security agencies
to go after supporters and organisers
of the Boycott, Divestment and
Sanctions movement against Israel.
The apologists for apartheid policies as
potential terrorists because it is
“activity that takes place in Canada and
undermines the security of another state.”

Critics assert that the police already
have enough power to deal with
domestic terrorists with existing Canadian law.

Critics fear that Bill C-51’s broad
definition of terrorism will allow
the Canadian Mount Police’s (RCMP)
and CSIS to clamp down on
environmental and labour
movements, for example if they
interfere with critical infrastructure
or economic and financial stability.

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to go after supporters and organisers
of the Boycott, Divestment and
Sanctions movement against Israel.

Even exiled US whistle-blower
Edward Snowden weighed in against
Bill C-51 recently. In video clip
from Russia, he warned that the legislation
threatens civil liberties and political
freedoms in Canada.

The Conservatives counter that
the legislation has built-in safeguards
that discredits a target ...

The bill will allow police to arrest
suspects and detain them for one
week without charge, based on mere
suspicion they might carry out a ter-
rorist plot.

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(RCMP) and CSIS to clamp down
on environmental and labour
movements, for example if they
interfere with critical infrastructure
or economic and financial stability.
Thugs and charmers

Celebrating International Women’s Day is great. Lots of wonderful stories about amazing women, history of the women’s movement, achievements and things still to achieve. There should be more stories every day about us – working men and women who contribute to society, build things and raise our children.

But what really, really annoys me especially around the IWD are those politicians who behave like thugs all through the year and on March the 8 or thereabouts turn on “charming” and pretend they are the true champions for women’s rights.

Promises are made to fight domestic violence – while millions of dollars are withdrawn from women’s refuges and services. Division House has become a place of abuse passing for robust discussions. It reminds me of a guy who was before court for domestic violence – he came in very neatly dressed and with a white ribbon on his lapel. It is cynically doing service.

Let’s judge our politicians by their deeds, not their promises and lip-service on the day.

Mati English
Sydney

Criminalising youth

As you read this our politicians are pushing through a disastrous new law, one that will steal the futures of our Indigenous kids.

Right now the “Home Burglary Bill” is being debated in Western Australia’s Parliament, despite overwhelming evidence that it won’t achieve its goals of reducing burglaries.

What it definitely will do is send more young people to prison, thanks to expanded mandatory sentencing laws for 16 and 17-year-olds. The situation is most dire for Indigenous kids. WA already locks up Indigenous kids at a higher rate than anywhere else in Australia.

If you’re an Indigenous kid in WA, you’re 58 times more likely to be in detention than your non-Indigenous peers.

If the Bill passes, three “strikes” for burglary and you’re in prison, even if you’ve never been to court before. Gone will be the option to send kids to diversion programs or use community-based orders focused on rehabilitation. Judges will have no other choice but to lock up even more young people – a breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

If it passes, this Bill will cost Western Australian taxpayers $43 million by the fourth year, and another $93 million if another detention facility is needed.

It’s labelling kids as unreformable criminals before they’ve even reached adulthood, and giving them no path in life except towards a prison cell.

If we don’t act now, this Bill could be law by the end of the month.

Premier Barnett has previously made a “personal commitment” to reduce the number of Indigenous people in the state’s jail system, and deaths in custody.

If enough of us call this Bill out, he’ll have no choice but to scrap it or risk reneging on his commitment.

Julian Clery

Indigenous Rights Campaigner
Amnesty International Australia

PS. It doesn’t take a criminologist to see that cutting out the options for diversion programs and rehabilitation is likely to increase crime.

Letters to the Editor
The Guardian
74 Buckingham Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010
email: tpearson@cpca.org.au

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

The respected British newspaper The Guardian has come out fighting on the subject of climate change. The paper’s editor-in-chief Alan Rusbridger in a statement says that “climate change stands out as perhaps the single most important issue now facing humanity” and notes that “climate change will probably, within the lifetime of our children, cause untold havoc and stress to our species.”

The paper has launched a series of major articles that it says will cover “what govern- ments can do to attempt to regulate, or other- wise stave off, the now predictably terrifying future of our world.”

