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## Spying revelations

# Partners in crime

Anna Pha and Tom Pearson

**The fallout from recent revelations of US spying operations on its "friends" in Europe continues. The US's European allies are embarrassed by revelations of the personal mobiles of government leaders being violated and are questioning whether US agencies can be trusted with shared intelligence. India and several other countries are looking at setting up their own internet systems to avoid their communications passing through the US, as they do at present. Indonesia is joining Brazil and Germany in asking the UN General Assembly to pass a resolution calling on all countries to respect the right of privacy under international law.**

The leaks by former National Security Agency (NSA) analyst Edward Snowden and US army private Chelsea (then Bradley) Manning with the assistance of WikiLeaks, have not only embarrassed the US and British authorities, but reflect badly on Australia which has been exposed as a partner in crime.

It is no secret that spooks spy on the affairs of their own people and those of other nations. That Pine Gap in Central Australia spies on our neighbours. Nor was it unknown that diplomatic corps in foreign countries include intelligence agents. The existence of the US Echelon system and the signals intelligence (SIGINT) collection and analysis network operated by the US, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom – Five Eyes – was in the public domain before Edward Snowden's revelations.

In the past the US and other governments could always rely on the media to black out or play down reports of espionage, especially when they came from peace activists. The Australia government used the "neither confirm nor deny" approach and got away with it.

We now have the actual evidence, the release of telling diplomatic cables and video material. It is out there in the social media and the all-pervasive nature of surveillance is mindboggling. It cannot be simply swept under the carpet; it has to be dealt with or at least seen to be dealt with publicly.

Edward Snowden revealed the US has surveillance facilities at 90 diplomatic missions around the world, some of them joint operations with Australia's top secret Defence Signals Directorate (DSD) which uses facilities at Geraldton in Western Australia.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel accused the United States of an unacceptable breach of trust following allegations that the US bugged her personal mobile phone, and suggested data-sharing agreements with Washington may need revising.

She told US President Barack Obama: "spying among friends – it cannot be." The British embassy in Berlin has also been implicated in the spying on Merkel and the German government. The German Foreign Minister called in the US and British ambassadors seeking an explanation.

Some German politicians have suggested that negotiations over an EU-US free-trade agreement should be suspended. US authorities are doing all they can to dampen down reactions and move on as though it is not a big deal.

The question of trust, of the reliability of the NSA to handle highly sensitive material without leaks is a very real issue for the US's allies. The US may well find that it no longer has the same level of access to data from its allies. After all, intelligence co-operation is dependent on the ability of others to keep secrets, and the US has failed that test.

The leaks have certainly struck a blow at US imperialism and exposed for the world to see aspects of the shameless, illegal and unacceptable operations of imperialist powers – not just directed against their "enemies", but also exposing inter-imperialist rivalries and unprincipled lack of loyalty between "friends".

Past claims about US spying facilities such as at Pine Gap or Menwith Hill and Fylingdale in the UK have tended to concentrate on the military and political side of US spying.

However, business information is a main target for intelligence organisations. Companies often provide employment and cover for spy operatives. Governments use the information to assist their transnational corporations in winning overseas contracts, making investments, changing government regulations, and in negotiating free trade agreements. NGOs and media outlets also provide cover.

Last week there was a report that the DSD was involved in an NSA operation using the cover of Kevin Rudd at the Bali climate change conference in 2007. It was used to listen in to the mobile phones of key Indonesian figures. One can speculate what else it may have been used for, e.g. to evesdrop on delegations under pressure to let industrialised nations off their responsibilities under the Kyoto Protocol.

According to Snowden's leak, all signatories of the "Five Eyes" agreement, including Australia have played a role in the gathering of data on our neighbours and elsewhere for the US and Britain.

Edward Snowden revealed that the NSA had hacked the computer network of Brazil's state-run oil company as well as capturing data from emails and telephone calls. Other countries that have objected to the NSA's operations include Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, France and Russia.

Australia's ambassador has been called into the Indonesian Ministry for a talk and also summonsed by the Malaysian government in protest over the spying allegations.

"As a neighbouring country and friend, the reported actions do not reflect the spirit of existing friendship," the Indonesian Foreign Ministry said in a statement. "It cannot be accepted by the government."

Adding insult to injury, the Abbott government arrogantly, in true colonial style, attempted to return a boatload of asylum seekers last week. Indonesia stood its ground, asserted its sovereign rights, and the Australian government was forced to back down. The poor asylum seekers were then illegally transported to Christmas Island for indefinite detention.

East Timor's Prime Minister, Xanana Gusmao spoke out last week about powerful countries that "shamelessly violate the civic rights" of other countries" using electronic surveillance. "Either we are in the presence of extreme distrust … or we are witnessing the fraudulent use of technology to obtain economic advantage over others, which is even more immoral when those others are weak and small."

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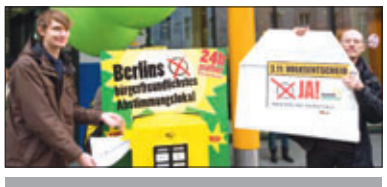


**Visitors to Snowden and visitors to Berlin**

Guardian

Issue 1618 November 13, 2013

## Farmers hit by global agribusiness

**With the rapid growth in trade with China and other Asian nations, there is increased interest by foreign and local corporations in agricultural production. Dairy produce is already Australia's third largest source of agriculture exports after beef and wheat.**

**There is a battle for control over Warrnambool Cheese & Butter (WCB) group with Bega Cheese, Murray Goulburn (owned by Australian dairy farmers), the Canadian giant Saputo, New Zealand-based Fonterra and the Japanese Kirin Corporation in the front line.**

**The multi-billion dollar Saputo empire is the 10th largest dairy producer in the world and has been looking for some time to find a way to penetrate the Australian market as a means of boosting exports to expanding Asian markets.**

**Bega, Murray Goulburn and Lion already own around 45 percent of shares, posing problems for Saputo or Kirin to gain a majority share-holding for absolute control. WCB manufactures a range of products for Lion including the Coon and Cracker Barrel brands. Kirin already owns National Foods and through it the Dairy Farmers company in NSW.**

**The signing of free trade agreements with China, Japan and South Korea, and the Transpacific Partnership Agreement could also see bidding for Australia companies escalate.**

**The National Party is up in arms over the possible outcome of a free trade agreement with China. China is asking for the same treatment as the US when it comes to investment. Any investment proposal over $1 billion from a US company for farmland has to be referred to the Foreign Investment Review Board and then approved by the government. At present, the threshold for the same investment by a Chinese company is $248 million. The National Party is strongly opposed to raising it. Victorian Nationals are proposing that there should be a limit of $15 million on foreign ownership of rural land, regardless of its country of origin.**

**Some National Party members have come out strongly against Archer Daniels Midland's plans for a $3.4 billion takeover of GrainCorp. ADM is a large US-based global food processing and marketing corporation which also handles transportation and storage of grain. GrainCorp would suite its Asian expansion plans.**

**GrainCorp is the largest publicly listed agri-business on the Australian stockmarket with control of about 60 percent of the transport and storage of Australian grains – mainly wheat, but also barley and canola. It has its origins in the Australian Wheat Board which provided a single marketing desk for Australian wheat exports. For many decades it protected farmers during periods of drought or low prices on global markets with an averaging system of payments over good and bad years.**

**Its monopoly over exports provided considerable market power and efficiencies and was of huge benefit to growers. The single desk removed counterproductive competition, such as preventing a downward spiral of prices by desperate farmers competing for sales when prices were low.**

**Competition policy saw deregulation of wheat marketing in 2008, including the removal of the single desk and entry of other competing players. Already a number of smaller growers have gone out of business or been taken over as the agro-industrial businesses move in.**

**Deregulation will continue to drive smaller farmers off their land, whether it be wheat, milk or other products. The lifting of restrictions on imports, which has already crucified so many fruit farmers, will continue to take their toll.**

**Competition and deregulation policies are feeding and empowering the global agribusinesses and putting Australian farmers out of business. The sell-off of millions of dollars of land to foreign interests, in fact to private interests, is further removing control over the usage of that land by the Australian people. The profits will be largely exported, providing little benefit to the people.**

**The distinction between Chinese investment capital or US or Japanese capital is not the key question. Once it is privately owned and profit and market domination become the prime motives, the nationality of capital is secondary. Private ownership, lack of planning, monopolisation and deregulation are the key questions.**

### PRESS FUND

**The *Guardian* seeks to frustrate the nastier, unannounced plans of conservative governments, by shouting them from the rooftops. In contrast, the Abbott government's policy is to let the public know very little (and preferably nothing) about what they're doing.**
**If you want to know about the treatment of asylum seekers, for example, you must rely on the Indonesian press, and if you're concerned about the future of Australian coastal shipping, don't ask the Minister for Trade, because his lips are sealed. We depend on your contributions to help production of the *Guardian*, but at the moment they're almost as rare as a frank and informative government media release. We offer our thanks to this week's supporters, as follows, but we really need to boost their numbers, so please send in something for the next edition if you possibly can.**

**Mark Mannion $5, "Round Figure" $15**

**This week's total: $20 Progressive total: $6,400**

# How much is a wharfie's life worth?

**Wharfies are 14 times more likely to die on the job than the average Australian worker. The waterfront has seen massive productivity improvements over the last two decades and this intensification of productivity (and exploitation) has seen risks associated with working on the waterfront escalate.**

## Campaigning for your life

The Maritime Union of Australia's (MUA) campaign arose out of the spate of waterfront deaths, particularly in 2010 but there have been other fatalities subsequently and prior to that. The deaths have occurred in terminals and in general stevedoring facilities across a range of different companies. The employers have used every dirty trick in the book to ensure profits come before safety.

The MUA has pulled no punches either and has correctly and admirably utilised a broad range of campaign methods including industrial action, online campaigning, demonstrations and occupations.

That action has been met with the full force of the bosses' laws but the union has persisted, acting on the basis that zero tolerance to workplace deaths can be the only position that a union can take. We support that view.

The union has effectively engaged the workforce and has made this a priority issue for rank and file workers. – after all, what can be more important than coming home alive. The links between the employers and the corporate media have been laid bare for all to see in this process. While the national safety regulator, Safe Work Australia (SWA), has on at least three occasions sought to adopt the National Stevedoring Code of Practice (NSCOP), each time the employers demonstrate and utilise their class links to undermine and thwart it.

## Despicable greed and negligence

A couple of companies have played a particularly dirty role in this process. Qube, headed by the infamous Chris Corrigan, and global network terminal operator Dubai Ports World have gone to great lengths to do everything in their power to ensure that pesky issues like safety do not impede profits. On one occasion as NSCOP was to be adopted, and the very day after Newcastle wharfie Greg Fitzgibbon was killed on the job in September 2012, the employers joined with the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) to bomb the Code.

On another occasion the employers called on the *Australian Financial Review* (*AFR*) to write a scurrilous and factually incorrect article saying NSCOP would have significant cost effects. The *AFR* did not check their facts but dutifully, as a good capitalist newspaper does, ran the bosses line. The *AFR* article sparked the Office of Best Practice Regulation (OBPR) to become involved and demand that the Code be costed, over-ruling the position of Safe Work Australia who advocated adopting the code.

## ALP fails wharfies

To make matters worse, but unfortunately not that surprisingly, all of this occurred with an incumbent Labor government. The ALP played lip service to NSCOP but when the chips were down once again failed workers, allowing corporate profits to outweigh the lives and safety of workers.

