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Reclaim the right to shelter

On March 28, the Senate passed a resolution congratulating organisations and groups across Australia providing essential services to people who are homeless, including the Larrakia Nation, Darwin; 24/7 Street Kitchen and Safe Space, Sydney; Food Not Bombs, Adelaide; After Dark Saints, Brisbane; South West Australian Homeless People; and the Homeless Persons Union, Victoria. The motion, moved by Greens Senator Lee Rhiannon, also called on the federal government to increase federal funding for homelessness services and public housing, and ensure the money is spent effectively.

The following is Senator Rhiannon's contribution during the debate on the Human Rights Legislation Amendment Bill 2017:

When it comes to the housing crisis it is clear that young people are getting done over. It was not so long ago that houses were recognised as homes for people, but now they are increasingly commodities to make money from.

A generation ago you only needed three or four times your annual income to buy a home; now it is more like 10 times in our big capital cities. Government used to intervene into the market to ensure homes for all, but it is now a cutthroat world with millions in housing-related stress.

There is clearly a generational divide, but we must remember that many older people are also doing it very tough. In particular, owing to the sexist nature of our workplaces and retirement benefit schemes, older women are increasingly being left without a secure, affordable home. Just remember these figures: 105,000 Australians face homelessness every night and over 40 percent of these are women. Fifty-five percent of homeless women are fleeing domestic violence.

Last year, the government threatened to cut the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). Thanks to the tireless work of housing campaigners, including an open letter signed by 209 major charities and frontline services, it was saved for another year. A cut would have impacted some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

Unless the NPAH is extended and increased we will see more people living on the streets, more women facing family violence and sexual assault alone, fewer young people going to school, higher unemployment and more admissions to emergency departments. All these things are connected.

Not spending enough on homelessness is particularly harmful for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, who disproportionately experience both family violence and homelessness.

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HANDS OFF SYRIA

CPA statement on US bombing of Syria

The Communist Party of Australia condemns in the strongest possible terms the bombing of Syria by the US military. The attack on a sovereign country is a violation of international law and gives comfort and aid to the other enemies of peace in the region.

The decision to launch the attack was made without reference to the UN or even to US Congress. Trump has shown by this action that the same agenda for the Middle East, i.e. for the dismemberment and destruction of countries pursuing a policy independent of US imperialism, is still in force.

The initial Western news broadcasts reported the bombing of a plant in Idlib, which hit a facility where terrorists produced chemical filled shells for usage in Syria and Iraq. The story quickly evolved to become an alleged chemical weapons attack by the Assad government. The international community is right to question the unsubstantiated claims by the Trump administration of the Assad government's responsibility for the supposed toxic gas attack on the civilian population of an area of Syria controlled by anti-government forces. The US has a history of creating such pretexts for aggression, such as the alleged existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, to cite just one example.

With this action, the US has heightened the risk of a major conflict between nuclear–armed powers and sets back efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The US attack on Syria's airbase serves to bolster the morale of terrorists who have suffered serious setbacks at the hands of the Syrian army over recent weeks.

The support given to the Trump administration by the Australian government and Labor Opposition, while predictable is deplorable and irresponsible. It is up to the peace-loving people of the world to show their opposition to this recklessness and to stop US imperialism's drive to war.

The CPA calls on all its members and supporters to join forces on the ground with the anti-war movement for peace and social justice. Hands off Syria and the Middle East!

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Culture & Life
"Free press"

There will be no *Guardian* next week. The next issue will be April 26.

Guardian

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The superpower's dilemma

In December 2016 Donald Trump called Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen to discuss "the close economic, political, and security ties that exist between Taiwan and the United States," as a statement from the White House put it. Trump also congratulated President Tsai on becoming president of Taiwan earlier this year.

This is a reflection of the history of the US approach to China. After China's revolution in 1949 Washington supported the nationalist remnant under Chiang Kai-shek after it fled to the island of Taiwan, claiming to be the entire country's legitimate government.

While much of the world recognised the mainland's People's Republic of China, the US only talked to the Republic of China on Taiwan. In 1979 president Jimmy Carter formally shifted diplomatic recognition to the PRC, which also now filled China's Security Council seat at the United Nations. However, US Congress then passed the Taiwan Relations Act, which institutionalised unofficial relations with Taipei, while acknowledging that there is only one China and top US officials avoided contact with Taiwanese leaders.

In 1997 the return of Hong Kong was a further step in the long struggle of the Chinese people in their liberation from imperialist domination. It was a step towards the reunification of all parts of China which had become separated from China in the colonial era.

During WW2 Taiwan was seized by Japan, but its return has been complicated because the remnants of the reactionary Kuomintang armies retreated to Taiwan and set up their headquarters under the protection of the US.

Such is the stuff of unfinished business.

Hong Kong was not willingly handed back by Britain. If British governments had sincerely repudiated colonialism they could have taken that step a long time before. It was the decline of the British empire and the emergent strength of a liberated socialist China which forced British governments to bow to the inevitable.

Nonetheless, Britain and the US continue to play games with One China. They have not for a moment given up the objective of overthrowing socialism in China and reimposing their modern form of colonialism.

During its imperialist occupation, Hong Kong was always controlled by British-appointed governors. There were no elections for this or any other role. For years after the revolution the US waged the Cold War, blocking China's application as Most Favoured Nation trade status and blocked its membership not only of bodies such as the World Trade Organisation but also the United Nations.

China has adopted a "one nation, two systems" relationship: the Chinese mainland with a socialist system while Hong Kong retains a capitalist system, a new experience for any nation.

Part of the US spin on China is the DPRK (North Korea), with the US's empty gesture of "recognition" of China's key role in relation to one of Washington's perennial "rogue" states.

From the day of its foundation, the DPRK has not had a moment's rest from outside interference. Sabotage, invasion, mass destruction, germ warfare, nuclear threat, encirclement and crippling economic blockade have all been used in the US-led attempt to remove this impediment to its regional domination. All of these efforts have failed. Naturally, the major capitalist powers subject such "rogue" states to an unrelenting campaign of vilification in order to enlist public opinion.

The DPRK is not just a thorn in the side of a declining superpower seeking to shore up its position in the Asia Pacific. Its territory, which borders the People's Republic of China, is eyed off by the US military for the location of its troops and nuclear weapons. China has stressed that "resolving human rights differences should be through constructive dialogue and cooperation based on equality and mutual respect." That won't happen unless world opinion insists upon it and demands that the US halts its aggression towards the DPRK and China.

PRESS FUND

The drive for handing over public assets to private business is up and running in NSW. The coalition government wants to privatise part of the existing rail network, and the state's land titles office, which contains property transaction records covering more than 200 years, is to be privately run for 35 years. In a nice twist, many businesses are complaining bitterly that their records will be insecure and the cost of transactions will skyrocket. Hopefully, the next state election will turf the privateers out of office, but in the meantime we really need Press Fund contributions, so please send in something for the next edition if you possibly can. Many thanks to this week's contributors, as follows:

M Hunt $50, T Katsineris $5, KM $10, NH $20, "Mad Dog" $20, Mark Mannion $10, T Nickle $100, "Rough Red" $5, "Round Figure"$10

This week's total: $230 Progressive total: $2010

Support *The Guardian* by donating to Press Fund

The right to shelter

Continued from page 1

Why are so many women finding themselves homeless? The issue is of course complex. However, there are two major reasons why this has become a major crisis. Housing has become a commodity in international financial markets. House prices continue to escalate in major urban centres. Housing has become unaffordable for the average resident.

The Liberal-National government argues that the solution is to increase the stock of housing. Developers and investors, including foreign investors, are being encouraged to build more housing, with tax breaks to encourage this. But in fact, according to a recent UN report, a significant portion of investor-owned homes are simply left empty – for example, one report estimates that 82,000, or about one-fifth, of investor owned units in Melbourne are unoccupied.

In such markets the value of housing is no longer based on its social use. Properties are equally valuable to these people regardless of whether they are vacant or occupied. They are built with the intention of lying empty and accumulating value, realised thanks to the unfair tax breaks on capital gains.

Developers and speculators are likely to replace affordable housing that is needed locally with luxury housing that sits vacant because that is how best to turn a profit quickly. This goes to the heart of why there is the housing crisis that we have today.

United Nations special rapporteur for housing Leilani Farha said it best in her recent report: Housing has … become a financial commodity, robbed of its connection to community, dignity and the idea of home. Women and children are most vulnerable to this disconnection.

There are many reasons for this, all embedded in an unjust patriarchal society that privileges male control over female human rights. For example, women are still more likely to have low-paid, part-time, insecure jobs. As single mothers, women have less opportunity to find suitable employment. When domestic violence occurs, women are often forced to flee and often lose the family home.

Domestic assault in NSW has risen from a rate of 257 per 100,000 people in 1995, reaching a high of 400 incidents per 100,000 people in 2014. Similarly, reports of family violence incidents in Victoria have increased steadily since 2010-11, with an 8.8 percent increase from 2013-14 to the following financial year. The private rental market is also becoming increasingly unaffordable. This also creates gender segregation.

In Australia, average-income single female workers can afford to live in only one suburb of Melbourne and cannot afford to live anywhere in Sydney. Older women are even more vulnerable to extreme poverty and homelessness. They are more likely than men to experience discrimination during their lifetime of employment, are very likely to spend much of their retirement years living alone, have relatively little access to superannuation and are likely to experience severe poverty in their old age.

Indeed, one study found that 51 percent of older women over 85 live in or near poverty. Older women, especially those living alone, become particularly vulnerable to homelessness if they are in the private rental market and dependent on the pension.

The number of older women renting in the private rental market is increasing, from 91,000 in the 2006 census to 135,000 in 2011. The vulnerability increases in the case of a medical crisis or a chronic medical condition, as successive governments have cut Medicare down to the bone.

According to a new report from the Mercy Foundation, women older than 55 are being squeezed out of the private rental market in Melbourne as real estate prices continue to rise. As a result, more, older middle class women are being exposed to homelessness, especially those who have led traditional roles raising a family.

Adequate housing must be seen as a human right. It is not a commodity. Older women – our mums, our grandmothers, our aunties – are increasingly vulnerable to homelessness. We are now in a major social crisis, and it will get worse if we do nothing. Governments must intervene to revitalise public housing and take on the real estate speculators and big banks. We owe it to those women to reclaim housing as a right and a social good. ✪

Sydney May Day 2017

March for Equality and Your Rights @ Work

The annual May Day March will be happening on Sunday May 7, with speeches kicking off at Hyde Park North from 12pm. We will then march down to Prince Alfred Park for food, live music and entertainment. With activities planned for all ages this is a family fun day that's not to be missed.

This year the theme for May Day is fighting inequality, with a focus on workers' rights. Under conservative governments we've seen the gap between the rich and the poor widen, cuts to penalty rates with 700,000 workers' losing up to $6,000 a year, the loss of decent secure employment, the soaring costs of living and the introduction of the ABCC.

With so much at stake for the working class, May Day is our opportunity to come together and fight back for a better future.