Major cities will very likely drown, ancient cultures will be swallowed by rising tides and our children will spend a great deal of their lives fleeing and recovering from vicious storms and extreme droughts. … There are ways of pre- venting this grim future, or at least making it a lot less dire. But the catch is that these also involve changing everything. For us high con- sumers, it involves changing how we live, how our economies function, even the stories we tell about our place on earth.

“What if,” she asks, “we realised that real disaster response means fighting inequality and building a just economy – that everyone working for a healthy food system is already climate warriors? So too, are people fighting for public transit in Brazil; housing and immigrant rights in the United States; battling austerity in Europe; extraction in Australia; pollution in China and India; environmental crime in Europe; and the bad trade deals that lock in all these ill outcomes everywhere.”

As readers of our Guardian know, “fight- ing inequality and building a just economy” means doing away with capitalism and replac- ing it with Socialism for there is no other way to achieve that aim. People who want to build a just economy while retaining capitalism (which is predicated on inequality and exploi- tion of the many by the few) are doomed to disappointment.

Klein also dismisses “the assertion that we have been held back [in combating climate change] by a lack of technological solutions.”

She points out that “Power from renewable sources like wind and water predate the use of fossil fuels and is becoming cheaper, more efficient, and easier to store every year. The past two decades have seen an explosion of ingenious zero-waste design, as well as green urban planning. Not only do we have the tech- nical tools to get off fossil fuels, we also have no end of small pockets where these low carbon lifestyles have been tested with tremendous success.”

She wants to see the same kind of approach used to achieve “the kind of large-scale transi- tion that would give us a collective chance of averting catastrophe” and is puzzled by the fact that apparently it continues “to elude us.”

She rejects the idea that it might be “human nature” holding us back. “In fact,” she says, “humans have shown ourselves willing to collectively sacrifice in the face of threats many times”. We could point to the extraordinary sacri- fices of the Soviet people in defeating fas- cism, but Klein uses examples drawn instead from the Anglo-US experience in the same conflict. “To support fuel conservation during World War 2, pleasure driving was virtually eliminated in the UK, and between 1938 and 1944, use of public transit went up by 87% in the US and by 95% in Canada. Twenty million US households – representing three fifths of the population – were growing victory gardens in 1943, and their yields accounted for 42% of the fresh vegetables consumed that year.”

“What is holding us back, of course, is the fact that capitalism makes its top priority not the well-being of humanity or even the planet, but the pursuit of profit. Something else our readers know is that today the US and the other imperialist powers are desperately trying to re-invigorate the Cold War. So they can’t be thrilled when the people adopt positions that reflect a desire for peace and friendship. Recently the students of the Cottonwood Classical Preparatory School in the US city of Albuquerque voted online to hold a Communist-themed prom they dubbed “prom-munism”.

The goal of the school is to provide “a dynamic environment where students learn to think for themselves.” Apparently they are doing just that. Of course, precisely what they envisage by the term “Communist-themed prom” is debatable. Nevertheless, the decision has apparently “sparked some turmoil among conservative students.” I bet it did!

US historian Webster Tarpley, author of the book 9/11 Synthetic Terror: Made In USA, has raised the question that, if the US really thought that the terrorist organisation “Islamic State” (IS) was a monsterity that must be destroyed at all costs, “Why wouldn’t the White House join the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, the legally recognised government and a UN member state, in the fight against the jihadists and crush them once and for all?”

Tarpley points out that the money that sup- ports IS and its operations comes from Saudi Arabia, a key US ally in the Middle East. Tarpley believes the US could have applied pressure to Saudi Arabia to stop sending arms and money [and mercenaries] to the terrorists in Iraq and Syria. He also wonders why US ally and NATO member Turkey, with a huge army, doesn’t “simply wipe the jihadists off the face of the earth in a matter of weeks?”. Why indeed?
the program draws heavily on the tes-

mony of emigres (“exiled Russian business tycoons, writers and poli-
ticians”), as well as the “exhaustive research of scholar and best-selling
author of Putin’s Kleptocracy Karen Davisha”, to expose Putin’s “alleged
money-laundering activities and ties to organised crime, [and] a secret
personal fortune said to be in the billions”.

There are some very bright grad-
uates of some of the leading universi-
ties of the USA, the UK and Europe, whose sole job is to formulate stuff
like this, and very well-paid it is, too. Clearly, we are going to see a lot
more of it.