Some may argue that this fact may be due to the delicate balance of power the former Gillard government had to deal with in a hung parliament but throughout the whole period of the Gillard and Rudd Governments, while the NSCOP debate was running hot, the ALP governments made no executive intervention to demand that the lives of workers were the foremost issue not the greed and skulduggery of the stevedoring bosses.

## What do the employers fear?

The cost arguments by employers cannot be justified. In the hierarchy of law there is legislation, acts of parliament such as the Workplace Health and Safety Act. Then below that there is regulation, usually accompanying legislation and giving details of application. Then beneath that there are codes of practice and then there is guidance material.

Codes of practice inform how to apply legislation and regulation; they do not create new legal requirements. They inform how to apply existing legislation and regulation, particularly around specific matters and areas not specifically identified in those existing laws.

There can consequently be no cost burden arising from a code of practice if the employer is adhering to the law. That is a questionable area on the waterfront where workers can identify daily breaches of the various safety acts and regulations and even breaches of the company's own policies on safety.

The cost argument around NSCOP is a myth. What employers fear is the consequential organisation of workers around safety issues that the NSCOP campaign brings about. The bosses fear workers' organisation. They act consistently to undermine and erode it and their opposition to NSCOP is based upon this fear.

## The Liberal/National dilemma

NSCOP is currently in the process of undergoing the regulation impact statement (RIS) to determine whether it will cost the employers. The bottom line question is "what is the cost of saving a workers life?" The tenuous grounds that are the basis of costing NSCOP will be tested to see whether political and profit-based expediency overrules common decency.

The obligations for employers are a class based assessment, based on their interests and their capacity to increase and maintain profits. For workers it means whether we come home alive.

After the RIS the code will have to be signed off by none other than the union hating (MUA in particular) Eric Abetz. The battle looks set to continue. This is a classic example of the bankruptcy of capitalism and a system that lauds profit above all else, while the worker continues to fight to survive.

Workers' lives before profits and greed.

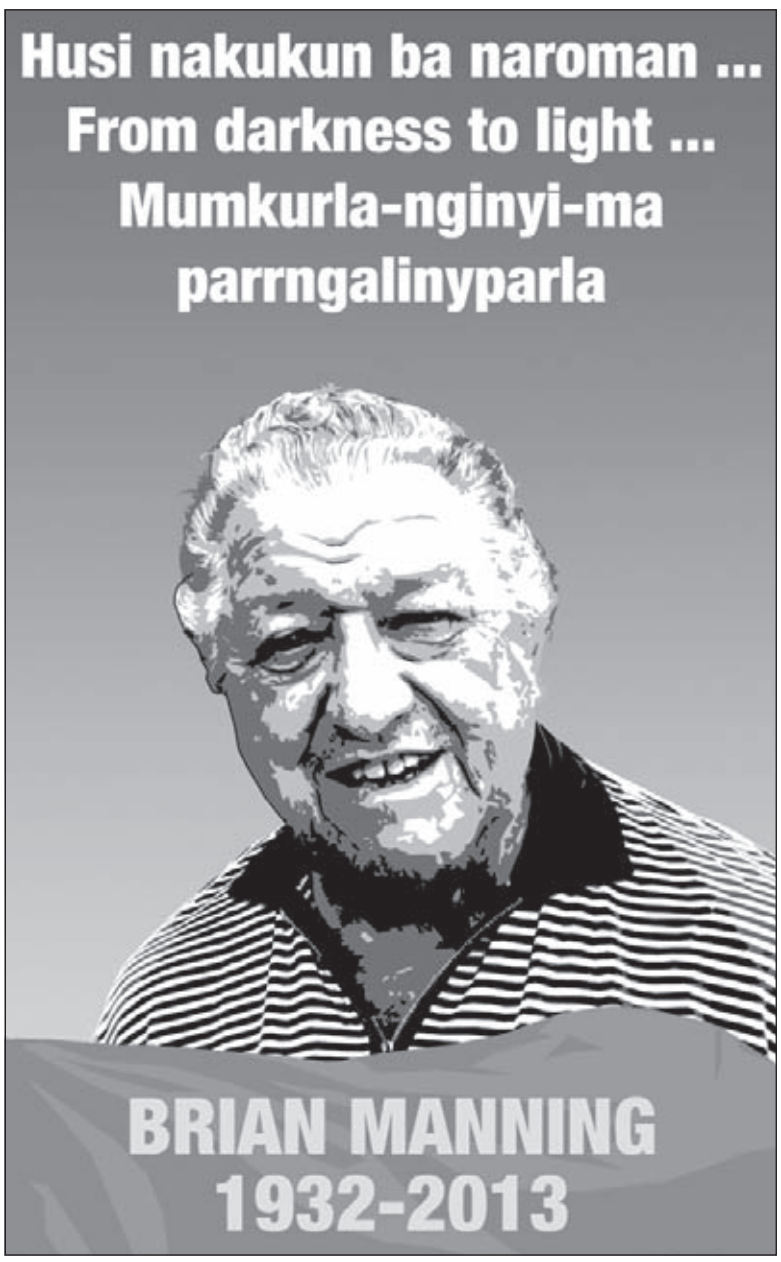
CPA Maritime Branch
maritime@cpa.org.au

Sign the MUA submission in support of NSCOP here:
nscop4life.org.au ✪

## Obituary

# Brian Manning

## A life given to the struggle




The slogan *Mumkurla-nginyi-ma parrngalinyparla* was selected by the Gurindji people involved in the 2000 Gurindji Freedom Day Banner Project, and has been translated into Tetum to honour Brian's work in the liberation of East Timor. Image from Brenda Croft, a Namawajirkiwajirki poster.

**It was with great sadness that the Communist Party of Australia received the news of the passing of legendary activist and communist Brian Manning on November 3 at the age of 81. It is not an easy thing to summarise the life's work of such an energetic and capable communist over long decades of struggle.**

The names of the battles he weighed into are etched in the annals of the labour movement of this country – the Wave Hill Walk-Off that opened the way to so many gains for the Aboriginal people, wage equality for Aboriginal workers, multiculturalism, the independence struggles of the people of Vietnam, Timor-Leste, West Papua and the Palestinians, the Green Bans movement of the Builders Labourers' Federation, opposition to the export of uranium from Australian ports and much more.

Brian was born in south-east country Queensland and attended Brisbane State High School until the age of 17. His first job was as a junior clerk. But over the next 17 years he worked in a range of jobs until finding his niche as a wharfie. He moved to the Northern Territory in 1956.

He was proud to be made a life member of the Maritime Union of Australia, successor organisation to the Waterside Workers' Federation that he served as secretary in Darwin with drive and militancy.

Following his retirement as a wharfie in 2002, he remained active in the union movement for the remainder of his life. He was also co-founder of the NT Trades and Labour Council and was on the Board of Inquiry that in 1984 laid out the foundations for workers' compensation for Territorians.

He became interested in politics and joined the Communist Party of Australia in 1959, which led him to take up the struggle for Aboriginal rights. He was a co-founder of the Northern Territory Aboriginal Rights Council in 1961 and played a leading role in the struggle against racism and for award wages for Aboriginal people. One of these was the struggle for award conditions for Aboriginal stock workers.

In 1965, the North Australian Workers Union (wharfies were then a section of that union), with the backing of the ACTU, applied to the Federal Arbitration Commission for full award pay and conditions for Aboriginal stock workers. The pastoralists were represented by John Kerr QC – the same Kerr who later sacked the Whitlam government.

Kerr argued that Aborigines, despite being the backbone of the industry's workforce for generations, still needed training because "a significant proportion … is retarded by tribal and cultural reasons from appreciation in full the concept of work."

The Commission accepted many of Kerr's racist claims, stating in part: "From the wealth of material presented to us by pastoralists, both in oral and written evidence, we conclude that at least a significant proportion of the aborigines employed on cattle stations in the Northern Territory is retarded by tribal and cultural reasons from appreciating in full the concept of work. The great majority are unable to work in a way which employers would expect of white employees." (07-03-1968)

None-the-less, the Commission, under considerable public pressure to award justice to Aboriginal stock workers whose work and skills were highly regarded, concluded that it had no option but to award equal pay: "There must be one industrial law, similarly applied to all Australians aboriginal or not." It did defer commencement until December 1, 1968.

Brian is widely recognised for his role during the Wave Hill Walk-Off. In 1966 a group of Aboriginal people led by Vincent Lingiari walked off the job at Wave Hill Station, 600 kilometres south of Darwin, in protest over wages and conditions.

This action, supported by the trade union, was central in paving the way for Aboriginal land rights. The struggle lasted for nine years until in 1975, the then Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, handed over a parcel of land to the local Gurindji people.

During this struggle, Brian and his J Series Bedford Truck, which is now heritage listed, supported the striking workers camped at Wattie Creek (Daguragu) by running supplies to and from Darwin.

On the 40th Anniversary of the Walk-Off Brian told the ABC: "I loaded this little Bedford with about three tonne of stuff. God, it took nearly two days. I think we had to camp half way. The roads were shocking – there were no bitumen roads, there were diversions all around the place … you know and there was great exhilaration by these people that help had arrived in respect of food."

### Solidarity struggles

Brian also used his truck to erect an antenna to establish communications with the underground movement (the Fretilin) in East Timor in the early days of the Indonesian invasion. He campaigned strongly for East Timorese self-determination.

At the 2011 Fretilin Congress, Brian was applauded by 700 Fretilin members for coordinating the establishment of the communications in difficult conditions. He was still greatly loved and revered by the East Timorese people. He was unable to attend the Congress due to his ailing health.

He was recognised for his hard work by becoming a Territory finalist for Australian Senior of the year in 2010. In the same year he was Darwin Senior Citizen of the Year, and accepted his award wearing a Morning Star tie in support of the West Papuans' independence struggle.

One of his most recent achievements was relocating and refurbishing the Seafarer's Centre at Darwin while he was voluntary chair of the Darwin Port Welfare Committee.

When he received the NT Senior Citizen of the Year award in 2010, Brian made a commitment. "I will spend my remaining energies opposing American imperialism and the lack of an independent foreign policy by the Australian governments that encourages the establishment of foreign bases on Australian soil."

A life given over to the struggle to his dying day for the betterment of the lives of people around the world. That's the legacy and inspiration left by comrade Brian to future generations.

The *Guardian* conveys its sincerest condolences to Brian's family, comrades and friends.

Vale Brian Manning ✪

**Pete's Corner**

# Rio Tinto hijacking Bougainville mining law

**In a stinging public attack, Bougainville President John Momis has been accused of colluding with mining giant Rio Tinto to bulldoze into law a new Mining Act that would pave the way for the re-opening of the Panguna mine.**

Twenty five years ago the environmental damage caused by the mine led to a civil war in which as many as 15,000 people lost their lives. Rio Tinto has never apologised or paid any compensation for the pollution or the terrible human costs of its mine.

Bougainville leader Sam Kauona last week published a two-page article in the national press presenting his stinging criticism of Momis and Rio Tinto – "The Regan/BCL political assault on Bougainville emerges from the shadows".

Kauona says Momis has acted unconstitutionally in trying to bulldoze a new mining law, drafted by Rio Tinto subsidiary Bougainville Copper and Australian academic Anthony Regan, through the Bougainville Parliament without public consultation.

This is the third draft of the Mining law. Two earlier versions were rejected by the public because they gave too much control of mineral rights and mining decisions to Momis and the politicians.