Lets make this year's May Day the biggest we've ever seen to show conservative Governments that the workers' united will never be defeated.

Sydney May Day Committee ✪

Politics in the Pub Perth

Arts under Socialism

6-8 pm Thursday, April 20

43 Below Bar and Restaurant

(opposite Perth Town Hall)

Join Olga Cironis, Dr Christopher Crouch, and Pilar Kasat in a discussion about socialist policy in the arts, and how it would change arts practice in Australia.

For more information contact perth@cpa.org.au or 0419 812 872. Entry free.

Hosted and chaired by the CPA

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

I do not want to miss a good chance of getting us a slice of this magnificent African cake.

Leopold II of the Belgians, 1876

The zombie cuts

52,100 low-income families poorer

Peter Mac

Children's early years are crucial for their development, and childcare should form part of the public education system.

Last month, with the support of One Nation, the Xenophon Team and some independent senators, parliament passed the Turnbull government's $1.6 billion revised version of its original childcare "omnibus" legislation.

The new Social Services Legislation Amendment Bill, (nicknamed "Omnibus 2") provides improvements for some families, but restricts access to childcare for certain minimum income families, and includes $2.4 billion in cuts to other welfare areas, brutally penalising people who are already experiencing financial hardship.

A graded means-tested family childcare subsidy, paid to childcare providers not parents, replaces the existing childcare rebate and benefit. Low-income parents receive the maximum subsidy of 85 percent, but under a new "activity test" they have to prove they have completed four hours of work, training, study or some equivalent activity each week.

Parents who satisfy the test are entitled to a maximum of 50 hours childcare subsidy per week. However, 52,100 families earning less than $65,710 will get a reduced subsidy because of the test.

Minimum-income families failing the test can still get 12 hours subsidy per week, but that's half the number of hours to which they were formerly entitled. At 85 percent they're only entitled to a subsidy equivalent to a full-rate childcare fee for 10.2 hours per week.

To get the legislation through the Senate the government very grudgingly agreed to place an upper income limit on entitlements. However, the limit is $350,000. Those who earn this amount and pass the four-hour test (which they're much more likely to pass compared with minimum income earners) still qualify for a 20 percent subsidy for a maximum of 50 hours care per week.

That's equivalent to 10 hours at the full childcare rate, almost as much as minimum-income parents can claim if they can't meet the four-hour test!

And the legislation doesn't just affect childcare. Welfare payments have been subjected to an indexation freeze and cuts. Cassandra Golding, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Council of Social Services, declared:

"Overnight the lives of people in over 1.5 million households have been altered for the worse. Young unemployed people and parents in need will have to wait for income support for seven days.

"It will now also be harder for them to show they need an exemption to the one week [rule] because of financial hardship. ... this will harm people escaping domestic violence and throw people who are in financial hardship into destitution.

"Families will see their Family Tax Benefit drop by hundreds of dollars over two years because of the indexation freeze. The biggest impact will be felt by low-income families, especially single parents at a time when already 40 percent of children living in one-parent households live in poverty.

"The freeze of income-free indexation for working age and student payments will see a student lose around $4.70 per fortnight. This may not seem like a lot of money but for 60,000 young students who will be affected, it is".

The zombie threat

The original "Omnibus 1" legislation, which would have stripped funding from an even wider range of welfare programs, was defeated in the Senate. However, certain welfare cuts included in the original bill or the notorious 2014 budget remain as deferred economic policy.

Known as "Zombie" measures, they include cuts to energy and pensioner education supplements, the elimination of portability for pensions, a four-week delay before young people can receive unemployment benefits, the abolition of Family Tax Benefit end-of-year supplements, and the removal of Family Tax Benefit for sole parents in the year their youngest child turns 17.

The government is simply waiting for the right moment to reintroduce these initiatives, which are specifically aimed at hitting people on low incomes. Golding declared: "We want an assurance from government that they will bury the one-sided 'zombie' measures once and for all."

According to Golding, since 2015 $3.6 million has been taken out of the family payments system. Children's early years are crucial for their development, and childcare should form part of the public education system. But the government cynically treats childcare as a bargaining chip to help it impose welfare cuts.

The Omnibus 2 legislation was only passed by unprincipled "horse-trading" under which the government offers legislation to improve social welfare, but only on condition that an equivalent or greater amount of funding is slashed from existing programs.

The government seeks to set the interests of parents in general against those of the poorest families. It poses the rights of the present generation against those of their descendants, with the false claim that welfare costs will have to be paid for by borrowing money it doesn't have, while it squanders billions on armaments deals, offshore immigration processing, fossil fuel subsidies, low business tax rates, and other wasteful and reactionary policies.

High rates of unemployment suit the government because it wants people to compete for work, which will drive down wages and blunt campaigns for better working conditions.

Before Omnibus 2 was passed, Senator Lambie suggested fund-raising alternatives to the legislation, including a financial transactions tax, a death tax for estates exceeding $5 million, and a cap on capital gains tax concessions.

She commented: "... when you continue to go after the poor when you could be going after the money of the top 1 percent of Australian earners ... it just makes me feel sick to the guts." But the government has the interests of the top 1 percent at heart and it ignored her.

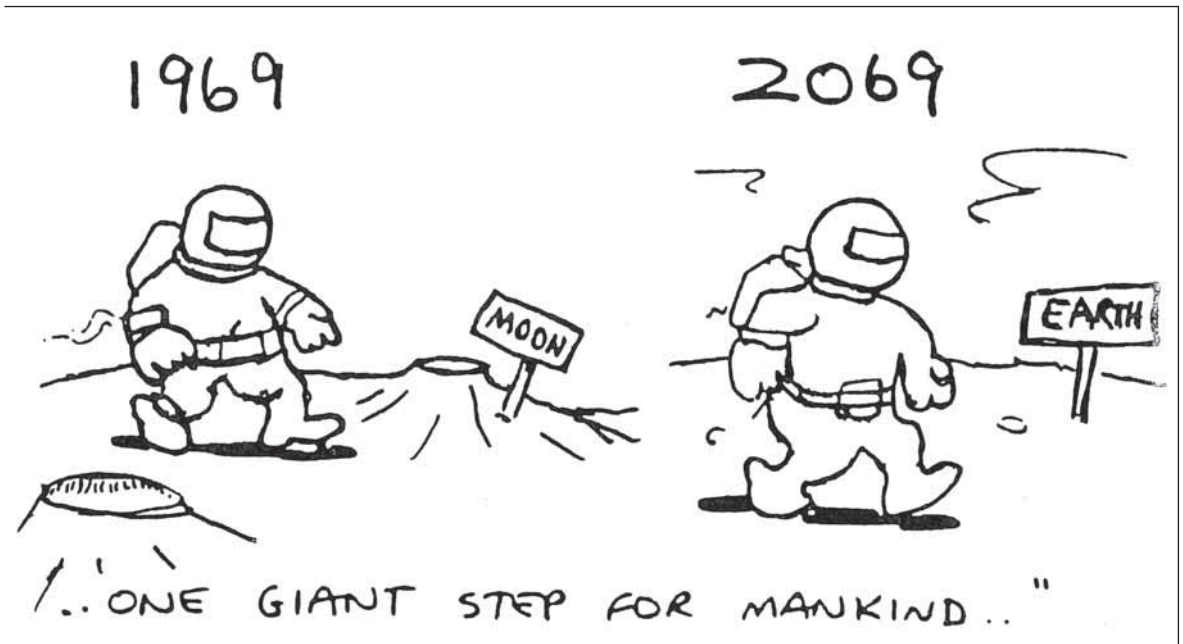
Few if any coalition MPs are likely to have had the experience of being on welfare. But Senator Lambie has, and in parliament she passionately opposed Omnibus 2 in a speech that was applauded around the country.

She declared:

"Saying 'we're not taking money off them, we're just going to freeze it' – well, are you going to freeze bread and milk, are you going to freeze fuel, are you going to freeze groceries? Are you going to freeze their rent? For you to take money off those people, you have no idea how tough it is. What you are doing is shameful."

And that just about sums it up. ✪

From the archives **Climate change – *The Guardian,* November 2000**



Sydney

VIGIL DEMANDING THAT THE USA STOP THE BLOCKADE ON CUBA

Monday April 17 at 12:30 pm Sydney Town Hall

Also to stop the subversion of funds against Cuba and return Guantánamo to the Cuban people

No one is a stranger

Zoe Grant*

I recently went to Bogor in Indonesia to visit a refugee community living there. The community was running a school for refugee children, the Cisarua Refugee Learning Centre. On the Friday afternoon after I arrived I walked into the school property and was greeted by a nine year old girl named Zahra who attended the school. When she asked where I was from I replied, "Australia," and Zahra instantly responded, "I can't wait to go to Australia!" I immediately felt saddened as I knew that with the current political climate her chances of being resettled in Australia were very slim. I soon realised that it would be tough hearing people's personal stories over the next few days and knowing I couldn't do anything to assist with resettlement.

That first day Zahra and her father proudly showed us around the school. The school was in a two story house with six three-by-three metre bedrooms. Each room had been converted into a classroom for different age groups. While the rooms were very small for 20-plus students each, I was blown away by how beautifully decorated each room was, how creative and bright they were. The walls had been painted with inspirational quotes and vibrant pictures that brought a sense of joy to the otherwise old school property.

Zahra beamed while showing us her classroom and revealing how many star stickers she had received for her good work. She spoke English incredibly well, and we soon learnt that every class was taught in English in order to ensure the students could become fluent in the language before resettling in a new country. We then met the two people who helped run the school, Tahira and Khalil from Pakistan. It was amazing to discover how passionate they are about the work they are doing. I was very grateful for the time they took out to welcome us (my mother had joined me for the visit) and show us around.

That afternoon we went to the family house where we would be spending the night. We were warmly greeted and told that this was now our house too. The family was so lovely, and fed us multiple delicious and large middle-eastern feasts over the next two days. Their eight year old daughter and I played games and drew pictures together while her father sat for hours reading over a poem trying to learn English. It dawned on us how challenging it must be to have to learn a new language at a later age, and to be flung into completely new cultures and societies.

It was in our host's house over a cup tea that Tahira shared the story of how she ended up in Indonesia. About four years before her husband had travelled from Pakistan to Indonesia and had boarded a boat to Australia in the hope he would be able to give his family a safe future. The boat went missing soon after it left Indonesian shores, and Tahira fled to Indonesia herself with their children to try to find out what had happened to him.

