



# Plans in US for takeover of WA naval base

Peter Mac

Last week it was revealed that the US government is considering moving a huge naval strike force to the HMAS Stirling naval base in Western Australia. The move would involve establishing new port facilities for a nuclear aircraft carrier, two nuclear submarines, two guided missile cruisers, and a supply ship carrying oil, ammunition and supplies.

It would also involve stationing 52 fighter aircraft, six electronic attack planes, six early warning aircraft, two fleet logistics planes, and 13 anti-submarine and maritime strike helicopters.

The proposal also involves constructing airport facilities for "bombers and other aircraft", and increasing the number of US troops stationed in the Northern Territory from 2,500 to a full marine air-to-ground task force of several thousand, bolstered with helicopters and fighter aircraft.

This horrifyingly dangerous proposal is blatantly directed against China. The Wikileaks cables have already revealed that Kim Beazley, Australia's ambassador to the US, and former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, have both had discussions with the White House about the possibility of a war with China, and Australia's role in that conflict.

The Stirling proposal is contained in a report written by the US Centre for Strategic and International Studies for the US Defence Department, and entitled *US Force Posture Strategy in the Asia-Pacific Region*.

The report declares enthusiastically: "Australia's geography, political stability, and existing defence capabilities and infrastructure offer strategic depth and other significant military advantages to the United States in light of the growing range of Chinese weapons systems, US efforts to achieve a more distributed force posture and the increasing strategic importance of South-East Asia and the Indian Ocean."

If implemented it would escalate military tensions in the region and add fuel to the current arms build-up.

It would also endanger neighbouring areas from accidents aboard the nuclear ships and submarines. It would turn Perth, Darwin and possibly other Australian cities into military targets during armed conflict between one or more of those countries and the US. The rich agricultural areas in southern West Australia and the Northern Territory, now proclaimed as Australia's new food bowl, would be endangered by nuclear fallout and military pollution.

Implementation would have major implications for other countries in the Indian



Aerial view of Garden Island and HMAS Stirling Naval Base.

Ocean and South-East Asian regions whose activities were considered unfriendly or hostile by the US.

The proposal contemplates Australian participation in armed conflict between nations armed with the world's most highly-developed weapons systems, which would inevitably result in the death of hundreds of thousands of people, and possibly in the use of nuclear weapons and millions of casualties and environmental damage.

### Foreign military takeover

The Stirling proposal is the most expensive and ambitious of four "options" outlined in the report which concern the Indian Ocean and South East Asia region.

The second option involves increasing the number of US forces and planes stationed in Australia, but without the massive upgrading of military infrastructure involved in the Stirling proposal. It poses almost the same threat to peace in the region.

The report also considers simply maintaining the current level and location of US military forces in Australia. The US is unlikely to adopt this approach, given the challenge posed to its economic interests and aim of global domination by the growth of India and China.

The report's final option involves reducing US military involvement in the region. That is the most rational course of action for regional

security (and the US's \$15 trillion or so public debt) but is unthinkable, given obsessive US perceptions of its manifest destiny.

The Stirling proposal is amazingly arrogant. Described in the report as an "option", it presumes that Australia will simply do as it is told. The proposal has never been put to the Australian people for their approval, nor has it been discussed in the Australian parliament.

### Australian govt fails to rule it out

After the proposal was revealed, the Australian Defence Minister Stephen Smith stated: "The US does not have a base in Australia and that will not change." The government refers to Australian bases (with a US presence) or facilities, it never calls them what they are: US bases.

The satellite spy station at Pine Gap, one of the largest and most important US war fighting and intelligence bases in the world, is officially referred to as a "Joint Defence Facility". It was used by the US for aerial attacks in the Middle East. It has no-go areas for Australians.

Moreover, the US is not proposing to build a new base, as Smith implied, but rather to expand an existing Australian base in order to accommodate US vessels, planes and support facilities, which would sit alongside their Australian counterparts.

This is what is occurring in Darwin with the expanded US presence there, including stationing of 2,500 marines.

Stirling would still be technically an Australian base, although the US facilities would dwarf ours and the US area would to all intents and purposes function as an independent military base.

Smith also said that undertaking the Stirling proposal was "not in contemplation", well not yet. He failed to rule it out and we all know how politicians can change their minds.

### Relations with China

Sun Zhe, Director of the Centre for China US Relations at the Tsinghua University in China, commented: "Of course [the Stirling proposal] would damage the relationship. It would be interpreted within China as another move to encircle China."

Mr Sun expressed the view that the financial costs, estimated between \$1 billion and \$7 billion, could prevent the Stirling proposal being implemented.

However, costs alone would not necessarily deter the US. Australia would doubtless be expected to shoulder part of the financial burden. The US is restructuring its military spending in line with its shift to the new Asia-Indo-Pacific focus.

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**GERM Warfare - School Education in Finland**

## The Guardian

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August 8, 2012

### No medals for the private sector

It used to be government policy that major sporting events would be available to viewers on free-to-air television. But not any more if the present Olympic coverage is anything to go by. The present Channel 9 monopoly over free-to-air coverage is scandalous. The criticisms of narrow focus on a few sports, the focus on Australians, the failure to show whole or even substantial parts of matches and constant interruptions with advertisements are well founded. So too are the complaints about endless repetition of swimming events and the analysis of them. The Olympics is an unparalleled opportunity to watch the top athletes in a wide range of sports. But not in the hands of Channel 9. Instead we have been fed a constant stream of drivel and hype.