Kauona says there is now a tidal wave of public opposition on Bougainville to the reopening of the Panguna mine and Momis, Rio Tinto and Regan are desperately trying to swim against the current by seizing control of decision making.

Kauona says many Bougainvillians are puzzled as to why the man they elected President and "who for 40 years jumped up and down and led the opposition to the Bougainville Copper Act" is now the "key sponsor, apologist, supporter and cheerleader for BCL".

Kauona says the latest draft of the Mining law allows Rio Tinto through BCL to retain its lease over Panguna "as if nothing happened".

"Nothing happened? Bougainville knows that a war happened and up to 15,000 people died including PNG Defence Force Members. The Bougainville Copper Act was a direct cause of the war".

Kauona asks what rewards Momis and Regan might have been promised in the future for their assistance to Rio Tinto over the new law? As a possible answer, he points a finger at the way BHP has provided for ex-PNG Prime Minister Mekere Morauta since he left office after providing the company with immunity for the environmental damage its Ok Tedi mine caused in Western Province. Some murky links between Regan, ANU, AusAID and Rio Tinto have already been revealed.

The first draft Mining law was rejected by the public after it was exposed that Momis's claims the law was a world first in the rights it gave to local people to decide whether to allow mining on their land were untrue and the law vested final decision making powers with the government.

However promises that the law would be redrafted to take account of the public views have proved to be false and, says Kauona, the latest draft law (which has not been made public) is just a reiteration of the first draft – which is why it has been brought in to Parliament via the back door.

Kauona says the new draft, which has been written by "rich white lawyers" would drag Bougainville back to the Colonial era by denying landowners any rights in relation to mining, effectively stealing the ground out from under their feet.

Kauona's article comes on the same day an Australian think-tank has warned the Australian government it could have to provide a new military intervention on Bougainville in a few years as the island could again descend into violence.

Bougainville Freedom Movement ✪

# Scott Morrison's deception exposed

**The Immigration Minister Scott Morrison has been caught in his own web of deceptive half-truths and policy of media blackout. At a media briefing on October 18, Scott Morrison famously denied that there was a pregnant woman on Nauru. Previously Morrison's office claimed that the fact that there was pregnant woman on Nauru was "unsubstantiated".**

But the pregnant Rohingyan woman that Immigration Minister Scott Morrison denied existed had been brought from Nauru to Brisbane just days before Morrison's briefing.

Scott Morrison had also bragged about the birthing facilities on Nauru, although he conspicuously avoided the fact that Nauruan infant mortality is twice that of Australia. Morrison had been insistent that there were no exceptions regarding transfers of asylum seekers to Nauru and that pregnant women, and young families would be sent to Nauru.

Originally believed to be carrying twins, the 31 year old Rohingyan asylum seeker was told she was carrying one baby after examination at a Brisbane hospital. On Nauru, she was also diagnosed with diabetes. She gave birth to a baby boy, by Caesarean section, on Wednesday afternoon, November 6.

The Rohingyan family has two other children, a seven-year-old daughter and a four-year-old son.

"Despite the Minister's boasting, it is now clear that even his own department does not think there are adequate medical facilities for pregnant women on Nauru," said Ian Rintoul from the Refugee Action Coalition. "Diabetic pregnancies present specific significant medical problems for both mother and baby. Thankfully the woman was brought to Australia. It was always irresponsible of Scott Morrison to insist that a twin birth would present no problems on Nauru.

"On top of that, the facilities in the camp are appalling. The heat makes it impossible for anyone, particularly the children, to sleep. The rationed five minute showers have to be taken together with the children and the shortage of water means the shower is a trickle of water. There are no facilities for the new-born."

To add insult to injury, the Rohinyan family was found to be UNHCR refugees in Malaysia in 2005. The Refugee Action Coalition has been told that there are many other Rohingyan UNHCR refugees being dumped on Nauru.

"Morrison's efforts at deception can't hide the stark facts of the detention hell-hole on Nauru. More and more of the mistreatment of asylum seekers and the cruelty of off-shore processing is being revealed," said Rintoul. ✪

# Residents stand strong against proposed Melbourne tunnel

**After successfully shutting down Lend Lease's Docklands office for several hours last week, opponents of the East-West Link again targeted the building giant on November 6.**

Protesters met at 7am on the corner of Bourke Street and Harbour Esplanade in the Docklands (Docklands Park) and then marched to the location at 825 Bourke Street.

Lend Lease are one of the front runners bidding for the controversial East-West tunnel and toll road project. If they win the contract they are set to rake in millions of dollars in profits. The other major construction firm bidding for the project is John Holland.

To make this project even more attractive to these private investors the economic model being used by the government means that the tax payer will take on all the risk.

Areas of Melbourne's north will become construction zones for up to five years. Impact documents reveal that people face dust pollution, increased congestion and work on the east-west tollway will cause noise and vibrations.

The will be a temporary loss of open public space and a permanent loss of two hectares. This is on top of the acquisition of 105 homes and 34 commercial properties.

In addition, Royal Park will lose 1.36 hectares to the proposed six-lane freeway.

Lend Lease last year admitted to cheating its US clients for a decade on projects including the 9/11 memorial and New York's Grand Central Station. It subsequently agreed to pay a fine of $US40.5 million. Despite this, it is still one of the state government's preferred contractors.

Protest organiser Mel Gregson said, "While this rogue company might be a favourite of the Liberals, they are not going to be welcomed into our neighbourhood.

"We are demanding that Lend Lease pull out of this project. We are telling them now that the tunnel will not be going ahead. If the government is arrogant enough to proceed to construction they will be met with a mass community picket at the site.

"This community is not going to allow billions of dollars to be wasted on a toll road and tunnel that won't reduce congestion. We want to see money invested in the state's public transport network. This would do much more to solve traffic congestion problems and create many more jobs." Mel said. ✪

# Partners in crime

Continued from page 1

Philip Dorling, writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, quotes a former Australian Secret Intelligence Service officer: "We gave market information [to] major companies like BHP which were helpful to us, and officers at overseas stations would trade snippets with some of their commercial contacts … BHP knew we were giving them secret intelligence. They lapped it up." ("Spy agency passed trade secrets to BHP", 07-11-2013)

US cables published in 2011 by Fairfax media revealed former BHP Billiton CEO Marius Kloppers privately offered "to trade confidences" with US officials about China.

Zhu Feng, Professor of international relations at Peking University, said that the spying revelations "badly undermine Chinese respect" for Australia. "Australia follows the US without principle and unconditionally.

"Australia doesn't even deserve to be called 'deputy sheriff'; they are more like a subordinate."

Australia's blind subservience to US military and intelligence agencies is only harming Australia' security, in both military and economic terms. What the media haven't reported on is that the US also spies on Australia.

The cables leaked by US army private Chelsea (then Bradley) Manning and published by WikiLeaks shook the US authorities. Manning was imprisoned under conditions that the US special rapporteur on torture described as inhumane and cruel. WikiLeaks founder, Julian Assange remains holed up in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, avoiding the same fate as Manning.

There is no evidence that these leaks posed a security risk to the US or its allies. Meanwhile, the real criminals, the real terrorists, remain in power attempting to restore their image amongst their allies and the public.

It is time to review Australia's foreign policy and relations with the US. If Australia is to develop good relations with its neighbours, regain international respect, and strengthen regional security, then it should end the US Alliance and immediately close down all US military bases and other facilities. To do so is in Australia's interests. ✪

# Abbott's wrecker's ball let loose

Anna Pha

**Prime Minister Tony Abbott hasn't waited for the findings of his Audit Commission to set the wreckers' balls and steamrollers loose on the Australian Public Service (APS). By the time the Audit Commission's report is handed over, government agencies (including departments) will have lost thousands of staff and vital public services and research will have been savaged.**

Government agencies received instructions for the slashing of 12,000 public sector jobs through "natural attrition" on Thursday last week. And that is not all. Abbott has already declared that everything is on the table with the Audit being prepared by the Business Council of Australia's head. (See "Abbott's audit: By big business, For big business", *Guardian*, #1616, 30-10-2013)

The Coalition government has also increased the APS's "efficiency dividend" by another 0.25 percent which will take it to 2.5 percent next financial year – an additional 2.5 percent cut in spending by departments which the Community and Public Sector Union estimates could result in 6,250 job losses.

"This is just the beginning of sustained cuts to jobs and services," national secretary of the CPSU Nadine Flood said. "Tony Abbott needs to come clean with the community. You can't cut 12,000 jobs without hurting services. These are real people doing real jobs.

"This will knock services around the country for a six. Centrelink queues will get longer, there'll be fewer people inspecting at Quarantine, and fewer people checking the weather at the Bureau of Meteorology. You name it, it'll be hit," Flood said.

In reality it is not about "natural attrition" or staff freezes. It amounts to outright cuts, job losses and the gutting of the APS.

The new instructions are clear: " … agency heads will take measures to ensure that existing non-ongoing employment arrangements cease at the end of their current term … Only in special circumstances where the work is critical and no suitable replacement is available in that agency or any other, is a replacement possible."

Where a vacancy arises it is to be filled "by displaced staff from within the agency, or if none are suitable, by displaced staff from across the APS".

"Agency heads should also consider cancelling non-ongoing arrangements in the case of programs that have been closed or downgraded." There is no shortage of programs being closed or downgraded! The full hit list is still to be revealed.

At present there are more than 14,000 public servants in "non-ongoing employment", such as fixed term contracts or a casual basis. They all stand to lose their jobs and the government may even swing the axe before their contract expires.

"Agencies will only engage non-APS staff to fill critical vacancies with the agreement of the Australian Public Service Commissioner."

## "Displaced staff"

The government has not given much information about how staff become "displaced". A large number of public servants stand to lose their jobs through the merging and downsizing of departments, the transfer of some areas of work to other agencies or decisions to discontinue the work they do. There is a footnote indicating that it includes employees who are identified as "excess or potentially excess".

There is no indication how long "displaced staff" will be allowed to remain in employment before being driven out or sacked.

The cuts are as indiscriminate as cluster bombs, scattered randomly across the APS, without any planning or prioritising of what would go. A contract ends or someone retires, the position vanishes.

More than 60 percent of the more than 14,000 temporary workers are women and 75 percent of them earn $42,000 or less per annum. A quarter of the temporary staff is under 25 years old. Indigenous employees will also feel the brunt of the cuts.

In addition, these workers are more likely to be found in frontline services such as Centrelink, Medicare and immigration in regional areas, meaning the cuts will hit the most vulnerable in society.

## Privatisation

The Victorian model may give some insight into Abbott's agenda. In December last year, Peter Shergold was appointed by the Victorian government as the project leader for "a revolution in the delivery of public sector services". Shergold was head of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet from 2003 to 2008 under the Howard government and was one of the three "independent" experts hired by Abbott to check on the Liberal's policy costings prior to the September elections.

In July this year, he produced a report, titled "Services Sector Reform: A roadmap for community and human services reform" which was only released this month, on the eve of the Melbourne Cup, resulting in little publicity.

The main thrust of this report is found in recommendations No. 6: "Delivering services through non-government organisations."

"While decisions on the most appropriate approach to service delivery should be based on a careful evaluation of the most effective way of creating public value, the default position should be an expectation that an increasing range of government services will be delivered by non-government organisations," the report claims.

"No matter how it is dressed, this is contracting out our work, and our members should be furious to be not only excluded from being a delivery option, but to be so openly vilified," CPSU Victoria said. (See "Shergold shafts Service in Sector Report", www.cpsuvic.org/news/shergold-shafts-service-sector-report)

Shergold recommends a new funding model that relies heavily on private finance.