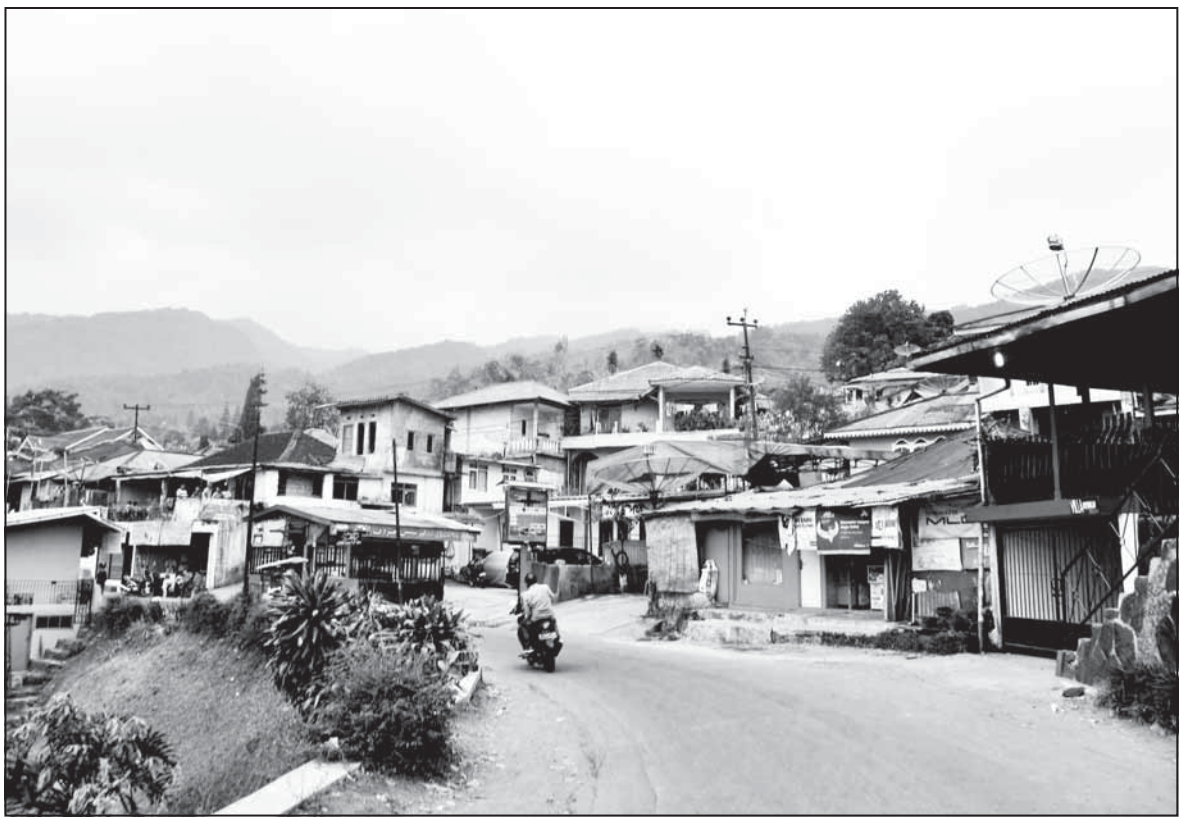
She soon realised Indonesia had a huge population and her husband could have departed from any one of a number of different ports, and after endlessly enquiring with different organisations, she realised that he could not be found. Her children ask often when their father is coming home, and she still has not told them that he has been missing for the last few years. We were in awe of how strong she was in raising her children on her own after having been through so much.

We were thrilled to then hear from her that after three years of applying for asylum through the UNHCR she had finally been accepted for resettlement in Canada. While she was grateful for the opportunity to start afresh in a new country, she was also sad to be leaving the tightly knit Hazara community in Bogor. She loved the school dearly and was easy to see that leaving it behind was not going to be easy.

I learnt a lot from my time with this community of people seeking asylum from Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan. It soon became apparent that living in Indonesia was incredibly difficult for these families as they had no work rights and no access to medical help, and the children were not permitted to attend local schools.

They were making the best of their situation, and it was good to see they were providing as much as they could for their children to enable them to grow up healthy and happy under the circumstances. Although the families we met had adequate small apartments to live in with the basics they needed, and they had enough food to feed their children, I noticed there were virtually no children's toys to be seen.

The parents shared that before they came they were able to save the money needed knowing it could be a long wait and some had family support. I asked what happened to those that did not have the finances, and we were told that those who didn't have enough to survive on for their time in Indonesia while their applications were being processed went to inadequate and under-resourced detention centres.



Bogor, Indonesia: "Most people we spoke to had been in Indonesia for three to four years and some had been given refugee status".

Most people we spoke to had been in Indonesia for three to four years and some had been given refugee status. It was hard to hear that some had been there for three years or more and had still not been given refugee status as the system can be so slow. No one knew how many more years it would be until they would be resettled, and it really dawned on us how hard life would be not knowing the future for yourself and your children.

We were told that refugees in Indonesia usually get resettled to the USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, but that in the last year resettlement to Australia had completely stopped. Interestingly, none of those that we met were planning to get on a boat to come to Australia and all had sought asylum through the legal channels. It was just so tough to see how long it takes to be resettled through the UNHCR. Their lives were in limbo.

I left inspired by the work the school was doing. It was helping to make sure that when children were finally resettled that they could slip into a new school and a new society without a huge gap in their education. We saw the great benefits of the children being able to continue their education, as well as giving the adults a daily purpose and focus. It had created a surprisingly joyful and positive environment for those who had all lost so much.

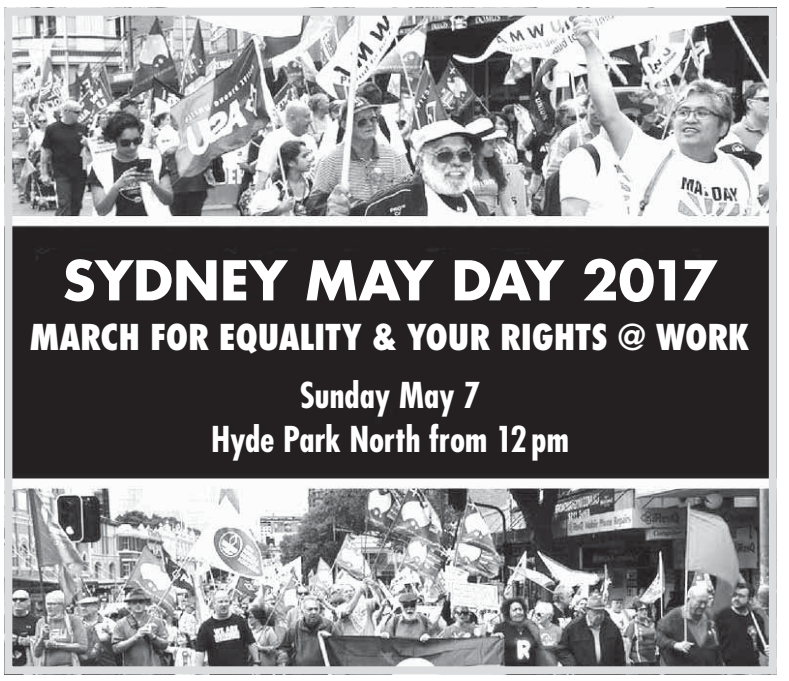
After having worked in the refugee sector for a while now, it was very insightful to see everything from a different perspective by spending time in Indonesia and meeting the people behind the news stories. I have been friends with former refugees who had also come to Australia and had also passed through Bogor for some time, but seeing it for myself gave me a new found respect and admiration for the people who have to go through this challenge. My friends are truly incredible humans; they are funny and kind, amazing bakers and artists, and doing degrees in science, law and business – as well as taking the time to speak up for children's human rights!

I am so thankful that they can now call themselves Australian, and I'm grateful for their friendship. While in Bogor I couldn't help but to dream of all of the amazing things the children at the school might be doing with their lives one day.

When reflecting on my time in Bogor while on my trip back in Australia, it was upsetting to think about the fact that there are only 14,000 refugees currently in Indonesia, and that Australia could resettle them all in one intake. The media and the government have created an "us" and "them" narrative, building fears of the "stranger". But when you meet people who have been forced to become refugees you see they are really no different to who we are, it's just that they were born in a different part of the world where unimaginable circumstances have made it necessary for them to flee their home country. One day it could be us in a similar situation.

I plan to go back to visit one day, and while I would dearly love to see again the people that so warmly welcomed us and looked after us while we were there, instead I hope that they are resettled and given the opportunity to start a new chapter of their lives. Who knows, with any luck someone I met could be resettled in your town in the next few years and they could end up becoming your child's school teacher, your local store owner, your lawyer or your future son or daughter in law. Everyone deserves these sorts of opportunities.

*Zoe Grant is ChilOut's Community Engagement Officer and a passionate human rights activist who is finishing her BA majoring in Applied Psychology. ✪



Film reviews by Peter Mac

Three classic post-war films

The following black and white films are historically connected by the cold war and highly relevant to current events. They're rarely shown on TV, but can now be seen at cinemas or on DVD.

The Third Man, a 1948 adaptation of Graham Green's novel, concerns penniless western novelist Holly Martins (Joseph Cotten) who arrives in bomb-cratered, allied-occupied Vienna, for a reunion with long-lost friend Harry Lime (Orson Welles).

Martin learns that Lime has been killed in a car accident, but discovers discrepancies in eye-witness accounts and becomes convinced Lime was murdered. Military police officer Calloway (Trevor Howard) informs him that Lime was involved in the illicit trade in desperately-needed penicillin, stolen from military hospitals and sold in diluted form on the black market with tragic results.

However, after a visit to Lime's former lover Anna (Alida Vali), Martins catches a glimpse of Lime, alive and well. The police don't believe him, but then realise that Lime has faked his own death and eluded Martins via Vienna's vast underground sewerage network.

Martins manages to organise a meeting with Lime, but fails to convince him to surrender. By this time he has, of course, fallen in love with Anna. He agrees to act as a decoy so the police can capture Lime, on condition that they prevent Anna from being repatriated to Czechoslovakia, but Lime escapes into the sewers where a fatal showdown takes place.

The Third Man has a tightly-written screenplay by Green himself, great direction by Carol Reed, wonderful ground-breaking camerawork and lighting by Egyptian-born Australian cinematographer Robert Krasker, and fine acting by the stars – including, in some memorable scenes a two-year old boy and a charming, diminutive cat! It also has one of the most efficient and memorable film scores ever written, played on one instrument, the zither, by Anton Karas.

The film provides a vivid snapshot of war's tragic aftermath, with wrecked buildings and haunted, ravaged faces filmed on site in one of Europe's most beautiful cities.

During the war Soviet Premier Stalin and the dying US President Roosevelt had discussed establishing a peaceful relationship between Western nations and the Soviet Union.

The film, shot in 1948, depicts a relationship between the occupying powers that is still cooperative and relatively cordial, but it's clear that Anna's unwillingness to be repatriated is because Czechoslovakia is communist, not because she's an unpopular German-speaking "Sudetenlander". The shadow of the cold war is already visible.

Judgement at Nuremberg, filmed in 1961 but set in the western sector of Germany in 1947, concerns the trial of German judges for their alleged complicity in the conviction and sentencing of people accused by the Nazi regime of crimes against the fascist state.

The trial is conducted by obscure, retired US Maine district court judge Dan Haywood (Spencer Tracey), who finds that some German judges blatantly support fascism's crimes against humanity, while others claim they had no choice under the law.