S
ome years ago, the actors
who played the two leading
detectives in the BBC crime series
Softly, Softly did an exhaustive TV
investigation into the notorious Jack
the Ripper case. They ran into a brick
wall: certain key evidence was inac-
cessible, being under official lock
and key, “not to be opened”. The incapa-
cable supposition is that the British ruling class was
protecting itself against a damaging
scandal of some sort. One theory is
that one or more of the Ripper’s pros-
titute victims had been taking part
in some upper-class debauchery, and
were killed to silence them. The kill-
ings stopped abruptly when that goal
had been achieved.

However, no such implications
bother The Missing Evidence: Jack
The Ripper (SBS ONE Wednesday,
March 25 at 8.30pm) which claims – incredibly – that “hidden diaries
and letters point toward a new sus-
pect, a woman by the name of Lizzie
Williams”.

Can you imagine the future such
a discovery would make if these dia-
raries and letters were real? Instead,
they’re virtually unknown except on
the Internet.

‘Softly, Softly’ (2007).

W
oody Allen is a distinctive talent among US filmmakers.
His 2010 film You Will Meet A Tall Dark Stranger (SBS ONE Sat-

day March 28 at 8.30pm) is the fourth film he made in London,

D
ave Gritten of The Daily Tele-

paper described it as “A

wood Reporter

Taking its title from the predic-
tion comedy. However, stand-up,
that tri

than engaging with them.” AO Scott

saying: “There are hints of farce, drop-

ning viewpoints about where the

Owen Gleiberman of Entertain-

ent Weekly stated “The film is not-

ete (2005),

Taking issue, and politics. From early

his most awful New York comedies,

famous fable

Melinda and

The Holly-

The Guardian

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March 19

THE ABBOTT GOVERNMENT’S NEW LAWS GIVING
EXTRAORDINARY POWERS TO INTELLIGENCE
SERVICES & POLICE MUST BE RESISTED BY ALL THOSE
WHO OPPOSE THREATS TO DEMOCRACY
Stephen Blanks, President, NSW Council of Civil Liberties;
Alison Broinowski, Dr, Former Ambassador and now Visiting Fellow, ANU;

March 26

IS THERE SPACE IN OUR CITIES FOR POORER PEOPLE?
Mary Perkins, Executive Officer, SHELTER, NSW;
Peter Phibbs, Professor, Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning;

April 2

NO MEETING: EASTER
Public holiday;

April 9

ANZACS AND THE MILITARISATION OF AUSTRALIAN
SOCIETY
David Stephens, Dr, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, UNSW;
Noah Bassil, Dr, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University;

Every Thursday 6:30 pm ‘til 8:15 pm
HAROLD PARK HOTEL
50 Wigram Rd & Ross St Glebe

24-26 Lilian Fowler Pl Marrickville 2204
Organised by Hands off Glebe 0418 290 663
Entry $10, concession $5

Charles Bradley 02 9692 0005
dbradley@pacfic.net.au
www.politicalinthebop.org.au

Guardian

Worth Watching
March 18, 2015

The missing evidence...
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Guardian

March 18, 2015

Save Woodlark Island’s forests

Steven Katsineris

“This island is biologically and culturally unique and it’s now in real danger. It’s vital that the world watch Woodlark Island very carefully,” William Laurance, director of scientific organisation ALERT (Alliance of Leading Environmental Scientists and Thinkers).

Woodlark Island (also known as Muyua Island) is a small, unspoilt tropical island paradise located off the east coast of Papua New Guinea. The 6,000 inhabitants of Woodlark live in harmony with the ancient rainforests of their island home, a biodiverse ecosystem shared for thousands of years between tribal peoples and a myriad of rare, endangered and endemic animal species.

However, the pristine forests of Woodlark Island are now under threat from a Malaysian logging company, Karridale Limited, which wants to clear at least one quarter of the island’s forests against the wishes of the majority of islanders who reject the project.

Many locals feel overwhelmed and deeply concerned about the future of their home. They and wildlife researchers fear that the project will inevitably lead to the extinction of numerous animal species that rely on the island’s rainforest as their habitat.

The destruction of Woodlark Island’s forests would be a crime against the natural world. These rainforests are home to countless wildlife, to date scientists have identified at least 42 species found only in the rainforests on Woodlark Island. More than 40 endemic plant and animal species would lose much of their habitat and are at risk, including seven frogs, four reptiles, four insects, 19 land snails and the Woodlark Cuscus, as well as seven plants. Scientists and environmentalists also believe that there are other as yet unknown species inhabitting the island awaiting discovery. 