"The so-called reform occurs concurrently with widespread public sector job losses. It leads to costly taxpayer clean-ups when social services fail while corporations clear out with the profits. Public Services "being delivered by shifting the government workforce to a lower wage non-government or faith based service provider has been the model embraced by conservative governments across the globe yet their proponents are struggling to point to one success", the CPSU Victoria notes.

"You don't need to be a soothsayer to see what's coming with a Commission of Audit; just take a look at Queensland which is heading towards the wholesale privatisation and outsourcing of public services. Liberal governments say one thing before the election and then go back on their promises after it," Nadine Flood said.

There are also strong similarities with the scorched earth policies of the former Liberal PM John Howard. He slashed 32,000-33,000 pubic service jobs in less than three years following his National Audit. Later, when the work was not being done, the numbers gradually increased back to even higher than their former level. Abbott has no intention of allowing that to happen.

The aim is not only to cut back services – give them a number one razor cut – but to privatise the remaining functions and services as far as possible.

Howard did this with the former Commonwealth Employment Service (CES). It was replaced by a plethora of large and small organisations including the big charities. The big ones made a killing, rorting the system for what they could, the smaller ones got squeezed out. The end game is the big corporations and corporate church and other charities, and that is essentially what happened.

The unemployed were treated like profit-churning commodities rather than receiving the assistance they required. Staff in a number of these organisations were churned at a rapid pace, underpaid, and there never was any continuity for their clients.

Once the Audit Commission brings out its recommendations for privatising and contracting out, then tens of thousands more jobs will be on the line. Some employees may be able to hang on by tendering to do their own work, but to win a contract they will need to abandon their union negotiated enterprise agreements. They will be competing with corporations, church corporations and other non-union, low-wage outfits, some even using volunteer labour.

The CPSU warns that at least 50,000 public sector jobs could go if a Coalition government followed the lead of Queensland and outsourced large chunk of services to the private sector. That may prove to be a conservative estimate.

The public service is the antithesis of everything that Abbott stands for. He would be happy to bring it to its knees, point to its alleged disfunction and then hand everything over to the church sector and big business outfits like SERCO.

Abbott's driving philosophy is Christian fundamentalism. He rejects science in favour of faith, and acts like his hero John Howard, relying on "instinct" to defend his denial and inaction over climate change, rather than accept the ungodly concept of human intervention, scientific knowledge and facts in a material world.

He combines blind faith with his capitalist ideology, which leads to his ultimate desire to shrink the APS to next to nothing and let big business and the church and its corporations take over.

These cuts and privatisation are under way. The CPSU and other unions and workers in the public sector require the support of all trade unions, left and progressive parties, community organisations and individuals to put pressure on the government. Write to your MP now and Coalition Senators to indicate your strongest opposition to these changes.

The services that millions of Australians depend upon are at stake. So too are thousands of public sector jobs. This is an attack on our democratic rights. Act now! ✪

The campaign to Stop TAFE Cuts is becoming more important as cuts to TAFE colleges around the country are really hurting students and communities.

We are asking all our supporters to "do your block" for TAFE during the week of 11-17 November 2013. To "do your block" take a bundle of letters or leaflets and letterbox your neighbourhood. This is a great way of letting people in your local community know what is happening to their local TAFE college and encouraging them to get involved in the campaign.

Letters, leaflets and posters can be downloaded from the website for you to print yourself; or contact us and we will post some out to you.

Everything you need to get involved is available at www.stoptafecuts.com.au/doyourblock

We're ready to spread the word in our communities – and hope you are too.

Kind regards,

**The StopTAFECuts Team**

# And then there were twelve

T Rajamoorthy

**The free trade agreement being negotiated by the regional bloc known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) has provoked widespread opposition in the countries involved in its negotiation. Today the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) is rightly perceived and condemned as a US-led attempt to penetrate and dominate the economies of the region.**

And yet in its origins, it was not a US-conceived treaty and initially the US was not even a party to it. When negotiations on the agreement (known originally as the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership) were launched on the sidelines of the summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in 2002, it was a tripartite affair involving New Zealand, Chile and Singapore. Dubbed the Pacific Three (P-3), they would soon become the Pacific Four (P-4) when Brunei joined the negotiations in 2005. The negotiations were concluded later that year and the agreement came into force in 2006 even though the negotiations on the financial services and investment chapters of the agreement were deferred for two years.

It was only in February 2008, when then President Bush announced that the US would join the deferred P-4 negotiations on financial services and investment that the US came into the picture.

One key reason for the US's interest in the trade talks is to be found in the US President's 2008 Annual Report on the Trade Agreements Program. It says, in part, "US participation in the TPP could position US businesses better to compete in the Asia-Pacific region, which is seeing the proliferation of preferential trade agreements among US competitors and the development of several competing regional economic integration initiatives that exclude the United States."

Apart from economic considerations, there are also geopolitical concerns, particularly with regard to the growing power and influence of China, something which became clearer with the Obama administration's policy announcement of a military and diplomatic "pivot" or "rebalance" towards Asia. As a research paper for the US Congress notes:

"The TPP could have implications beyond US economic interests in the Asia-Pacific. The region has become increasingly viewed as of vital strategic importance to the United States. Throughout the post-World War II period, the region has served as an anchor of US strategic relationships, first in the containment of communism and more recently as a counterweight to the rise of China."

As noted above, US involvement began in March 2008 with its participation in the P-4 negotiations on financial services and investment. Later in September it announced its decision to participate in comprehensive negotiations for an expanded trans-Pacific agreement and thereafter took charge of the whole negotiations. It took the initiative to expand the membership of the proposed treaty by coupling its announcement of accession with an invitation to Australia, Peru and Vietnam to join the pact.

## Legitimate fears

For Chile and Peru, two Latin American countries which had previously already concluded bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) with the US, the leading role of the US in the negotiations for an expanded trans-Pacific agreement raised some legitimate fears. Soon after President Bush announced in 2008 his country's intention to join the negotiations, one Chilean trade official complained that, with an FTA with the US already in place, "he could only expect greater, politically and perhaps economically difficult, demands from the Americans in a TPP". This fear among Latin American countries which had already concluded FTAs with the US, that they might end up "paying twice", was spelled out more fully by a Chilean economist:

"Chile and Peru, as well as other Latin American potential TPP candidates, had to make several economically and politically costly concessions in their respective FTAs with the US. Some of those concessions were made even after the formal closure of negotiations, through amendments to the agreed texts.

"Commitments on intellectual property have been especially contentious, as they often involved going beyond TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) provisions. Such is the case, for example, of the increased protection afforded by FTAs to pharmaceutical and agrochemical products, as well as copyrighted matter; of the restrictions placed on certain flexibilities allowed by TRIPS such as mandatory licensing for medicines; and of the strengthening of enforcement provisions beyond TRIPS disciplines.

"Renegotiation within the TPP of existing commitments on issues such as IPRs [intellectual property rights], investment and environment involves for Latin American countries the risk of 'paying twice' in areas of great political sensitivity and which relate to a broad range of public policies."

Malaysia, which was invited in 2010 to join the proposed pact, had been involved in negotiations for a bilateral FTA with the US. The talks however had become stalled because of disagreements on some issues. Interestingly, in explaining why an invitation had been extended to a country with which bilateral talks had proved abortive, the then United States Trade Representative (USTR) Ron Kirk, in his written notification to the US Congress of the President's decision, claimed that "Malaysia, which is engaged in extensive domestic economic reform, has assured us that it is now prepared to conclude a high-standard agreement, including on these issues [which remained outstanding in the bilateral negotiations]''. If the claim is true, then the TPPA will afford the US a second opportunity to wrest from Malaysia what it could not secure in bilateral negotiations.

With Malaysia as its ninth member, a formal announcement of the emergence of this trading bloc (now known as the TPP with the dropping of the words "strategic" and "economic") was made by the parties at the APEC leaders' meeting in Honolulu in 2011. In the same year, the US's partners in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Canada and Mexico, indicated their intention to join the grouping and they made their debut at the 15th round of the TPPA negotiations in Auckland in December 2012.

South Korea had been invited to join the grouping in 2010 but rather prudently declined. But it is the decision to invite its economic rival Japan and the decision of that country to become the latest, 12th member (it participated in the 18th round of TPPA talks in Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, in July) that is somewhat perplexing.

As Wilson Centre Senior Policy Scholar William Krist observed in his 2012 paper on the TPPA prepared for the Centre, "there is some strong opposition to Japan's participation within the United States; for example, the US auto industry opposes Japan's participation in the negotiations at this time, arguing that Japan's market access barriers cannot be remedied in a free trade agreement". There was equally strong opposition within Japan from the country's small but influential agricultural lobby to joining the TPP.

While geopolitical considerations have been an important factor in overriding opposition in both countries, the Obama administration obviously believes that it can still wrest significant concessions from Japan on the automobile issue through the TPPA. US trade officials have already begun talks with their Japanese counterparts on this issue and, at the time of writing, the new USTR Michael Froman is scheduled to hold further talks during a one-day stopover in Tokyo on his way to Brunei for the 19th round of TPPA negotiations.

## The great transformation

As noted above, soon after the US became a party to the P-4 negotiations, it announced its decision to participate in comprehensive negotiations for an expanded trans-Pacific agreement. For the original P-4 parties and the other new participants, it must soon have become evident that the US drive to transform the P-4 agreement into the TPPA was going to be a costly exercise involving stringent commitments and concessions from the other countries.

Taking the P-4 agreement as a point of departure for the TPPA negotiations, the chasm between the P-4 agreement and the TPPA is huge. While clearly designed to give greater impetus to the process of economic liberalisation and while it does make inroads in opening up more space for market forces to operate, the P-4 agreement is nevertheless hedged with provisions conferring on member governments discretionary powers to safeguard national priorities. It is evident even from the preamble of the agreement that the intention of the parties is to preserve and protect the right to regulate the liberalisation process. The preamble, which informs all the 20 chapters of the agreement, explicitly recognises:

1. "the rights of [the four] governments to regulate in order to meet national policy objectives"; and
2. "their flexibility to safeguard the public welfare".

What this means is that, however liberally the agreement is interpreted as furthering the process of economic liberalisation, it cannot be construed as sanctioning the undermining of the right of the governments to safeguard national policy objectives and public welfare. This clearly sets a limit on the liberalisation drive and preserves the role of the state in national development and in protecting public welfare.

## Pushed to limits

No such constraint appears to inform the drive by the US to mould the P-4 agreement into (in the words of Obama) "a 21st century trade agreement". To ensure that the liberalisation process is pushed to its limits, the US has pressed for the adoption of a "negative list" approach in the negotiations for the TPPA. The point is that a negative list approach has an inherent bias in favour of liberalisation as it requires parties to specify the sectors that will not be covered by commitments. All those sectors not so specified are deemed to have been subjected to market opening.

Although the TPPA negotiations are completely shrouded in secrecy, it would appear from leaked drafts that one of the agreement's key objectives is to undermine the role of the state in national development. One of the main targets is the state-owned enterprise (SOE).

Sydney Rally

**The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)**

**FAIR DEAL or NO DEAL**

**12 - 2pm – November 29**
**Martin Place (Cnr Castlereagh St)**

The Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) is a free trade agreement involving Australia, the US, and ten other countries. Negotiations are secretive and the agenda is being driven by US corporations. They want: Special rights for foreign investors to sue governments over health and environmental laws; Higher medicine prices; Threats to our internet freedom; Less Australian content in film and television: The Coalition gov't wants to finish the negotiations by the end of this year.