German judge Ernst Janning, (Burt Lancaster), refuses to accept the jurisdiction of the tribunal. Defence counsel Hans Rolfe (Maximilian Schell) argues that while acting as a judge Janning did his best to minimise the sentences of the accused, and that none of the judges knew about the slaughter occurring in the concentration camps.

Janning remains absolutely silent in the court for three quarters of the film, a brooding, enigmatic figure, but his final speech, in which he admits his guilt and condemns his fellow judges, is electrifying.

The cold war is a dominant theme. The US had to put Germany's Nazis and their collaborators on trial, but the film highlights the pressure to which US judges were subjected for the trials to be conducted rapidly, and for the accused to be acquitted or given lenient treatment if convicted.

The objective was for Germany to become a US ally in the cold war against the Soviet Union. The USSR, barely mentioned in the film, had been the primary ally of Britain and the US, had suffered huge losses far in excess of other allied nations, and had made the biggest contribution of any allied nation to defeating the fascist war machine.

Nevertheless, the pressure was successful. As one US official notes, the directors of IG Farben, the chemical corporation that produced cyclon gas for mass extermination in the concentration camps, received light sentences or were acquitted.

The post-war trials lasted until July 1949. Hitler and Goebbels had committed suicide at war's end, Hess died in Spandau Prison. Speer, Hitler's architect and Minister for Munitions, was released in the 1980s. But of 99 other defendants, none were still serving sentences by the time the film was made in 1961, and Hitler's rocket scientist Werner Von Braun had even taken over the US rocket program.

The film leaves uncorrected the impression given by Rolfe that Churchill had praised Hitler in 1938, and that the pre-war German-Soviet non-aggression pact was an alliance between the USSR and Germany. In fact Churchill bitterly opposed the Nazis, and the pact persuaded Hitler to launch Germany's first attacks against Poland and France, forcing Britain to abandon its policy of appeasement and declare war on Germany.

Nevertheless, the film carries very important messages. The judiciary must be independent of government. Laws that seek to legitimise discrimination and the violation of human rights must be disobeyed and overturned. "I was just following orders" is no excuse for following those laws. The deliberate promotion of public fear to justify introduction of the laws, and the imposition of secrecy concerning their implementation, must be denounced and reversed.

The Third Man.

Judgement at Nuremberg has great performances from Tracey and Lancaster, and from Maximillian Schell, Richard Widmark, Montgomery Clift, Marlene Dietrich and Judy Garland.

Inherit the Wind, originally written as a play, concerns the trial of a young man in Tennessee for teaching Charles Darwin's theories of evolution and natural selection, which contradict the literal interpretation of the Bible.

The play by Nathan Douglas and Harold Smith, who also wrote the film's screenplay, was based on the notorious 1925 "monkey trial" in Dayton, Ohio of young high school biology teacher John Scopes.

In the play and film Scopes is renamed Bertram Cates, counsel for the prosecution William Jennings Bryan becomes Matthew Harrison Brady, counsel for the defence Henry Darrow is Henry Drummond, and journalist HL Menken is EK Hornbeck.

In the film, leading scientists whom Drummond had enlisted as witnesses to explain Darwin's theories, are forbidden from testifying, on the grounds that their testimony would be irrelevant as to whether Scopes had actually broken the law.

After a blazing row with the judge Drummond decides to call as a witness an expert on the *Bible*, Brady himself! Brady is astonished, but cooperates enthusiastically.

It's a big mistake. During cross-examination Drummond tears to pieces Brady's literal interpretation of the *Bible*'s account of the creation of life.

The jury still finds Cates guilty, but the judge, who is painfully aware that the trial has become a national scandal, imposes a small fine. Drummond declares that no fine will be paid and the matter will be taken to a higher court. Outraged at the leniency of the sentence, Brady begins an incoherent rant defending the literal truth of the *Bible*, but dies in mid-sentence from a heart attack in the chaotic courtroom.

The performances of Spencer Tracey as Drummond, Frederic March as Brady and Gene Kelly as Hornbeck are terrific, as is Stanley Kramer's direction and the screenplay by Douglas and Smith. The brilliant courtroom dialogue is an almost verbatim version of the 1925 courtroom transcript

The play was written in 1950 and first performed in 1955. An instant success, it was written as an allegory in protest against the anti-communist, anti-intellectual witch hunts of the House Un-American Activities Committee in the 1940s and 1950s. The film was made in 1960.

Nowadays there's little chance of success in court for anyone arguing that a literal interpretation of Genesis is a valid account of human creation.

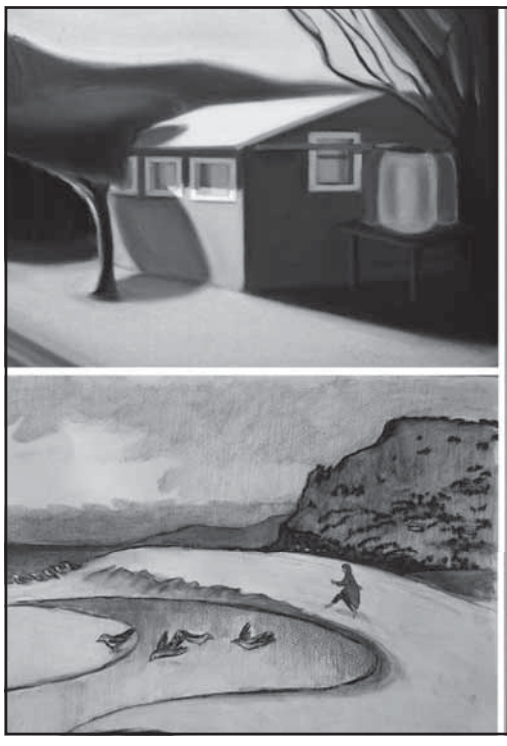
But in 2005 a religious group in Pennsylvania argued unsuccessfully in court that "scientific creation" should be taught in public schools alongside genuine science. According to two polls conducted in the US that year, 38 percent of teenagers interviewed said they believed that "God created humans pretty much in their present form within the last 100,000 years or so" and 54 percent of the adults expressed doubt as to whether humans had evolved from earlier species.

The messages of *Inherit the Wind* are certainly still relevant today.

Inherit the Wind and *Judgement at Nuremberg* have been released along with the trivial comedy *Desk Set* (in which Spencer Tracey and Katherine Hepburn squander their prodigious talents) on the DVD "Films of Spencer Tracy".

Palace cinemas are currently screening *The Third Man*, as follows:

Melbourne: Brighton Bay: Friday April 21, 10am; Monday April 24, 12:15am
Melbourne: Balwyn: Monday April 24, 2:15pm, Wednesday April 26 10:00am
Brisbane: Centro: Monday April 24, 2:15am, Wednesday April 26, 10:00am
Adelaide Nova, April:12, 10:00am ✪



Six reasons to close Pine Gap

Hannah Middleton*

Pine Gap, 20 kilometres southwest of Alice Springs, was established in 1968 in conditions of great secrecy. Local people were told it was a space research facility. In fact it is a facility dedicated to spying and warfare. It now consists of around 20 radomes working as satellite receiving and transmitting stations.

Every branch of the US military as well as the National Reconnaissance Office, National Security Agency and the CIA are stationed at Pine Gap. It employs over 1,000 US and Australian personnel.

Pine Gap is one of the largest and most important United States war fighting and intelligence bases in the world.

Pine Gap's original and still most important function is to serve as the ground control station for US satellites which cover a strategically important third of the globe, encompassing China, southern Russia and the Middle East oil fields.

US satellites transmitting through Pine Gap monitor missile launches and military, economic, political and domestic telephone, microwave and VHF radio communications from allies and enemies alike. They provide photographic surveillance of terrain, buildings, troop movements, the results of bombing raids, etc. The satellites can also intercept radar emanations, allowing mapping of air defences, anti-ballistic missile radars and early-warning radars.

Pine Gap was established in the hysteria of the cold war and was part of the United States nuclear war fighting strategy. With the end of the cold war the United States did not downgrade Pine Gap. Instead it intensified its use of the base, adding more and more functions as the years went on.

US bases on Australia's soil contribute to the US war fighting strategy. The bases assist the US to prosecute wars against countries in our region and beyond and help swell the list of Australia's enemies.

50 years is too long

The treaty to set up Pine Gap was signed by the US and Australian governments on September 12, 1966.

Data processed by Pine Gap provides targets for United States missiles and bombs, intelligence for United States economic and military activities, military command and control functions and early warning of missile launches.

For 50 years the US military facility has contributed to making Australia less secure and incorporated Australia into its war activities. It is time to close Pine Gap, for the following reasons.

1. Aboriginal land

Pine Gap sits on Aboriginal land. The Arrente people were never asked their opinion, let alone their permission, for a huge war making facility to be located on their traditional lands.

It is time this prior Aboriginal ownership was acknowledged.

It is time the traditional owners were given back their right to decide what is done on their land.

2. Drones

Pine Gap contributes crucial tracking and targeting information for US drone strikes across the globe.

Thousands of civilians have been killed by US drone strikes. The claim that drone strikes are "surgically precise" and that "collateral damage" is minimal is false.

In one instance, leaked intelligence documents showed that Obama-led drone strikes launched in Afghanistan killed innocents 90 percent of the time.

A Stanford University and New York School of Law investigation into drone strikes in Pakistan found that they killed, maimed and traumatised hundreds of civilians, violated international human rights law and generally "terrorised" men, women and children.

Far from helping to defend us, drone strikes foster anti-western sentiment and facilitate the recruitment to terrorist organisations.

The Pine Gap drone program makes Australia complicit in war crimes.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and his senior ministers welcomed the reported assassinations of two young Australians in Iraq and Syria and declared that Australia was directly involved in targeting them.

These remarks amount to sanctioning extra-judicial killings as a matter of government policy, without the pretence of any legal process. Officially, the death penalty has been banned by Australian law for more than four decades, but these young people were summarily executed, without trial.

Pakistani human rights lawyer Shahzad Akbar has said that Australia must end its complicity in US drone attacks on civilians in Pakistan or face war crime accusations at the International Criminal Court.

3. Surveillance/spying

Australia is a crucial part of the US-led "Five-Eyes" intelligence club (US, UK, Canada, Australia, NZ) who work together to gather intelligence material across the entire globe. For years Australian governments have argued that the intelligence provided by Pine Gap to Australia is essential for our security.

However, leaked documents provided by CIA whistle-blower Edward Snowden reveal that the US-led global surveillance network – of which Pine Gap is an important part – consists overwhelmingly of indiscriminate, bulk collection of the phone and internet communications of millions of civilians around the globe. The targets are not merely individuals under suspicion for planning crimes, but *everyone*.

Although Australian governments justify in terms of its so-called defence value, much of the intelligence collected by Pine Gap is used for political, economic and diplomatic purposes.

Pine Gap is supported by satellite interception facilities including those operated by the Australian Signals Directorate at Kojarena, near Geraldton in Western Australia, and Shoal Bay, near Darwin.

4. Star Wars

In 1992, then US Defence Secretary Dick Cheney confirmed that Pine Gap has a role in the US National Missile Defence (NMD, also called Star Wars) program.