The Woodlark Cuscus is a tree-dwelling marsupial that inhabits primary and secondary tropical forests with a preference for the dry lowland forest. Since it makes up the eastern half of Woodlark Island and on nearby Alcester Island, however, they were still considered vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) because of their restricted range. It is currently listed as endangered by the IUCN. While the Woodlark Cuscus is hunted by the locals, it plays only a small part in their diet and this does not impact on population numbers on the islands. The biggest threat to the Woodlark Cuscus is the clearance of its rainforest home. While it is not known how massive this project will be, it will have adverse effects on the native forests and wildlife on the island.

Simon Piyszew, a local medical doctor who is leading the struggle against the destruction of his island home says: “I’m so exhausted and depressed at the thought of losing Woodlark’s nature to plunderers.” Simon Piyszew is hoping for outside support, as in 2008 when a palm oil company wanted to clear the island’s forests for a plantation. With international backing, the locals managed to convince the company to abandon the project. Karridale Ltd wants to clear at least 17,600 hectares of forest – around one quarter of the island, but locals fear that the company has its eye on more than half of the island’s forests. Time is running out for them, however, as the Malaysian company has set up logging camps and is ready to start felling the island’s trees for lumber and patio furniture.

A leading elder of Woodlark’s Malasi Clan says only a minority of the islander community approved the project, while the general population was kept in the dark until very late. The company’s permits are dubious at best.

It’s not too late to stop the project, as the response to a planned gold mine on Woodlark has shown: Governor Titus Philemon criticised the “dismal and half-hearted” efforts by government agencies to inform the islanders about the environmental impact of the three planned open-pit mines and put a stop to the project until the peoples’ concerns are addressed.

Scientists express grave concerns

“Woodlark Island is a biological jewel – home to at least 42 species that occur nowhere else on Earth,” said William Laurance, a professor at James Cook University in Australia and director of ALERT. The leading scientific group is concerned that a tropical island rich with unique wild animal species and Indigenous peoples could be over-run by industrial logging. The Malaysian logging company, Karridale Limited, plans to log a large swath of the island. Estimates of the extent of planned logging range from 20 to 50 percent of the island.

“The customary land owners on Woodlark Island are extremely nervous, they rely on the forest and land for their livelihoods and fear they could lose control over large swaths of the island,” said Laurance.

“The company is being elusive about its plans and doesn’t appear to have consulted adequately with the local communities,” said Professor Corey Bradshaw at the University of Adelaide.

“There’s been many conflicts between logging corporations and indigenous groups in Papua New Guinea,” said Dr Erik Meijaard, who studies logging in the Asia-Pacific region. “For nature conservation, a plan this ambitious sets off alarm bells.” said Professor Stuart Pimm from Duke University in the USA. “This island is jam-packed with unique species, many of which have tiny geographic ranges and so are highly vulnerable to major disturbances. “The devil is in the details,” said Pimm. “Careful, small-scale logging is one thing, but many Malaysian logging corporations are known for aggressive, large-scale logging.”

Large-scale logging of Woodlark’s forests will destroy this unique lowland rainforest and a huge percentage of the habitat available to the island’s unique plants and animals and will endanger the island’s precious flora and fauna. These intact rainforests, the wildlife that inhabits them and the land rights of the Indigenous people should be protected from this logging project. It should not be allowed to go ahead.

On their own, the 6,000 inhabitants of Woodlark Island do not have the means to alone avert the destruction of their home. They need our support. Please take up the cause of the Woodlark Islanders and help to put a stop to this destructive project. Your input can greatly assist the people to save their island’s rainforests, the Woodlark Cuscus and other threatened wildlife. And these efforts will also contribute to highlighting rainforest destruction and help in saving the world’s precious remaining rainforests.

What to do:

Please raise this issue and publicise it by write letters to the newspapers expressing your concerns.

Please sign and share these petitions to help save the forests and rare animals of Woodlark Island from logging companies.

Go to www.woodlark.org and do a search for “Woodlark Island” and sign the petition.

Sources – Rainforest Rescue, EcoInternet and ALERT