*Speakers to be confirmed.*

Contact: campaign@aftinet.org.au

The pressure for this move comes from US big business.

"There is strong pressure from the American business community to tackle what it perceives as discriminatory state capitalism through the TPP talks. In April 2011, six industry associations sent a letter to USTR Kirk requesting binding obligations on SOEs that would curb unfair advantages vis-a-vis private companies." This push to "level the playing field" for foreign capital can have serious repercussions for many developing countries in which SOEs play an important role in their development. For example, Vietnam has some 1,000 SOEs and restructuring them to conform to free-market rules can have a major impact on the country's economy.

Another provision which seeks to whittle away the role of the state in economic development is the TPPA's procurement chapter. Government procurement contracts have been useful tools for states to promote local businesses and domestic industrial development. They have also been used to assist disadvantaged and economically weaker communities. The TPPA's procurement chapter would however weaken the state's capacity to play such a role as it would require all firms operating in any signatory country to be provided equal access with domestic firms to government procurement contracts over a certain threshold.

## Grave concern

Another issue of grave concern is the high standards of protection that would be afforded by the TPPA to holders of intellectual property – copyright, patents, trademarks etc – obliging signatory states to amend their laws to grant a virtual monopoly to such holders. They go well beyond the level of the commitments in the World Trade Organisation (WTO)'s Agreement on TRIPS and pose a serious threat to access to medicines. Here again the hand of big business is evident; Big Pharma views the TPPA as an important vehicle to impose stringent rules to limit the production of cheap generic medicines.

But the intellectual property provisions under the TPPA will affect not only medical patients but also citizens at large. For example, the TPPA seeks to extend the duration of copyright beyond the current 50 years after the death of the author. If the US has its way, the duration may be extended up to 120 years after the author's death. This will impact adversely not only on library digitisation programs but also ultimately on people's access to knowledge.

Leaked drafts of the investment chapter of the TPPA reveal that the US financial industry has also had a hand in shaping its contents. The chapter sanctions the liberalisation of financial inflows and outflows, and places severe restrictions upon the ability of TPPA member governments to restrict or curb such flows by the use of capital controls.

The dangers of the unfettered flow of speculative capital were painfully illustrated in the 1990s during the Asian financial crisis and the object lesson it provided helped to persuade even the International Monetary Fund (IMF), long a strident advocate of the free flow of capital, to give a qualified approval for the use of capital controls. The investment chapter of the TPPA is thus not only a threat to the financial stability of signatory nations, but a retrograde attempt to embellish failed neo-liberal dogma in an international agreement.

Lastly, the TPPA's dispute settlement chapter contains a highly controversial provision (dubbed "investor-state dispute settlement" or ISDS) which empowers a foreign investor (either a corporation or an individual) to bring a claim directly against the host state for losses allegedly suffered. One particular cause of action which investors have invoked under the ISDS provision in some existing free trade agreements is "expropriation".

## Elastic definition

The elastic definition of the term in such treaties has enabled investors to haul up governments before an international arbitration tribunal for any move (e.g., a new regulation or policy fully justified in the interests of public health or other social concerns) which may be seen to deprive them of expected future profits. The usual for such adjudication are the tribunals conducted by the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), an integral part of a "self-serving" international arbitration industry which, as a damning international report has exposed, "has a vested interest in perpetuating an investment regime that prioritises the rights of investors at the expense of democratically elected national governments and sovereign states".

While some countries such as Australia and Vietnam are strongly opposed to the inclusion of an ISDS clause in the TPPA, the US appears adamant on incorporating such a clause. To buttress its case, it has argued that the US Congress will not ratify the TPPA unless it includes an ISDS clause.

In light of the many pitfalls that confront any developing country that is a party to the TPPA talks, the issue is not whether it can successfully negotiate these dangers. The real question is why any developing country should choose to become locked in negotiations which hold out so many risks and perils. In any case, it is apparent that the issues involved are too weighty to be left only to policymakers and political leaders to decide. The time has come for greater public participation so as to ensure that the people have a voice in determining the outcome of the TPPA negotiations. A first and essential step must therefore be an end to the secrecy surrounding the talks.

*Third World Resurgence*

# Climate change is not just about the weather

Marc Brodine

**The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is in the process of finalising the different sections of its massive every-seven-years report. The first portion of the 5th Assessment has already been released, and the next is scheduled for release next March. Copies of the draft of that section, about the impact of climate change on human society, have recently been leaked.**

While the draft is not finalised yet and may undergo revision, it offers dire warnings about the interactions between a warming world, other natural systems on which humans depend, and human social interactions.

The latest leaked draft predicts that as global warming changes the climate, resulting in both more rain in some areas and more drought in others, extreme weather events and sea level rise, human societies will be increasingly affected. This will lead in a variety of ways to increasing stresses on people, agriculture, water systems, the world's refugee crisis, and human habitation near oceans, among other impacts.

The report predicts that as a result our future looks likely to be one with growing poverty, growing water and food stresses, flooding and the spread of desertification, ocean acidity and overfishing destroying many fisheries, spread of diseases, as well as extinction of many species of animal and plants that can't adapt quickly enough to changes in their habitat.

Climate change is not just about the weather getting hotter. It is about the linked natural and human systems we all depend on. As severe drought causes crop failure in important agricultural areas, food prices increase. In an effort to increase the stressed food supply, some farmers draw down the water table for irrigation, mining water from underground aquifers that is not being replenished. As flooding impacts agricultural production in other areas simultaneously, prices rise even further. Over the past decade there have been several spikes in world food prices, leading to food riots. This was one factor in the Arab Spring revolts.

This illustrates the interconnections affected by climate change. Climate change is not the sole or main cause of the problems the world faces, not by itself, not yet. But it makes virtually all other problems worse. A United Nations study of Darfur cited the effects of climate change on water and agriculture and land as one of a number of interlinked factors driving the conflict. Human access to protein is challenged by these physical changes to the climate and our agricultural practices.

Meanwhile, even companies that occasionally admit that climate change is a problem (even as they fund climate change deniers) try to limit the impact on their particular company and business. For example, in Chevron's "7 Principles for Addressing Climate Change," they appeal to our sense of fairness: "Broad and equitable treatment of all sectors of the economy is necessary to ensure no sector or company is disproportionately burdened." At the same time, the industry is planning to take advantage of the melting of Arctic ice by drilling in the Artic Sea, in one of the areas most inhospitable for safe oil exploration.

Fossil fuel companies are feeling pressure from the growing climate change divestment movement. While it will not likely cut into their massive profits soon, it places these companies on the defensive. Business professionals are beginning to build a case for divestment on purely financial terms. Cities and states around the world are attempting to grapple, sometimes in conflict with central governments, with necessary adaptations to climate change, including through divestment issues related to climate change and fossil fuel use. These are beginning to affect local elections.

Other environmental battles continue to play an increasing role in the public dialogue. Efforts to build unity between environmental struggles and the labour movement and other progressive movements are growing.

As news reports continue over the next months until the complete final IPCC 5th Assessment is released, the scientific arguments for more climate change activism will be reinforced. The history of the coming decades will be one of massive environmental struggles, alongside the struggles of other progressive movements to save humanity from exploitation and oppression.

The science is not divorced from these movements – it adds depth and detail to the reasons why humanity needs to fight to take more serious action to prevent the worst impacts of climate change, and fight to demand that corporations pay the costs of their pollution. As prominent Indian activist Dr Vandana Shiva says, "It is not an investment if it is destroying the planet."

*People's World*

# Masters of disaster bring cholera to Haiti and Polio to Syria

Michael Collins

**Haiti and Syria are victims of their rescuers. The two nations are now sites of major disease outbreaks. Cholera in Haiti and polio in Syria didn't just happen. Through negligence, those who claim to rescue the people imported the disease entities and fostered the conditions for wider outbreaks.**

## 680,000 cases of cholera in Haiti

The 7.0 Mw earthquake that devastated Haiti on January 12, 2010 collapsed an already fragile society and infrastructure. The United States and major European powers sprung into action. Bill Clinton was the front man for the relief effort. The United Nations provided the vehicle to deliver much of the aid. "Welcome to the new Haiti" said former president Clinton boasting of the relief effort that would transform the near failed state. Within ten months, the vaunted relief efforts led to a major outbreak of cholera.

The source of the outbreak was identified quickly. UN enlisted troops from Nepal set up camp and began their work. Someone forgot to screen the troops for cholera, a known problem in Nepal. Prior to the arrival of these peacekeepers, Haiti had never experienced a cholera outbreak. The recent suit for compensatory relief from the UN describes the situation elegantly:

"In or around October 2010, human waste from the base seeped into and contaminated the Meille Tributary with cholera. From the Meille Tributary, the contaminated waters flowed into the [320 kilometre long] Artibonite River, resulting in explosive and massive outbreaks of cholera along the river and eventually throughout the entire country."

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon responded that the suit was "not receivable" in an attempt to fabricate sovereign immunity for the UN. Ki-Moon's initial gambit was to deny any UN role in the outbreak. When it became abundantly clear that the UN's failure to screen outside forces for infectious diseases caused the outbreak, the secretary switched to fictitious legalisms at odds with international law.

The bottom line is simple. The UN's negligence caused the cholera outbreak. It is massive. The Centres for Disease Control reported that: "As of October 17, 2013, 684,085 cases and 8,361 deaths have been reported since the cholera epidemic began in Haiti. Among the cases reported, 380,846 (55.4 percent) were hospitalised."

## Polio comes to Syria

The World Health Organisation (WHO) confirmed multiple reports of an outbreak of wild poliovirus type 1 in Syria. The disease is showing up among the very young. WHO went on to warn of a regional outbreak because of the absence of coordinated efforts to beat back the disease. Due to "frequent population movements across the region and sub-national immunity gaps in key areas, the risk of further international spread of wild poliovirus type 1 across the region is considered to be high."

Since the domestic political conflict turned violent in Syria in 2011, the Syrian Arab Army has fought domestic and foreign fighters funded and armed by the Gulf oil oligarchs and the US and its NATO allies. Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton took the lead on US support for the rebels through her insistence that "Assad must go". Clinton travelled the world announcing her command that the elected president of Syria leave the country.

This effort at regime change by the same crew that sought to rescue Haiti is apparently doing an encore in war torn Syria.

A senior WHO official announced that Pakistan was the likely source of the Syrian poliovirus outbreak. Taliban controlled areas of Pakistan refuse to cooperate with vaccination programs. One reason for the reluctance was a US organised fake vaccination drive to gather intelligence in the hunt for Osama bin Laden. Pakistan is a known source of foreign fighters in the Syria rebel cause.

DNA testing will confirm the Pakistan speculation. Regardless of the source, however, the conditions created by the attack on Syria by the largely foreign fighter manned brigades created the basis for an outbreak of poliovirus and other infectious diseases.

## A legion of fools

Imagine a friend or acquaintance with an opinion on just about everything that turned out to be wrong on a consistent basis. His actions made any situation worse than it was before he got involved.

Now, imagine that your friend or acquaintance was multiplied by a factor of ten and controlled the most powerful nation on earth.

Instead of an annoying individual with poor judgment, someone whom you could ignore without much effort, the carriers of consistent bad judgment, mistakes, and suffering are everywhere. Whatever these powerful fools touch turns to utter disaster.