NMD involves a system to intercept in flight a limited number of intercontinental-range ballistic missiles armed with nuclear warheads.

NMD is a controversial space battle system which aims to allow the US to attack other countries without fear of retaliation. NMD is concerned mainly with offence – with using space to establish domination over the world below. NMD is about trying to be invulnerable. It is not a benign, defensive nuclear umbrella.

Pine Gap supplies targeting information to air warfare warships in the Asia-Pacific region. These ships carry the Aegis Combat System. This is an advanced command and control and weapon control system that uses powerful computer and radar technology to track and guide weapons to destroy enemy targets.

NMD has the potential to trigger a nuclear arms race and to seriously undermine global disarmament and non-proliferation agreements. Australia's security will not be advanced by such developments.

The corporate presence at Pine Gap has expanded substantially since the 1990s. It includes some of the major US aerospace and defence companies, such as Raytheon, Boeing, Northrop Grumman and General Dynamics, as well as major computer companies, such as IBM and Hewlett-Packard.

Raytheon is by far the largest contractor at Pine Gap.

Almost three-quarters of the approximately 1,000 personnel at Pine Gap are employees of private US corporations and their sub-contractors. Less than one in ten are Australian government employees.

The corporations are primarily interested in making profits. They are less committed to Australian security and intelligence priorities or Australia's national interests. This again compromises Australia's sovereignty and independence.

5. Sovereignty and independence

Pine Gap clearly expresses Australia's lack of independence for it involves our country, without permission, agreement or even notification, in US foreign policy disasters and crimes. For example, the key role that Pine Gap plays in targeting both drone strikes and battlefield air strikes ties Australia directly into the enormous human and environmental damage that such warfare has wrought on the Middle East over the past two decades.

Despite this, Australian governments support its existence.

The Australian parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Treaties has in the past complained that MPs are kept in the dark about Pine Gap. Although members of the US Congress have visited Pine Gap and received classified briefings about its functions, the Treaties Committee is "entrusted with less information than can be found in a public library".

Pine Gap is a US base and not a "joint-facility" as successive Australian governments have falsely asserted. Although Australia has some access, Pine Gap was built by the US, its core facilities are paid for and maintained by the US and it would not exist but for American strategic purposes.

Pine Gap is so central to the US military that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for Canberra to disentangle itself from any future US conflict, including a US-China war.

Because of US military installations in Australia, especially Pine Gap, if America goes to war in the Pacific, it will take us to war as well – without an independent decision by Australia. In any major contest in the Pacific, our relationship with the US would make Australia a strategic target for America's enemies. It is not in Australia's interest to be in that position.

Instead of a military alliance, including hosting Pine Gap, Australia needs an independent and non-aligned foreign policy and friendly and mutually beneficial relations with all countries. Militarising Australia and delivering unfaltering support for US aggression and threats against other countries cannot ensure security for Australians.

6. A dangerous Alliance

Pine Gap functions within the larger context of Australia's long-standing subservience to US foreign policy interests. In return for US protection "insurance" (the ANZUS Treaty), Australia must pay a "premium" in the form of support for American foreign policy objectives, even when they do not directly contribute to Australia's interests. In fact, the insurance policy is far from a guarantee of American defence aid. Moreover, the major security threats to Australia in the post-WW2 era have, paradoxically, resulted from Australia's alliance with the US.

During the Cold War, Australia was a high priority nuclear target for the Soviet Union because of the existence of Pine Gap. In the event of global nuclear war, Australian and American intelligence officials secretly estimated that Sydney would suffer one million instant deaths and 750,000 radiation deaths, and you would not have wanted to live in Alice Springs, Woomera, Exmouth or Adelaide. Today, Pine Gap remains integral to America's global nuclear war fighting capacity and therefore a high priority target. This is particularly concerning given rising tensions between the US and China in the Asia-Pacific.

Australia is the only nation to have joined the US in every one of its major military

Instead of a military alliance, including hosting Pine Gap, Australia needs an independent and non-aligned foreign policy and friendly and mutually beneficial relations with all countries.

interventions in the past century, including Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, Afghanistan and Iraq. With rare exceptions, Canberra has enthusiastically supported Washington's efforts to extend its dominance to every corner of the globe, defending and downplaying atrocities committed by notorious American-allied dictators from Marcos in the Philippines, Suharto in Indonesia, and a host of repressive states across the Middle East today.

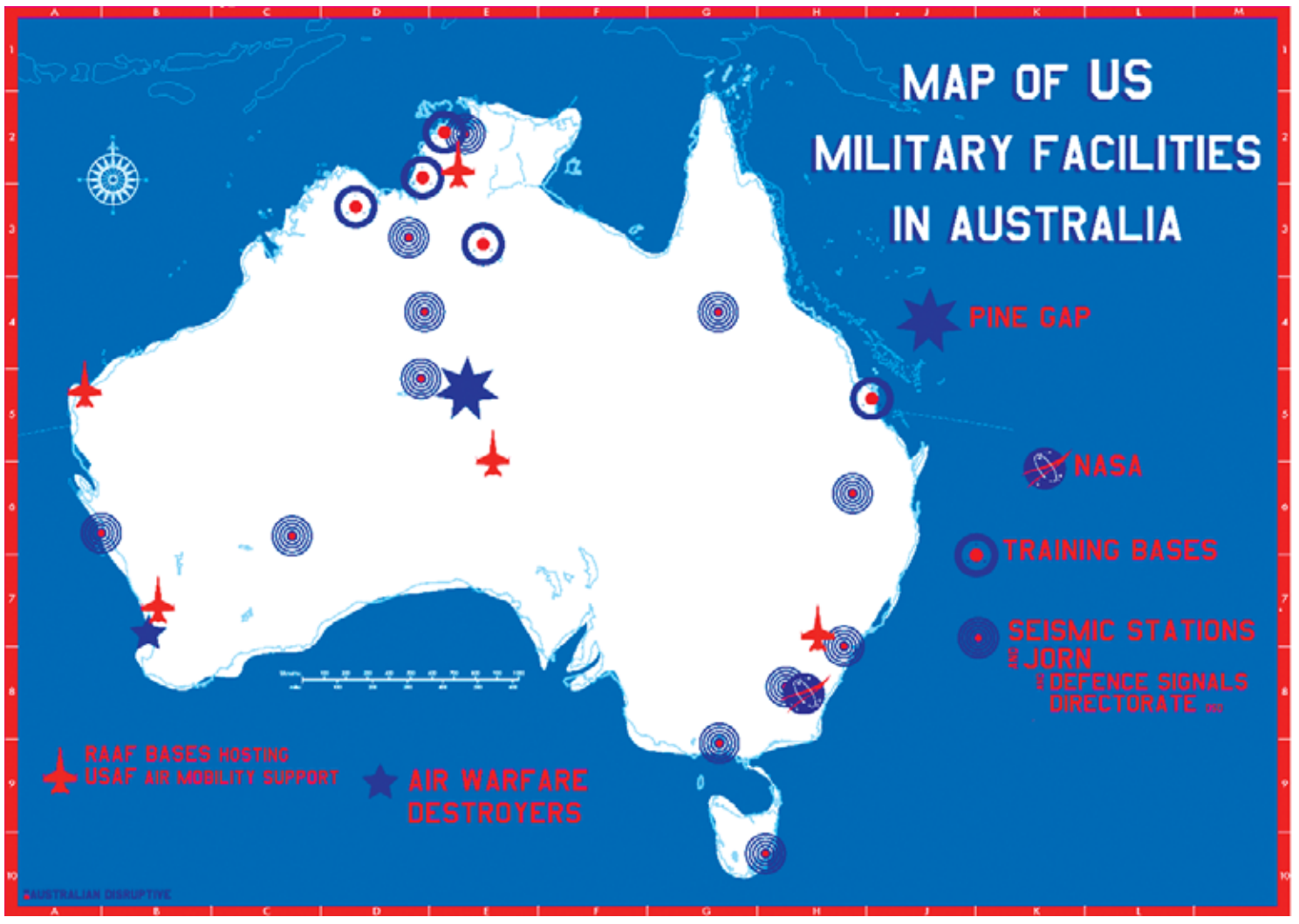
The costs of American militarism are enormous. The US has intervened in more than 70 nations since WW2, deploying the CIA in clandestine operations to overthrow democratically elected governments, arm repressive military regimes and export torture. The illegal US invasion of Iraq, eagerly supported by Australia, was a catastrophic strategic failure and a human rights disaster, resulting in mass civilian casualties and the destabilisation of the wider region – a major factor contributing to the rise and success of jihadi terrorist groups such as ISIS. The threat of a terrorist attack in Australia has increased greatly because of the US alliance.

Successive Labor and Liberal governments have surrendered to Washington Australia's sovereign decision-making power of when to go to war. At present, Pine Gap is central to America's ability to conduct extra-judicial killings via drone strikes across the Middle East, including in countries that Australia is not officially at war. What would be the consequences if Washington decides to send its strategically-positioned Marines in Darwin to engage in hostilities against a country with which Australia has friendly relations?

A majority of Australians are opposed to supporting the US in any future war in Asia, recognising Australia's regional relationships are key to the nation's future security and prosperity.

And yet, Pine Gap is so integrated into America's military and intelligence infrastructure that Australian governments would find it difficult, if not impossible, to refuse to support the US in a war with China.

*Written for the Independent Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN). IPAN is a network of organisations from all regions of Australia, united by support for an independent Australian foreign policy based on the peaceful resolution of conflicts.
For more information: www.ipan.org.au



US military facilities in Australia as of 2012.

The major security threats to Australia in the post-WW2 era have, paradoxically, resulted from Australia's alliance with the US.

Chemical attacks slur

Russia will oppose a draft UN resolution by NATO powers on an alleged chemical attack by Syria's military, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova announced. She said the draft proposed by the United States, Britain and France blames the Syrian government without any credible investigation.

Zakharova argued that video and photo evidence of the incident in Khan Sheikhoun, resulting in 72 deaths, presented by volunteer first responders could have been fabricated. She accused the West of staging a "political show" and called for an international probe.

Western powers and some non-governmental agencies have pointed the finger at Damascus, but all have relied on evidence supplied by people identified as medical staff or first responders working alongside Al-Qaida-affiliated jihadist groups in Idlib province.

No mainstream or independent journalists are present there because the situation is too dangerous and most media outlets rely on the one-man pro-insurgency operation run from Coventry and known as the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Medecins sans Frontieres said that photographic evidence indicated a likely release of the nerve gas sarin.

Yet the Al-Qaida-linked White Helmet "civil defence" volunteers are portrayed handling corpses with exposed skin and without adequate safety equipment.

Al-Masdar news agency correspondent Yusha Yuseef reported being informed by Syrian military sources that the air force had targeted a missile factory in Khan Sheikoun, using a Russian-manufactured Su-22 fighter jet to carry out the attack.

"Most importantly, Su-22 bombs are unique and cannot be filled with any chemical substances, which is different from bombs dropped from attack helicopters," he said.

Russian Defence Ministry spokesman Major-General Igor Konashenkov said the jihadists had been producing and storing chemical weapons at the factory before shipping them to Iraq.

The same chemical munitions were used by militants in Aleppo, where Russian military experts took samples in late 2016, Major-General Konashenkov said.

He pointed out that both Iraqi and international organisations have confirmed the use of such weapons by jihadists in Iraq. Both the Syrian government and Kurdish YPG guerrillas have reported chemical weapons use by jihadists in Idlib, Hama and Aleppo, but this does not fit the Western media agenda and is ignored in favour of blaming Damascus.

Meanwhile, the terrorist atrocity in St Petersburg last week was pushed from the top of the news agenda by the reports of a chemical weapons attack on Khan Sheikhoun.

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova.

The Syrian town is held by opponents of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Damascus. The BBC and Sky reported that scores of people have died following air strikes by government or Russian jets. Different claims initially put the number of fatalities at 58, 67 and 100. Some reports identified the deadly gas as chlorine, others as sarin. The reported time of the attack varied from 6:45 am local time to 7 am.

While the main source of the story is the Syrian Observatory on Human Rights (SOHR), others cited include the Edlib Media Centre, the Step news agency and a charity ambulance service in Idlib some 35 miles away.

SOHR is a one-man operation run from a private house in Coventry by long-time Syrian dissident Rami Abdul Rahman. His information or misinformation comes mostly from anti-government rebels in and around Syria and it receives extensive coverage from Reuters, CNN and Voice of America as well as the BBC and Sky.

SOHR may have links with the Edlib Media Centre and Step and all three agencies are opposed to the Assad regime. Their reports from the war in Syria focus mostly on real or alleged civilian deaths inflicted by the regime and its allies, particularly Russia.

These reports often paint events in the most lurid colours. Thus, for example, it was also being claimed yesterday that Russian or Syrian aircraft had later targeted the local clinics and hospitals treating the wounded of Khan Sheikhoun.

Although the BBC and other media outlets were careful to say at the outset that the reports were "unconfirmed", everything was done immediately to lend them credibility. This included interviews with representatives from such worthy bodies as Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) and the International Red Cross, although from their vantage points in Turkey and Geneva they, too, were unable to confirm what had happened in Khan Sheikhoun.

Even so, the French government rushed to demand that an emergency meeting of the UN security council be held to investigate matters. There is no such enthusiasm when it comes to the mass killing of civilians by US and other NATO forces in Aleppo and other parts of Iraq, say, or in Afghanistan.

Of course, it's possible that an atrocity has occurred. Events may become clearer in time, supported by evidence on the ground.

The use of chemical weapons and deliberate attacks on civilians and medical facilities by any country's forces are war crimes that should be investigated and the perpetrators punished, without fear or favour.

One problem, however, is that honest and reliable reporting from the theatres of war is rare. Western news agencies are far too quick to report negatively about those governments and forces regarded as hostile to Western capitalist and geopolitical interests, however thin or non-existent the prima facie evidence.

This breeds scepticism and cynicism among many who believe that international humanitarian law should be upheld and enforced.

Morning Star ✪

Division amongst ANC leaders

South Africa's ruling African National Congress came out swinging for Jacob Zuma last week, backing the corruption-mired president and declaring that opposition efforts to force his resignation would fail. ANC secretary-general Gwede Mantashe said the party was "gravely concerned" about displays of division among its top leaders.

However, Mantashe, deputy leader Cyril Ramaphosa and treasurer general Zweli Mkhize – three of the party's top six officials – were prominent critics of Zuma for dismissing finance minister Pravin Gordhan and revamping the cabinet without consultation.

At an ANC national working party meeting agreement was reached to support Zuma and accusing its Communist Party (SACP) ally of leaking details of a bilateral meeting to the media, which the SACP has strongly denied.

It accepted the president's right to sack Gordhan because their personal relationship had broken down. The ANC acknowledged that its allies, including the SACP and the COSATU trade union federation, had urged the president to resign, insisting that it would keep engaging with its tripartite alliance partners "on this matter".

The SACP responded to the ANC statement making clear that it had informed the ANC first of its view that Zuma should resign before making a public announcement.

It described as "unacceptable" attempts to scapegoat the SACP for the president's failure to consult. "He reshuffled the cabinet last week without even consulting the ANC itself, and not only alliance partners, on the other positions that were affected and names that were 'decided elsewhere', as confirmed by ANC officials in response to his unilateralism," the SACP declared.

COSATU expressed support for the government's stated commitment to radical economic transformation, but it insisted that this could not be divorced from a "commitment to fight against corruption and looting of our resources."

The trade union centre confirmed that its main complaint was Zuma's failure to consult either the ANC or its alliance partners.

It made clear that the labour movement remains committed to the tripartite alliance – but one which is reconfigured.

"We want an alliance which is led by the ANC that understands and accepts in practice the leading role of the working class as a primary motive force in the National Democratic Revolution," Cosatu said.

Morning Star ✪

President of South Africa, Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma.

The US private prison industry

Alice Heiserman

There should be no surprise that the Trump administration has boosted the bottom line for privatised prison companies such as CoreCivic (formerly CCA or Corrections Corporation of America), GEO, Management and Training Corporation, and others. And, their stock is likely to soar with the increased imprisonment of more immigrants. For this reason, the Trump administration bolstered by the lobbying organisation for privatised prisons is opposed to immigration reform. There is good money to be made by locking up immigrants.

However, having more people incarcerated does not make our country safer. Ironically, just the opposite is true. A report from the Centre for Substance Abuse Treatment (2010) claims that 65 percent of all US inmates meet medical criteria for substance abuse addiction, but only 11 percent receive any treatment. The largest numbers of individuals who are incarcerated do not receive adequate or even any substance abuse treatment or help with their mental health and these problems afflict the majority of inmates.

About 20 percent of prison inmates have a serious mental illness, 30 to 60 percent have substance-abuse problems and, when including broad-based mental illnesses, the percentages increase significantly. For example, 50 percent of males and 75 percent of female inmates in state prisons, and 75 percent of females and 63 percent of male inmates in jails, will experience a mental health problem requiring mental health services in any given year, according to Dean Aufderheide writing in *Health Affairs Blog*.

Without such substance-abuse and mental health treatment, their conditions will worsen. This means that the time they spend in prison does not help them when they get out than when they were imprisoned. This alone leads to recidivism. And, peer pressure often means that they learn from each other – how to be better at being robbers, drug dealers, gangsters, or whatever "profession" they had on entrance. And, things are even worse at privatised prisons.

In a new book, *Bodies in Beds: Why Business Should Stay Out of Prisons*, the author takes on the private prison industry's thirst for profit at the expense of offenders, taxpayers, and staff. The author contends that the private prison industry is only interested in maximising the number of people it has in prisons, not in rehabilitating them – hence the title – Bodies in Beds. In fact, helping inmates avoid prison is counter to the needs of privatised prisons. They want repeat customers because they are paid on a per capita basis. The more prisoners they hold, the more money they receive.

Author Sue Binder, a licensed clinical mental health counsellor and addictions counsellor examines the issue of privatisation from her perspective of 13 years working as a mental health coordinator in a private prison. She focuses on the failure of the privatised system to provide adequate treatment and successfully integrate inmates back into society. She documents the case of inmates who commit suicide because they did not get the proper mental health treatment.

Bodies in Beds takes the reader from the birth of the first private prison, founded by Corrections Corporation of American (now CivicCore) up through the current status of privatised prisons under the Trump administration.

Using a combination of personal experiences and research, Binder analyses topics such as safety and security issues for offenders and staff; the huge salaries of the corporation's chief officers versus employee salaries; and the growing importance of immigration profits for the private prison industry.

In addition, the book reviews the functional structure of the privatised prison with its sole emphasis on profits and lack of attention to staff safety. This is exemplified in the inability of the mental health staff to actually provide counselling or therapy due to insufficient staff and time constraints. It also describes the influence of the privatised industry's lobbying and strategies for negotiating contracts with states.

Alex Friedmann, associate director of the Human Rights Defence Centre and managing editor of Prison Legal News, stated that his only criticism of the book is that "the author should have resigned from her position with CCA and released this account much sooner."

Binder wrote Bodies in Beds to reveal how privatised prisons do not meet the needs of inmates and cheat staff but are loyal to their shareholders.

People's World ✪

Gibraltar: the EU's tax haven

Gibraltar is making headlines again in Britain, following a couple of years of silence. The last time such a furore was kicked up over the overseas territory was when Labour's then leader Ed Miliband warned it – along with other British possessions – that if he won the election in 2015 it would have six months to compile a public register of offshore companies to assist a clampdown on tax havens, or face "international action."

That didn't go down any better with Chief Minister Fabian Picardo than last week's mention of the Rock by European Council president Donald Tusk has.

Tusk's statement that no EU-British agreement would apply to Gibraltar unless Spain gives it the green light has prompted the Tories to threaten a Spanish equivalent of the Falklands war, while Picardo accused the EU chief of behaving like a "cuckolded husband taking it out on the children".

"Gibraltar belongs to the Gibraltarians and we want to stay British," he declared.

It's a bit rich for the foreign secretary who helped launch the entirely unprovoked invasion of Iraq to accuse anyone else of "19th-century jingoism," but Jack Straw is right that Gibraltar's British status is seen as an affront to Spanish sovereignty by most Spaniards, and right that threatening military action is "frankly absurd."

British nationalists assert that the right of Gibraltar's residents to stay British is a matter of democratic principle, and there can be no doubt that the vast majority do want to remain subject to Britain.

The most that can be said for this argument is that it beats basing our claim entirely on the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, when the enclave was ceded to Britain "in perpetuity" in return for London abandoning its campaign to replace a French king of Spain with an Austrian one.

In some respects politics has moved on since those days. Gibraltar's population may wish to be British, but overseas territories whose wealth depends on companies using them to avoid tax due elsewhere do not have an inalienable right to keep doing so.

Picardo has always rejected the charge that Gibraltar is a tax haven, but look at the facts: this tiny strip of land has more registered companies than households, including 8,464 offshore companies – not bad for a population of just over 30,000.

As Britain's former ambassador to Uzbekistan Craig Murray points out, over a tenth of the workforce is employed in the online gaming industry, based there purely to avoid taxes, and the territory imposes "no inheritance tax, no VAT, no capital gains tax and low income and corporation tax."

Tax advisers Darwin Tax describe Gibraltar as "the tax haven of the European Union" and assure clients: "A Gibraltar company which is owned and controlled by non-Gibraltar residents is not subject to Gibraltar taxation.