Some rescue; some rescuers.

*Dissent Voice* ✪

# Remember, remember the 5th of November

Ryan Fletcher,
Luke James,
Peter Lazenby

**Westminster was at the centre of a tornado of anti-austerity protest on November 5 that began in the early hours and tore across Britain as the day went on.**

The day of action co-ordinated by the People's Assembly movement saw small-scale guerrilla activism sweep through northern and southern England, and Cardiff activists playing a cat and mouse game with police to hang an effigy of David Cameron from the city's castle walls as part of a string of actions.

"No more pennies for this guy," read the sign around his neck.

Other targets ranged from job centres and offices of the hated Atos capability assessment firm to payday lenders and NHS privateers. But all had one aim – to say No to austerity and Yes to a people-first Britain.

In Brent, north-west London, 70 campaigners descended on the magistrates court against a mass prosecution of 500 people who haven't paid their council tax. Most of those targeted used to receive benefit to make ends meet which has since been cut by the council and left them struggling to survive.

The 500 are the first from a group of 3,200 who will be dragged before the court.

Unite union Community co-ordinator Pilgrim Tucker told the *Morning Star* newspaper: "People are really desperate here. Some are talking to me about turning to crime. The councils need to be persuaded not to pass down cuts from central government onto the most vulnerable."

Cardiff activists occupied the Welsh headquarters of British Gas and confronted bosses over rising energy bills. They then rallied at the city's iconic Anuerin Bevan statue before bringing trading to a halt in Topshop, Boots and Starbucks.

People's Assembly supporters reported "a great reception by shoppers as we blockaded the stores." In Ipswich 100 campaigners held a vigil outside a job centre and joined in solidarity with striking probation workers.

In the evening protesters gathered round bonfires to burn effigies of Tory ministers and placards detailing austerity measures.

Activist Miles Hubbard reported "a really good reception from the public – people are fed up with austerity.

"In the coming weeks we will step up our campaign for a living wage by targeting choice employers."

In Middlesbrough a flash-mob-style sing-a-long protest against austerity took place in the town centre, while Teesside People's Assembly members also joined forces with probation officers striking outside of the Middlesbrough Probation Trust headquarters.

Local Barbara Campbell commented: "Some resistance fighters make bottles into Molotov cocktails. I've made mine into pasta shakers, but don't go underestimating me Mr Cameron.

"I am one of the 99 percent."

As night fell in London demonstrators descended on their most high-profile target of all - an occupation of Westminster Bridge in the shadow of the ministries where hated Con-Dem austerity policies are hatched.

*Morning Star* ✪

# Israel "prime suspect" in Arafat's death

**The man leading Palestine's investigation into the death of Yasser Arafat has said that Israel is the one and only suspect in the case. Swiss scientists said last week that he was probably poisoned, after finding high levels of polonium among his remains.**

Tawfik Tirawi said Israel had the means and motive to carry out the killing.

He described Israel as the "first, fundamental and only suspect in the assassination of Yasser Arafat."

Mr Tirawi had asked Russian scientists to carry out their own investigation of Mr Arafat's death.

They didn't find sufficient evidence that polonium was the cause of death, but the Palestinian investigator said both teams had determined that the longtime Palestine Liberation Organisation leader had died because of "poisonous material."

"It is not important that I say here that he was killed by polonium," he said.

"But I say, with all the details available about Yasser Arafat's death, that he was killed and that Israel killed him."

Israel has repeatedly denied that it killed Mr Arafat.

"The Palestinians should stop this nonsense and stop raising these baseless accusations without any shadow of proof," said Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor yesterday.

Israel claimed it had politically isolated Mr Arafat and so didn't need to kill him.

But the Swiss scientists said his death was consistent with polonium poisoning.

He died in a French military hospital a month after falling ill in the West Bank compound Israel had him holed up in.

*Morning Star* ✪

# Open letter to President Barack Obama

**Dear President Obama,**
**We implore you to end the embargo of Cuba. It accomplishes nothing worthwhile, and is a humanitarian catastrophe for the Cuban people. We are not a political party, or an organisation; nor do we even have a shared social agenda. We are simply doctors who met in mid-September at the "DevelopingEM" medical conference in Havana, in order to share our clinical knowledge and experiences in emergency and critical care medicine.**

This letter stems from a resolution passed by the participants at the conference.

Approximately 185 doctors came to the conference from 18 countries, including the United States, Cuba, Australasia, Europe, and throughout the Caribbean. We heard talks by presenters from the US and other nations on clinical aspects of emergency care, as well as on related aspects of public health.

One of the latter talks, given by Mr Jorge Soberon, from the Cuban Health Ministry, addressed the impact of the US embargo on both health and healthcare in Cuba, and was extremely sobering. The following facts were presented:

- The embargo, currently in its 55th year, severely limits Cuba's ability to import medicines, medical equipment and new technologies, including some that are essential for treating life-threatening diseases and maintaining public health programs that are important for ordinary Cubans.
- The embargo has prevented Cuba from purchasing, among other things, medicines to treat childhood leukaemia, and enteric formula for children in danger of dying from treatable diarrheal diseases.
- In addition to blocking direct purchases from US companies, the embargo prohibits foreign companies from doing business with the US if they also trade with Cuba. The Office of Foreign Assets of the US Treasury Department stopped Cuba from receiving $4 million worth of drugs from France to combat AIDS and tuberculosis. Fines for doing business with Cuba have doubled under your administration compared to that of your predecessor, George W Bush.

We believe that political considerations should not supersede the health needs of several million ordinary human beings. We are sure you know that many prominent individuals, including from the US, have expressed concern that the embargo violates both moral standards and international law (and even adversely impacts American business).

By continuing to enforce this policy not only would you be counter to the expressed belief of the international community, but also of the majority of the American people (62 percent in one poll). You would also be abetting what continues to be a humanitarian catastrophe for the people of Cuba.

The embargo simply makes no sense. Flora Roca, a Cuban psychiatrist suggested that "the US thinks the embargo will make Cubans rise up against the Cuban government, but it doesn't work that way." Fifty-five years have proven as much. What the embargo does cause is immense suffering to people we claim to want to help. What value is there in denying medicine to a child with leukaemia?

As physician specialists in emergency medicine, we may be fortunate enough in our careers to have a positive impact on our communities, helping to ease suffering and occasionally even saving a life. By ending this senseless embargo against Cuba you would ease the suffering of millions of people, and save thousands of lives. In 2009 you were awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace for your "extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples." Please extend this effort to include the people of Cuba.

We call upon you please to put an end to this senseless and inhumane embargo.

Sincerely,

**S Lee Fineberg, MD, FACEP, FACEM**

**Mark A Newcombe, BMed, FACEM**

**Jerome R Hoffman, MA, MD, FACEP**

**Faculty & Delegates of Developing EM 2013 Havana, Cuba**

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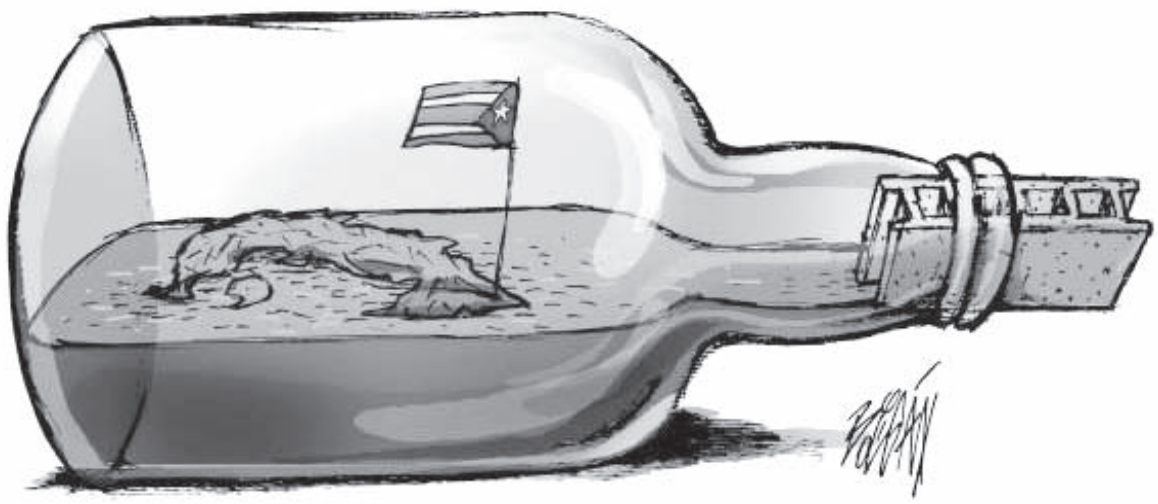

# Energy bosses shamed

Roger Bagley

**BRITAIN: Angry Labour MP Ian Lavery bluntly told rapacious energy companies that they should face re-nationalisation if they charge bills which people simply can't afford. Mr Lavery intervened as company executives presented a shameful spectacle in front of the Commons energy select committee.**

Members of the cross-party committee repeatedly challenged the executives to explain huge price hikes by four companies – expected to be followed soon by the remaining two of the big six.

But the loyal company men ducked and dodged as even Tory committee members accused them of "acting in concert" on price rises and displaying "a lack of transparency" over their finances. It was all too much for Mr Lavery, who boomed out that three million elderly people feared that they would not keep warm this winter – amid predictions that 24,000 people would die from cold.

"It is an absolute outrage in one of the richest countries of the world that this has been allowed to happen," he said as he glared across at executives from E.On, SSE and nPower.

He reeled off figures for the huge profits raked in by the big six companies.

SSE managing director William Morris pleaded that "these profits are fair."

Mr Lavery retorted sharply: "How can these profits be fair if people cannot afford to pay for their energy?"

And he told the executives that there was now a real potential for investigating the possibility of renationalising the energy industry "because you cannot run the companies."

The bosses looked glum when the managing director of relatively small concern Ovo Energy told MPs that he could not understand why the big companies were charging so much, adding: "I don't know where all the money is going."

Ovo managing director Stephen Fitzpatrick went on: "It looks to me that a lot of the energy companies – including the big six – are charging the maximum prices they can get away with, and then maintain an illusion of competitive pricing."

E.On chief executive Tony Cocker tried to fob off MPs by calling for "a very thorough" Competition Commission investigation into energy prices. And he suggested to Mr Lavery that if his constituents were worried about not being able to pay their bills, they could "call us, email us, or whatever."

Glasgow Labour MP John Robertson told the executives: "Don't you understand that the people in this country do not trust you." SSE managing director Guy Johnson replied lamely: "We do have a profound problem on our hands, because we are not getting our message across."

Mr Robertson asked why E.On declared profits and dividends based on combined operations of energy generation and retail supply, despite claiming that these two parts of the business were "stand-alone." He alleged that bills were soaring "while you are still making 20 odd per cent profit on distribution."

Tory committee member Peter Lilley suggested that the companies' finances were "all very wonky." He wondered if they'd simply taken some of their profits offshore.

*Morning Star* ✪

# Activists press for release of Iraq documents

**Peace campaigners scolded David Cameron last week after the Tory Prime Minister excused the cover-up documents that would reveal the full story behind Britain's invasion of Iraq.**

Sir John Chilcot has made 10 requests for access to the classified information in order to conclude his inquiry into 2003 attack and publish a report.

They include 130 transcripts of conversations between former Labour prime ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown with former US president George Bush.