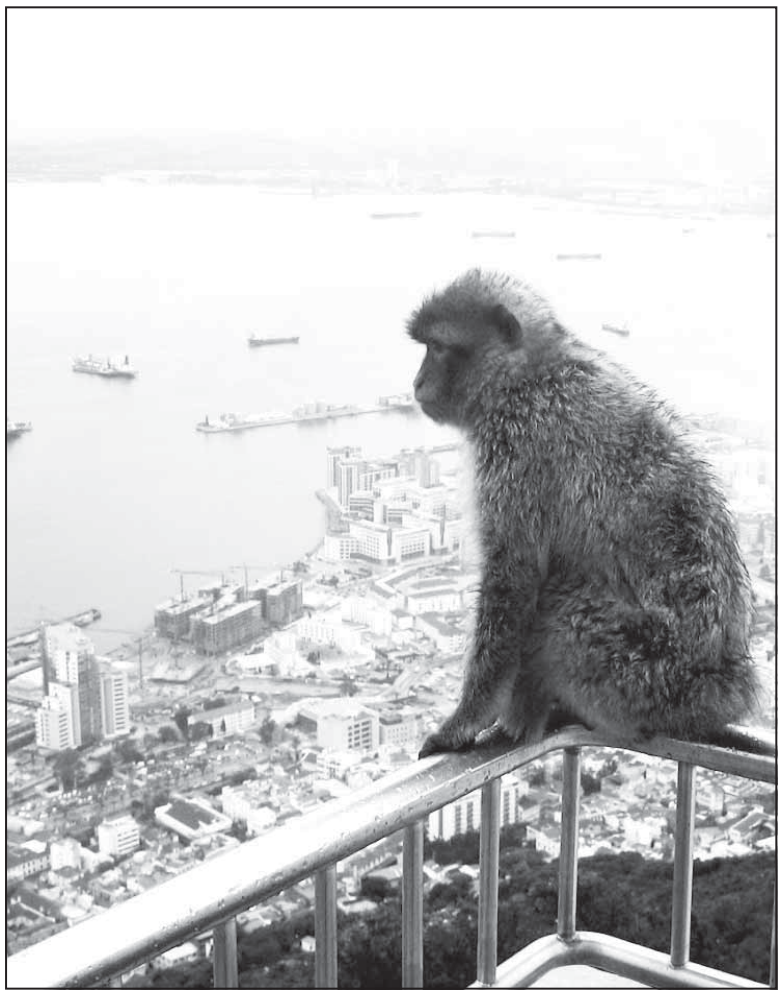
"The non-resident status of the company is supported by the Gibraltar Companies Ordinance. If such company does not carry on any trade or business in Gibraltar, all taxes are avoided."

As the only "offshore centre" which is actually part of the EU, Gibraltar is uniquely attractive to capitalists who need their companies to be registered in the EU but also want to avoid their obligations to any of its member states. The losers are the citizens of Spain, Britain and other countries whose treasuries miss out on taxing the profits of companies that operate in their territories, employ citizens they educated, use their infrastructure and sell in their markets.

Whatever differences socialists may still have on the EU, it should not be hard to agree that Gibraltar's tax status is an anti-democratic disgrace.

It should be brought to an end, along with the anti-social privileges granted to corporations in the rest of Britain's network of offshore tax havens.

Morning Star ✪



From a guide of Gibraltar targeting children.

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

Inquiry into abuse, self-harm and neglect

The Senate and Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee Inquiry into Serious allegations of abuse, self-harm and neglect of asylum seekers in relation to the Nauru Regional Processing Centre, and any like allegations in relation to the Manus Regional Processing Centre, finalised its report on March 30.

In its submission to the inquiry the Australian Psychological Society (APS) recommends that community-based alternatives to detention are prioritised, especially for children, as part of a system-wide reform of the detention network and refugee policy more generally.

The APS has particular concerns about asylum seekers being detained and "processed" offshore due to the history of escalating mental health issues resulting from offshore detention, including suicide attempts and serious self-harm incidents.

The remoteness of offshore locations restricts access to mental health and other services, as well as compromising ethical delivery of such services and links to community resources; networks and legal assistance are severely limited in detention centres in remote locations.

The APS is concerned that the detention environment itself constitutes a source of trauma and abuse, with self-harm and suicidal behaviours commonplace among detainees.

Earlier research found adults and the majority of children in a remote immigration detention setting to be regularly distressed by sudden and upsetting memories about detention, intrusive images of events that had occurred, and feelings of sadness and hopelessness.

The APS believes there is an escalating need for a just and lasting resolution to the current situations on Manus and Nauru. There are increasing reports of worsening mental health issues, abuse and self-harm, particularly in Nauru, and these distressing events are often witnessed by others, including children, who are particularly vulnerable in traumatising environments.

The APS is also concerned about recent reports of disturbing instances of sexual assault of women in Nauru and physical abuse of people seeking asylum. Such reports are echoed in the observations of APS members.

APS

Have your say on banks

For too long the big four banks have had an unfair advantage over customer owned banking in Australia. This has led to an uncompetitive banking environment for Australians.

The Customer Owned Banking Association (COBA) have presented three policy steps to Canberra to achieve more banking competition, a fairer system and drive better outcomes for consumers.

COBA is calling on Australians to have their say on our banking system and send an e-postcard to their MP's from the "Better for All" website to encourage more competition in banking.

For too long the big four banks have had an unfair advantage over customer owned banking in Australia. This has led to an uncompetitive banking environment for Australians.

Mark Degotardi
COBA CEO

Culture & Life

by **Rob Gowland**

Hurrah for the free press!

The capitalist media is at great pains always to portray itself as "free", independent and definitely not a tool of the government. This state of affairs is constantly paraded before us as not only desirable but as an essential prerequisite for the smooth functioning of democracy, good and efficient governance and just about anything else that could be regarded as socially desirable.

It's a load of baloney, of course. The capitalist mass media is big business, and whether it supports or opposes a specific government it will always support the interests of the capitalist ruling class. Different sectors of the ruling class have varying priorities, however, and this is reflected in the mass media each sector controls. Priorities aside, however, all the capitalist mass media have a fundamental commitment to sustaining capitalist class rule, so they will not support anything that actually threatens the dominance of capital or which might weaken its hold on government.

The effect of this is that, for all their talk of "independence" in the media, in reality capitalism tolerates only a narrow variation of viewpoints in the media, basically ranging from mild right-wing to extreme right-wing. They don't usually go so far as to ban left wing publications (unless they feel their class rule is actually threatened). Instead, they tolerate them but ensure that they do not have the funds to compete with the capitalist media.

In this way, they are able to puff their chests out about the "freedom" of the media under capitalism, safe in the knowledge that the working class cannot hope to acquire the means to effectively inform, agitate and organise the masses with an alternative message.

The result, of course, is that the "news" is invariably biased: no matter what it is about, it is some form of ruling class presentation. Journalists working for capitalist media soon learn what their editors and owners will accept, and tailor their reporting accordingly. Or they find another job. The result is a uniformity of viewpoint on the "news" regardless of the particular mass media platform.

This uniformity of viewpoint should be an indication to the mass of the people that this source of information is suspect, at least. Instead, capitalism has cleverly turned it into a propaganda virtue: if every news outlet is saying the same thing, it *must* be true. Right?

Hardly. On March 22, *Russia Today* published a piece comparing the approach taken by the capitalist media covering the fighting in and around the city of Mosul with the approach those same media took when reporting on the liberation of Aleppo from Daesh/IS. *Russia Today* was particularly interested in why the Western mainstream media was downplaying the civilian casualties in Mosul, when similar casualties in Aleppo made strident headlines.

British journalist Michael Raddie, co-Editor of *BSNews*, made the pertinent comment: "In the West, the media have an ideology and it all boils down to worthy victims and unworthy victims. The victims of US bombs and British airstrikes are not worthy, because 'we don't do that kind of thing'. Our killing of civilians is 'a mistake, collateral damage'. The Syrian air force's killing of civilians – if it happens – even if it is alleged to have happened without evidence – or the Russian air strikes: that is 'atrocities'. And that is the ideology that Western media portray all the time.

"You only have to look at the coverage of Aleppo. Aleppo was a tale of two cities: for six months, we didn't hear anything of West Aleppo, we heard about the plight of those in East Aleppo. But we didn't hear why they were suffering.

"They were suffering not because of Syrian Arab Army or Russian air-strikes. They were suffering because they were held captive by Al-Qaeda effectively – Al-Nusra Front and other armed groups – who were actually firing missiles [and] hell-fire cannon into West Aleppo. West Aleppo civilians were unworthy because the bombs that were being rained down were part of the regime-change program that we've instilled in Syria. It is not surprising to me that we have such distortion in the media in coverage of West Aleppo, East Aleppo and Aleppo in general and Mosul.

"Obviously in Mosul, we are not going to hear much about the civilian casualties, we are not going to hear much about their plight. We hear about the fleeing. But we are told that they are fleeing ISIS. But most of them are actually fleeing American air-strikes. They understand what is at stake here …Yes, if they stay they'll probably fall under the captivity of ISIS, but if they stay they'll probably be bombed by American B-52s as well, so they understand why they are fleeing."

Max Abrahms, Professor at North Eastern University in the US added a comment on the attitude of Western media: "There is a selective outreach – not all civilians are equal. The plight of the civilians in Aleppo drew a huge amount of attention in the West. It forced one of the newscasters on CNN to cry and it was just a major news story. However, the plight of civilians elsewhere – in Mosul and Yemen – their plights don't get nearly as much media attention. And the reason why is because attention is not dictated strictly in terms of the humanitarian basis for concern, but rather there is a politicised component.

"The Aleppo carnage was depicted at length in order to cast Assad and Putin in a negative light. The same is not true in Mosul and Yemen, and that's why the Western media doesn't have nearly as much interest."

The carnage in Yemen is the work of the Saudi air-force, using US-supplied planes and bombs. But unlike the crocodile tears shed by on-the-spot Western correspondents about Aleppo, the smashing of Yemen by its very much bigger neighbour is largely ignored by our capitalist mass media.

Hurrah for a "free press" indeed. ✪

Feminist occupation of Cheltenham Road Library

Felicity Collier

BRITAIN: Feminist activist group Bristol Sisters Uncut formed a year ago in order to campaign against cuts to domestic violence services in the city.

The group occupied a disused library building on the Cheltenham Road in Bristol for 10 days last month. As services are cut, Bristol Sisters saw an opportunity to create a safe public space in the Montpelier area.

The library had been shut down since February and was set to be sold off and become "luxury flats," which the activists objected to as it would see a community space become a profit-making venture, only benefiting greedy developers and the privileged few who can afford to buy the flats.

If they could occupy the space and block the sale of the site, they would be able to create a much needed community space that is inclusive for women, non-binary and trans people.

The group settled in and workshops and events were quickly organised, including everything from women's self-defence and power tool courses to clown workshops and music practice.

The building was decorated with signs like: "How can she leave if she has nowhere to go?" Some of the women involved in the occupation were homeless, underlining the point that women have nowhere safe to go.

The idea, the activists said, was to mobilise people to take action against this sort of gentrification that sees the erosion of public spaces, social services and precious community buildings.

The group said: "There are currently only 63 beds in refuges in Bristol and survivors often get stuck there for months at a time while waiting for a new home.

"There is a desperate need for more housing and supportive spaces for survivors and yet the council continues to sell off public buildings to private developers with only profits in mind."

Much to the injustice of the women who created the space and the women who need it, the group was called to court in recent weeks and within a day bailiffs moved in.

Women took to the roof with fire extinguishers and flares and banged pots and pans. One local newspaper reported that women were "forcibly" removed from the roof. Within four hours, the developers had ordered the demolition crew in and the building was lost.

But Bristol Sisters plan to fight on and create more vital spaces for women that don't currently exist.

Polly, who experienced the space and attended some of the Sisters' workshops, told the *Star*: "I thought that the message that they were sending by repurposing the space for community use was really important."

Curious to meet the people involved, she attended a clown workshop, describing it as "one of the most liberating and amusing things I've done."

"I think that was largely due to the unique space and the Sisters being so welcoming."

She also attended a DIY punk band workshop. She said: "It was wonderful to try new things and meet like-minded people in a safe space, which I felt took on an almost sacred feel due to the magic of the work that was being done there.

"I felt so connected to the community, in a way that I hadn't previously experienced. I really felt free to try things that I wouldn't perhaps have considered I was capable of, or entitled to."

Polly found out about the occupation through Facebook. She is co-founder of Female Empowerment Network Bristol (FEN) and uses social media to keep up to date with local women's activist groups.

She co-founded FEN with Carly, who single-handedly organised the Bristol Women's March in January in a matter of 48 hours. The group was formed to connect and empower local women and girls.

"We are putting on discussions, socials and other events, and forming a bunch of 'feminist superheroes' to share skills and experience with the community," she explained.

"Meeting so many like-minded and enthusiastic people through the women's march and FEN has given me the affirmation and confidence to be involved with activism in a way that I previously felt I perhaps didn't belong to," she said.

"When I saw that Sisters Uncut was holding a clowning workshop at the library, I thought, why not? I wanted to show solidarity and was also curious to meet the people involved and see if there was anything FEN could do to help."

She added: "The library was open to all women, trans and non-binary people, which felt right, considering their message about the lack of accommodation and support for women fleeing domestic abuse.

"I also feel that the way in which they used what had previously been a community space, to empower, educate and liberate women, trans and non-binary in the community was both inspired and inspiring.

"Austerity has meant that we are sadly losing so many public services and spaces. I'm becoming increasingly more aware and concerned that many people, particularly the vulnerable, don't have anywhere to go."

Polly was upset to read about the eviction of Sisters Uncut.

"I knew it probably couldn't last for long when up against a corporate property development company. But it did feel as though it was cut short.

"I would have liked for them to have had more time to continue with their planned forthcoming events, and for more people in the community to experience what they were creating.

"I'm also concerned about those for whom the library was their only residence – people have now been made homeless and the way in which they were evicted seemed rather brutal."

But the attention that the Sisters drew to the housing crisis and the struggles of women trying to leave domestic abuse has had an affect.

"In that respect, they have certainly been successful in delivering a strong message, and shown the positive impact of direct action. "I know that they will continue their work elsewhere, and I shall be there to support them."

Morning Star ✪

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INCREASING INEQUALITY OR BASIC INCOME FOR ALL?
• Dr **Ben Spies-Butcher**, senior lecturer in sociology, Macquarie University
• Prof **Frank Stilwell**, Sydney University

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SAUDI ARABIA: A PARTNER IN WAR AND OPPRESSION IN THE MIDDLE EAST
• **Michael Bull**, Columnist for *New Matilda*
• **Mike Karadjis**, UWS Lecturer, writer for *The New Arab*, *Links* and *Green Left Weekly*

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BEING A MUSLIM IN AUSTRALIA
• **Rudy Hamad**, FaMirfax Media Columnist
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LET HER SPEAK! LET HER WORK! BULLYING, DISCRIMINATION & SEXUAL ABUSE OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE & WORKPLACE
• **Susan Price**, unionist and women's rights activist
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TIMOR LESTE: FAIRLY OR UNFAIRLY TREATED BY AUSTRALIA?
• Sister **Susan Connelly**, St Josephs, Mary McKillop Foundation
• **Bernard Collaery**, lawyer at the centre of the biggest intelligence scandal for 25 years

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The Guardian
Editorial Office
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010
Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833
Email: guardian@cpa.org.au
Editor: Tom Pearson
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Upping the ante in Venezuela

WT Whitney

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's opponents are close to their goal of toppling the socialist government he heads in Venezuela. The US government seems to have recruited a well-to-do coterie of Venezuelans as well as international allies to the task. The Organisation of American States (OAS), set up by the United States in 1948 as a Cold War tool, is on the job.

OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro, on March 14, released a 75-page report blaming the Maduro government for human rights abuses, humanitarian disaster, and failing to negotiate with the political opposition. It threatened that if new elections are not held soon in Venezuela, the OAS would invoke its Democratic Charter and possibly expel the country.

The "Inter-American Democratic Charter" of the OAS allows for diplomatic action against nations accused of violating democratic rights, up to and including suspension.

Also on March 14, 14 nations under US and Mexican leadership issued a statement asking the Venezuelan government to "restore democracy" by releasing political prisoners and holding the elections for state governors and municipal officials that had been previously postponed. A White House official indicated "the statement was a major step towards an OAS suspension."

At a special OAS meeting in March 28 in Washington, delegates discussed Venezuela but backed away from applying the Democratic Charter; the required two-thirds majority was lacking.

Florida Republican Senator Marco Rubio had already warned Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador that they would receive no US foreign aid if at the meeting they failed to vote for Venezuela's expulsion.

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Where does power reside?

The offensive against Maduro's government escalated following the unfolding of a dispute over separation-of-powers between the legislative and judicial branches of the Venezuelan state.

On March 29, Venezuela's highest court, the Supreme Tribunal of Justice (TSJ by its Spanish initials), having previously disempowered the opposition-controlled National Assembly, proposed to assume legislative power in its stead. For OAS head Almagro, this was a "self-coup" indicating that the time had come to activate the Democratic Charter.

The context for the TSJ's actions was that in early 2016 it had disqualified three recently-elected delegates to the National Assembly from Amazonas state from taking their seats following allegations they had purchased their electoral victories. When the three eventually resigned, their absence deprived the opposition of the two-thirds majority required to block key government proposals.

The Assembly persisted in ignoring a TSJ order for new elections in Amazonas for the disputed seats, however. According to a report from the BBC, the National Assembly on January 9, 2017 declared that President Maduro had, in effect, abandoned his office and that new presidential and local elections were required. According to a reporter, Maduro has been relying on the TSJ to govern, inasmuch as "the activities of the Assembly have been consistently annulled by the Supreme Tribunal for Justice." The Assembly on March 21 voted for "reactivation of the process of the Inter-American Democratic Charter of the OAS to be applied."

Defenders of the Maduro government, however, say the Assembly's refusal to follow the TSJ's ruling rendered its actions legally vulnerable.

That legal vulnerability recently became important when the state-owned petroleum company PDVSA asked the Assembly for authorisation of business contracts with foreign entities, a process required by the Venezuela's "Law of Hydrocarbons".

The Assembly's legal problem supposedly made for risky contracts and so, using the justification of acting in the interest of the national economy, the TSJ on March 29, on a one-time basis, took over power from the Assembly and authorised the contracts.

President Maduro quickly appealed to the country's National Security Council – members are drawn from all branches of the government – to "bring peace and calm to Venezuela". He was reacting, at least in part, to Attorney General Luisa Ortega's diagnosis of a "rupture of the Constitutional order".

The TSJ bowed to the Council's insistence that it not take on legislative functions and that it back away from having declared legislators ineligible for parliamentary immunity. Power over future contracts dealing with joint-venture business investments and oil projects was granted to the president, however. Going forward, Maduro will not have to seek the legislature's approval.

Such is the context for the current political crisis. Advances in health care, education, housing, and old age assistance carry little weight in the discussion. That's the case also with the government's rationalisations for its recent actions.

The latest in a line of crises

There have been previous crises. Governmental shortcomings have been factors, but alterations in the world economy and destabilisation by Venezuelan capitalists have also taken hold. Businesses have cut back on imports and production of goods and hoarded them to promote shortages.

The worldwide drop in oil prices led to reduced income from oil exports. Money for funding social programs disappeared, and dollars too. Consequently, money is being printed, the black market in dollars expands, and inflation mounts.

The failed military coup and a prolonged oil-workers strike in 2002 and periodic, prolonged, violent, and even deadly street demonstrations have destabilised in their own ways.

President Maduro's narrow electoral victory in March 2013 and his government's loss of a National Assembly majority via elections on December 6, 2015 warned of trouble ahead. In March 2015 and January 2017, the US government named Venezuela as a threat to US national security and deserving of economic sanctions.

The latest crisis is reminiscent of coups removing other progressive presidents; for example: Mel Zelaya in Honduras, 2009; Fernando Lugo in Paraguay, 2012; and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, 2016. Each time, shenanigans operated in and around the various parliaments. In Venezuela's case, involvement of the OAS and conservative governments in the region is new.

The US government works to build relationships. In targeted countries, its agents befriend businesspersons, bankers, legislators, youth groups, and soldiers. Money flows. The media falls in line. The approach fits well for parliamentary coups.

According to Mexico's *La Jornada* newspaper, "Parties of the MUD [opposition coalition] have met [in the US embassy in Caracas] countless times. The rooms are a beehive of meetings. Activists, businesspeople, and bankers turn up to receive instructions. Agents posted to Latin America are there precisely to watch over developments. The contact is Tenney Smith, a high ranking military person belonging to the Defence Intelligence Agency, and Rita Buck Rico, assigned to the political affairs section of the foreign services."

People's World

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Communist Party of Australia

www.cpa.org.au cpa@cpa.org.au

General Secretary
Bob Briton
email: gensec@cpa.org.au

Party President
Vinnie Molina
email: president@cpa.org.au

Adelaide Bob Briton postal: PO Box 612, Port Adelaide BC, SA 5015
phone: 0418 894 366 email: sa@cpa.org.au web: www.adelaidecommunists.org

Brisbane postal: PO Box 6012, Manly, Qld 4179 phone: 0499 476 540
email: bris@cpa.org.au

Canberra email: act@cpa.org.au

Darwin Vinnie Molina phone: 0419 812 872 email: darwin@cpa.org.au

Melbourne Andrew Irving
postal: Box 3 Trades Hall, Lygon St, Carlton Sth Vic 3053
phone: 03 9639 1550 email: cpavic@cpa.org.au

Head Office (Sydney)
postal: 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010
phone: 02 9699 8844 fax: 02 9699 9833 email: info@cpa.org.au

Newcastle email: newcastle@cpa.org.au

Perth Vinnie Molina postal: PO Box 98, North Perth, WA 6906
phone: 0419 812 872 email: perth@cpa.org.au

Western NSW Allan Hamilton
postal: 121 McKay St, Cootamundra, NSW 2590
email: western.nsw@cpa.org.au

Sydney Wayne Sonter email: sydney@cpa.org.au
postal: 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010 phone: 02 9699 8844

Tasmania Bob Briton phone: 0418 894 366 email: tas@cpa.org.au