Details of around 200 cabinet discussions and 25 notes from Mr Blair to Mr Bush are also included in the documents.

But Cabinet Secretary Jeremy Heywood has stalled the process over what Mr Cameron called concerns over "sensitivity" in a letter to Mr Chilcot. Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament leader Kate Hudson accused the government of driving the inquiry from the long grass and "into the woods."

She said: "How much longer can they keep up this charade? It is now over a decade since Tony Blair took the UK into a bloody war in Iraq based on a lie.

"To say these conversations are 'central' to the inquiry is an understatement – they are crucial to understanding the path to war, including if Blair guaranteed unconditional UK support for an illegal invasion."

Menzies Campbell, who was Lib Dem foreign affairs spokesman at the time of the invasion, also labelled the hold-up as "intolerable."

He added: "The Iraq adventure is one of the most serious failures of government policy in the last 50 years."

*Morning Star* ✪


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## Coke and its beverage industry buddies are at it again

**The Coke-funded Beverage Council of Australia has launched a massive, nationwide advertising campaign to try and stop our politicians adopting the popular and proven Cash for Containers scheme.**

The highly misleading "Container Tax" campaign is based entirely on a report so inaccurate it was dismissed by an Australian Senate committee for its "poor methodology and weak data". In the report, Coke claims Cash for Containers would drive up each drink by 20 cents and cost consumers hundreds of dollars a year – despite evidence from The Boomerang Alliance showing a modern scheme can operate at zero cost.

It threatens to undermine all we've achieved this year to persuade our MPs to support this scheme.

What we're calling for is simple. You buy a drink, and you get 10 cents back when you return the empty bottle or can. It's proven to work all over the world and has delivered huge environmental benefits, helping achieve recycling rates of up to a massive 97% in some parts of Europe.

Unlike Coke, our Cash for Containers campaign is based on evidence compiled from years of research. These are the facts that Coca-Cola doesn't want you to know:

• **It already works in Australia.** The successful scheme in South Australia has doubled the recycling rate compared to the rest of the country.

• **A modern scheme could operate at zero cost.** Modern schemes can cover overheads using only unredeemed deposits. This means no extra costs to consumers.

• **It's globally proven.** In some parts of Germany with Cash for Containers, recycling rates are as high as 97 percent.

• **Local councils support it.** In fact, savings could total $183 million per year – which could help fund other essential services.

• **It will generate more jobs.** Recycling companies have promised to invest millions of dollars and create more than 3,000 new jobs to support the scheme.

Multi-billion dollar corporations like Coke think they can buy their way out of doing the right thing by the planet. But the truth is, no matter how much cash they throw at this, they can't match what we have. Greenpeace is a global and interconnected community with millions of supporters who run and win campaigns every week. We know how to win.

**Reece Turner**
**Greenpeace Australia Pacific**

## Flirting with disaster

**Here we go again. Fukushima nuclear station is still polluting the environment but here in Australia the NSW Liberal government is thinking about resurrecting the nuclear power debate. Mind you, Mr Jonathan O'Dea (Liberal Member for Davidson) says he was "not advocating for nuclear technology".**

If he does not, what's the point of raising it again? On the one hand the Abbott government has already positioned itself as a climate-change denial one. Nuclear power advocates usually promote it as being beneficial for the environment (tell it to the Japanese at the moment).

It is more likely, though, that it's mining interests that are being accommodated. Chris Hartcher, Resources and Energy Minister, is about to announce which mining companies will be invited to apply for uranium exploration licences in NSW. It was last year that NSW lifted a 26-year ban on uranium exploration.

NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell said that the state was not going to rush into uranium mining. Are there any naïve people left who may believe that? They are already saying that Broken Hill may have some uranium deposits and that's where the market interest is.

Blame it on the market! Those grubby, greedy so-and-so's will risk everybody's health, wellbeing and future for profits. Concern for the environment should start with accepting that there is a problem and then making proper decisions to solve it.

Renewable energy sources need to be invested in and developed – but it seems that getting something out of the ground is a more preferable option. Not for the environment or the people though.

**T Southern**
**Brisbane**

## Spelling out the future

**Came back from work yesterday – tired and hungry. While making tea I switched on the radio as usual. And it was such a joy to listen to the ABC's coverage of the NSW Premier's Spelling Competition.**

Half an hour of pure joy listening to the kids showing their skills at spelling. How proud their public schools' teachers and parents must be!

I believe that 130,000 schoolchildren across the state took part in the competition. Let's hope it continues to grow and well done to all. Hopefully there will be similar initiatives in science.

**Mati English**
**Sydney**

# Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

# Capitalism in trouble, fascism next?

**I have written in these pages many times now about the calamitous state of the US economy and with it the US standard of living. The USA may be the richest country in the world but its image of itself as the envy of the world has seldom been less true. For most of the last 100 years or so the US has been viewed with either admiration or fear, depending on whether the viewer was trying to emigrate there or was being bombarded by US warships.**

Today, however, the US is more commonly viewed with a mixture of fear and contempt. Why? Let an American journalist answer that: "America is a mess – and Republicans are to blame.

"In fact, Republican policies and actions have tarnished America so much that the leader of the strongest country in the world is no longer the most powerful. At least that's according to *Forbes*' new list of the most powerful people in the world. President Obama has fallen to number two on their list, while Russian President Vladimir Putin has taken over the number one spot.

"As *Forbes* puts it, 'Putin has solidified his control over Russia while Obama's lame duck period has seemingly set in earlier than usual for a two-term president ...' That 'lame duck period' that *Forbes* is referring to is thanks in large part to the constant Republican obstructionism that we're seeing on Capitol Hill.

"Instead of focusing on moving our country forward, Republicans have voted a staggering 47 times to defund or repeal Obamacare. Meanwhile, Republicans in the Senate have staged 400 filibusters to delay votes on bills or Obama administration confirmations.

"To put that in comparison, I met with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid last year in Las Vegas, and he told me that when Lyndon Johnson was Senate Majority Leader for the same six-year period as he has been the Senate Majority Leader, he faced just one filibuster. One. But it's not just Republican obstructionism that's caused our nation's monumental decline; it's Republican policies too.

"Thanks to Republicans and their money-first democracy-second mentality, Wall Street executives are making millions of dollars each year, while honest hard-working Americans are struggling to survive day-to-day.

"Giant transnational corporations are making billion dollar windfalls and paying next to nothing in taxes, while working-class Americans are making less than ever before, a terrible symptom of the state of the American economy after 32 years of Reaganomics.

"And it's these policies that are driving America's income inequality epidemic too. Today, the 400 wealthiest Americans own more wealth than the bottom 150 million Americans combined, and over the past 15 years, the annual income of the typical American household has fallen 9% ... .

"Meanwhile, Republican war hawks lied America into over a decade of unjust wars, which claimed the lives of thousands of American soldiers and civilians and cost us six trillion dollars. If you need even more proof that our country is a mess, and that Republicans are to blame, look no further than the number of Americans who rely on federal food stamps to survive: 50 million.

"Right now, 50 million Americans, including 7 million children, rely on food stamps for survival. We are the richest country on the planet – and yet 50 million Americans need federal help just to eat ... .

"Republicans would rather pad the wallets of the wealthy elite than put food on the tables of America's most needy and vulnerable. And in their rush to condemn and slash funding to the food stamps program, Republicans constantly fail to put a human face on the staggering cuts that they're fighting for ... .

"It's a disgrace that any American, veteran, child, or otherwise, doesn't have enough to eat in the richest nation on the planet. And now Republicans want to take what little access they have to food away from them.

"It's time to put an end to the devastating Republican policies that are causing this nation's rapid and historic decline.

"It's time to get back to the values that our founders fought and died for, and that George Washington had three horses shot out from under him to help create.

"Call Congress right now and tell them to stop the devastating cuts to food stamps and to start looking out for the needs and well-being of all Americans." – *The Daily Take, The Thom Hartmann Program* 31 October 2013 first published on *Truthout.*

The publishers of *Truthout* of course are what people in the US call "liberals", supporters of an ill-defined Left, people who know that capitalism itself is the problem but are unsure what to do about it. American communists, who do know what to do about it, have been isolated by six decades of strident anti-communist propaganda and a simultaneous campaign against the Left in the trade union movement.

However, with industry (once the key to US prosperity) closing down or moving to low wage countries resulting in joblessness rising and tens of millions reduced to poverty, with not just the economy but also the country's culture and society increasingly militarised, with African-Americans increasingly criminalised and forced to work in industrial prisons, and with the US populace constantly spooked by alleged discoveries of terrorist threats, is it any wonder that the country is also wracked by crazed outbursts of insane violence and mass murder by US citizens who cannot tolerate the insanity of capitalist life any longer?

Capitalism is in its death throes. Less than a century ago people thought those death throes would be of short duration. Historically, of course, they are in fact passing in an instant, but it is still painful – and painfully slow – to have to live through it. Meanwhile capitalism is fighting desperately to postpone its demise, to stay on top, in fact to crush those who would remove its foot from our collective neck.

And as a wise man once said, the last resort of capitalism in decline is fascism. Capitalist governments everywhere – including here in Australia – have been introducing laws and increasing police powers to facilitate the introduction of fascism if they feel it necessary.

The threat is there. We must be ready. ✪

**Rob Gowland previews ABC & SBS Public Television**

Sunday November 17 – Saturday November 23

Maya Newell was raised by her two gay "mums" and no dad. Now grown up and a graduate in Media Arts and Production from UTS, she finds the anti-gay rhetoric of much of the marriage equality debate disturbing. Why is the way she was raised held up as wrong or even "evil"?

In ***Growing Up Gaby*** **(ABC2 Wednesday November 20 at 9.30pm)** she attempts to find out. Or at least to confront those who condemn her female parents' lifestyle choices. ("Gaby" incidentally is a portmanteau word for "gay baby", which does not mean the baby is gay, merely that its parents are.)

She interviews other "gabies" about problems at school or problems with their peers after school, and also interviews vocal critics like Fred Nile and Janet Albrechtsen. A very smug Fred Nile tries to come over as benign grandfather (he even mugs for the camera) but he doesn't give an inch. Albrechtsen, after talking to Maya seems to change her position.

Significantly for the marriage equality debate, having two gay parents does not seem to have anything to do with whether children do or do not turn out gay. For a young filmmaker, the film is well made and instructive.

This week's episode of ***Mock The Week Looks Back At …*** **(ABC2 Thursday November 21 at 10.10pm)** deals with the Royal family, and refreshingly is not in awe of them or even very sympathetic to them. Which is a healthy sign for an English program, let's face it.

Rory Bremner does a ruthless impression of Prince Charles (Charles actually isn't a fatuous upper class ninny but he certainly comes across as one). This particular series is made up of clips selected from previous episodes of the popular current affairs panel game *Mock The Week*. Some of the gags and wisecracks can be very funny.

During the last Ice Age, Ireland was completely covered by an ice sheet up to 1,000 metres deep. When the ice finally retreated, Ireland was left barren and seemingly lifeless. How did the diversity of plant life that now covers the land manage to recolonise this windswept outpost surrounded by sea on the tip of Europe?

In a new three-part series, ***Secrets Of The Irish Landscape*** **(SBS ONE Fridays from November 22 at 7.30pm)**, Derek Mooney sets out to basically uncover the history of Ireland's landscape. To anchor the series he takes as his starting point a remarkable achievement of a pioneering Irish naturalist Robert Lloyd Praeger. A librarian during the week, on Friday evenings he would take a train to one of more than 500 rural railway stations across the country (before the motor car, trains could take you to the most out-of-the-way little places in most countries). By Sunday evening he would have walked a 40 mile circuit, catching the train back to Dublin to be ready for work on Monday.

Praeger was undertaking nothing less than a one-man census of Ireland's flora. He had a two-fold purpose: discovering what plants there were in Ireland, and how they got there after the desolation of the Ice Age. Derek Mooney follows Praeger's route, using his 1937 book *The Way That I Went*, as his guide.

In the first episode, Mooney is mainly concerned with evidence of the effects of the Ice Age, flying over moraines left behind by ancient glaciers and looking at prominent off-shore islands that once were under the sea ice.

His mingling of the story of Robert Lloyd Praeger and the geographical history of Ireland could have been fascinating. Instead it is sleep-inducing. And that almost warrants close attention. Why is this natural history program so dull compared to others of its type? Sure, the topic's a little dry, but in natural history programs they often are. They don't normally put you to sleep. Yet I actually nodded off.

The way the program is made is just turgid. Even when they fly over supposedly interesting coastlines or the like, you are more likely to see a shot of the interior of the helicopter than a shot of what they are exclaiming about out the window. A couple of times when Mooney says "as you can see" I was actually moved to yell at the screen "NO, I can't see because you were in the way of the camera, you clot!"

*Nordic Wild* (SBS ONE Saturdays at 7.30pm).

***Sexwork, Love & Mr Right*** **(ABC2 Friday November 22 at 9.30pm)** is one of those documentaries where the filmmaker becomes very involved in the life of her subject. The subject here is Lina, a Bulgarian-born prostitute working in one of the street-level windows in Amsterdam's red-light district. The girls sit semi-nude in their window and draw the curtain across when servicing a client.

Lina hopes to get out of sex work sometime soon and marry her American boyfriend. He has a job on cruise ships, but now he has Lina he doesn't chase girls on the ships anymore. He wants to take Lina back to Texas with him. His friends in Europe are cool about his girlfriend being a sex-worker, but the filmmaker wonders whether the folk in Texas will be as broadminded.

The filmmaker goes to the trouble of consulting a social worker about the possibility of a sex-worker finding love with a client, but towards the end of the film Lina drops the relationship with the filmmaker (to the latter's distress). This odd little soap opera behind and in front of the camera makes this an unusual documentary.

To see how the Irish series mentioned above *should* have been made, take a look at ***Nordic Wild*** **(SBS ONE Saturdays at 7.30pm)**. It started last week but I only just received the preview disc. This four-part Scandinavian series is about the wildlife of the region and how it copes with and is affected by the elements and the seasons.

It has excellent camerawork (no shots of the insides of helicopters) and an intelligent, informative commentary. ✪

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**Joe Nagy**, Economist and Financial Risk Analyst;

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# Visitors to Snowden and visitors to Berlin

Victor Grossman

**BERLIN: It was a good try, anyway – and an adventurous one. Three men flew from Berlin to Moscow, were taken in a car with tinted glass windows to a secret location - where they met Edward Snowden and his partner-in-(alleged)-crime, Sarah Harrison.**

The meeting was very interesting. So were the three visitors.

## The Green man

Trio leader was Hans-Christian Stroebele, 74, Bundestag representative from a mixed East-West Berlin electoral district, the only Green Party delegate directly elected (four times); the other 62 got in, thanks to Germany's proportional representation system. Anyone joining in anti-war rallies recognises the lean grey heired man who – until recently – always arrived pedalling a bike. He was always (or almost always) the Green deputy opposing wars in Iraq, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Patriot missiles for Israel, who fought hardest against anti-foreigner discrimination (even supporting the right of immigrant-rooted police officers to wear turbans or head cloths and a Turkish version of Germany's national anthem). A constant thorn in the side of war-happy Green Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (1998-2005), he has (almost) always been a maverick, well to the left of other Green leaders. And as a maverick he flew to Moscow.

## Two investigative journalists

But Stroebele's English is not too good. So, sharing the fruit, fish and other Russian delicacies – and the scoop – was Georg Mascolo, 50, Italian-German journalist, a former correspondent in the USA and editor of *Der Spiegel* (before getting fired after two years), and also the American journalist John Goetz, 52, born in New York, a TV-journalist in Berlin since 1989 and also writing for a leading Munich newspaper.

Goetz's big scoop in 1993 revealed that the German government was still paying pensions to Latvia's Nazi SS veterans, who held militant marches in Riga every year while veterans of the Red Army and the few Jewish survivors in Latvia were cruelly ignored or short-changed. As a result, the pensions were finally halted (unfortunately not the parades).

He later exposed the financial shenanigans of a slippery arms dealer profiting from deals between manufacturers in Canada and right-wing Bavarian politicians, did a series on Germany's secret assistance to the US war in Iraq (despite official abstention) and helped expose "extraordinary renditions" by US planes across Germany to secret torture locations.

His first impression of Snowden: "A slight fellow, short, quite thin, black suit, blue shirt, with angular glasses too large for his face." But then came the questions and frank, honest, impressive answers. And an offer of assistance.

## Why Snowden won't be visiting

Stroebele passed on Snowden's letter to the German government, expressing willingness to testify as an expert witness on NSA spying directed against Germany – and Chancellor Angela Merkel. The one stipulation about coming to Germany was that he be guaranteed freedom from extradition to the USA and, since Russia might then rescind his current status, a right of asylum.

But the chances of such a visit soon dropped to near zero. When it was revealed that Merkel's mobile phone was tapped by NSA – like those of millions of other Germans – she had spoken out far more angrily than is customary for the usually mild-toned German "Mutti" (Mama). But, very predictably, while still mumbling that "Such practices must be altered" she had her office explain that, after all, "the transatlantic alliance is of overwhelming importance to us Germans" and it was soon announced that a delegation of US Congress members would fly over to voice their regrets and try to repair damaged fences. In such a romantic, Atlantic relationship Snowden would only be in the way.

## The fight for public power

As that greatest of Scottish poets Robbie Burns wrote: "The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft agley, An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain." The past two years witnessed a scheme or plan, this time not by three but by thousands of Berlin citizens. In late October 2010 a group decided on an initiative to communalise the city's power supply, which meant buying it back from the giant Swedish enterprise Vattenfall.

Their slogan: "Democratic (city-owned), ecological and social (lower prices)". The group, which eventually included 50 organisations, received the backing of all three opposition parties in the Berlin House of Representatives, the LINKE (Left) party, the Greens and the Pirates and, after some negotiation, also the Social Democrats, the leading party in the ruling Senate (the name of the city government). Only the Christian Democrats, also in the governing coalition, rejected the idea. It looked as if the law repossessing the power supply of the city could easily pass a vote.

But then the Social Democrats, bowing to their right-wing coalition partners, turned tail and reneged on the plan. This meant that far more signatures were required in a new campaign to obtain a referendum of all Berliners. A powerful campaign was initiated, obtaining between February and June 2013 over 271,000 signatures; 228,000 were ruled valid, a huge triumph, which meant that a referendum of Berlin voters must now take place.

It was planned for September 22, the day when the whole country elected a new Bundestag – and about 70 percent go to the polls. But the ruling duo, Social Democrats and Christian Democrats, put a spiteful spoke in this wheel. They moved the date for the referendum to November 3 – when far fewer voters could be attracted to polling booths for a single Yes or No vote so soon after the earlier elections. But the two parties had the majority of representatives – and ruled the roost.

All the same, enthusiasm was maintained, if far more worried. The city was filled with posters and a ray of hope came from distant Hamburg where a similar referendum scraped though with 51 percent. But that was on the all-German Election Day, when so many voted.

The big problem was not getting a majority to approve the new law; that was quite certain. But the vote would only be successful if 25 percent of all Berlin voters approved – and how many would go to the polls?

The result was bitter. Less than 30 percent voted. A very big majority voted Yes, but even after the last mail-in votes had been counted they tallied up to only 24.1 percent, just 0.9 percent short of the mark. Or, in absolute terms, 620,000 Yes votes were required, but the final count was 599,565! One thought again of Burns' sad mouse and sad plowman!

Meanwhile, also in Berlin, but now occupied with all-German themes, those two obstructive parties, the Social Democrats and Christian Democrats – plus the Bavarian sister party of the latter, the Christian Social Union (CSU) – continued negotiations on their "grand coalition", which hopes to agree on all points, compromises and cabinet assignments before Christmas. Not all too many holiday gift presents can be expected, either for Germany's southern neighbours in the European Union or for many working people in Germany, or those who work only part-time or not at all through no fault of their own.

The current dispute, however, centres on whether autos on the famous Autobahn highways, favoured by no speed limits on many stretches, should also have to pay tolls – hitherto required only from truckers. The Bavarian party wants to charge only foreign drivers, Merkel and the Social Democrats have been against all tolls, but Angela seems to be weakening on this point. We do not yet know how many points the Social Democrats have been weakening on.

In big, important Hesse, where Frankfurt (Main) is located, there was also a tight vote in September, and it is still uncertain whether a similar "grand coalition" will be arranged here, as on the national level and in the city-state Berlin. Still a slight possibility is a Social Democrat-Green plus Left coalition which would defy deep-seated prejudices against the LINKE and set a new precedent. Another stumbling block: The LINKE wants to close down the extremely noisy fourth runway at Frankfurt's giant airport; the noise has been catastrophic and almost life-threatening to thousands of citizens down below the aerial rush hour traffic. The Greens want to restrict night traffic (as a high court has ruled).

The Social Democrats want no bars; like Lufthansa they say, "The flights are needed". There are other disagreements in a highly delicate situation. If a three-way coalition includes the LINKE, some will paraphrase words from that old American Revolution, either as a warning, or as a joyful chant: "The Hessians are coming!"

One thing seems quite certain. If not the Hessians then at least Mercedes is still coming along, at least in government circles. In an earlier commentary, I noted that BMW had given the Christian Democrats a large financial present – at just about the same time the restrictions on CO2 emission were postponed by the European Union, under Merkel's pressure. It has now been revealed that a major official in Merkel's office, Eckart von Klaeden, stayed at his comfy government job until the elections and has now quit for a far comfier job as head lobbyist for that other heavy carmaker giant, Daimler-Benz.

His switch was already known in May but von Klaeden kept his patriotic and noble nose to the government grindstone until September. He had "no influence on policy" it was hastily stated by government spokesmen – but had every opportunity to learn Merkel's plans to put off carbon CO2 limits – and perhaps just possibly to help frame them? Now he will do that openly (and, as we now know, few secrets are really secret anyway). Yet, despite all the dirt, the Social Democrats also "want in". And close to half of all voters supported "Mutti" Merkel.

I introduced a tiny zoological note in quoting Burns about a mouse. I will end with a zoological note connected with my bird-watching hobby. Every November I rejoice when thousands of black northern rooks visit the city, engaging in marvellous manoeuvres in the evening (and probably early morning) sky.

Joining them is a smaller number of black-and-grey jackdaws – for whom arrival here also represents "going south for the winter". They strut fearlessly on lawns and sidewalks, arrogantly staring us humans down as if to say, "What are you doing here on my territory?" Both are members of the crow family, said to be the cleverest of birds. I enjoy their visit, and say to myself, "Better rooks and jackdaws than crooks and jackasses!"

*People's World*

***"Such practices must be altered, the transatlantic alliance is of overwhelming importance to us Germans".***

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