The media pressure placed on athletes was appalling. At times you could be forgiven for thinking that only Australia, despite its relatively small population, went into the Games with any medal chances. There were the political attacks on the young Chinese swimmer with wild accusations about drugging, that her performances were impossible. At the same time miracle performances by an American swimmer were heralded as the greatest sporting achievement ever.

Nine and Foxtel Pay TV have a monopoly of coverage. It was quite different to the 2008 Olympics when a commercial channel did the sensational short grabs in a few select sports and endless medal ceremonies, and the free-to-air public broadcaster SBS ran a full schedule of matches and events covering a range of sports. It was possible to turn on and watch a badminton or table tennis match in its entirety, to see all the competitors in javelin throwing, or watch the wrestling if that was your interest. Viewers were exposed to a range of sports that they were not necessarily familiar with and possibly even motivated to take up a sport.

The SBS coverage was not, "Aussies, repeats of Aussies, interviews of Aussies, analysis of Aussies, back stories of Aussies", to quote one response to the *Courier Mail's* request for feedback on Nine's coverage. "It's a World Game, not the Aussie Games." The Olympics are "about the world coming together to celebrate sports and the Olympics spirit. The media has completely insulted the Games with their obsession with Aussies and gold medals." There was no free-to-air SBS with its excellent coverage this time. Anyone who wanted to see the sports being played, rather than watch sobbing competitors and gold medal counts needed to sign up with Foxtel – not just for the basic package but for additional sports channels. Nine and Foxtel paid about \$120 million to the International Olympic Committee for their TV monopoly over the 2010 winter Olympics and the London Games.

Even in cold, economic terms, Nine's attempts to foster Australian nationalism have misfired. It is missing out on a huge potential audience. Australia is a multicultural country with ethnic communities who might like to have seen the football or basketball team from their homeland compete. While Nine has drawn large audiences, there are millions more who turned off after a couple of evenings frustrated at not seeing sports events. Some in desperation took out a subscription to Foxtel, which after all was one of the aims of the exercise.

The coverage has generated its own backlash. It has kindled negative assessments of the Australian Olympic squad in spite of numerous outstanding performances. There appears to be an attitude that if the media monopolies are going to provide multi-million dollar coverage, the athletes had better deliver gold or else.

Nine made a big thing that it was bringing live coverage, but had a knack of cutting off live events at critical moments to run ads or repeat an interview or summary of events for the third or fourth time. Even Aussie tennis hero Lleyton Hewitt got cut off. People want to see a sport being played to its full, not a couple of players walking off a court or table at the end of a match.

The more technologically astute viewers have found online streams to watch for free but not everyone has the knowhow or is in a position to do this, nor should they need to.

Channel 9 and Foxtel's monopoly of TV coverage are the antithesis of the "Olympic Spirit" and the much touted claim of being "the people's games". The Olympic Games is the largest private, corporate event in the world and the corporate monopoly over the coverage of these Games in Australia is just one facet of that profit-driven event in which athletes become commodities. It is time to begin the campaign for our public broadcasters to be given the right to cover the next Olympics and other major sporting events.

#### PRESS FUND

Big business claims that the private sector is more efficient than the government. NSW homeowners who have solar panels on their roofs aren't convinced. They feed energy back into the power grid and should therefore receive either a reduced bill or a cheque if they've produced excess energy. But no! Instead, they get a bill from one company for the energy they drew from the grid, and a cheque from a totally different company for what they fed back. How inefficient is that? Now, for the Press Fund we just make one request, that you support us with a contribution for the next issue! Our sincere thanks go to this week's contributors, as follows:

J R Allen \$10, Grant Drew \$50, Noel Hazard \$20, Ina Heidtman \$20, Mark Manion \$5, Peter Reed \$100, "Round Figure" \$15

This week's total: \$220 Progressive total: \$6,390

# Two Communists running in local government elections

Dr Hannah Middleton

The local council areas of Auburn and the City of Sydney will feature party members running as candidates. In Auburn, running for the *Battler* is Tony Oldfield, a well-known local activist and party member. In the City of Sydney is Denis Doherty running as Mayoral and Councillor Candidate with the Housing Action Team.

Both comrades have been heavily involved in their local communities acting to encourage the use of local government resources for ordinary people. In Tony's case the group he belongs to (the *Battler* and [www.battler.org.au](http://www.battler.org.au)) have been involved in a campaign to stop the state Liberal government sending radioactive waste from the north shore suburb of Hunters Hill to a storage facility in Lidcombe.

They have also lead successful campaigns to stop large areas from being re-zoned for high-rise development. Tony spoke with *The Guardian* and said, "I am proud to have been chosen to head the ticket for the *Battler*. This group has worked hard in the last four years and scored some great victories. It just shows what communities can achieve when they fight-back against big business and property developers"

Denis Doherty on the other hand is part of a historic shift in left politics in Sydney where the team of which he is the lead member is composed of



Denis Doherty is running for the City of Sydney.



Tony Oldfield is running for Second Ward of the Auburn Council area.

Socialist Alliance members and other community members. The Housing Action Team has Ray Jackson from the Indigenous community, Raul Bassi an Argentinian migrant and now activist, Jay Fletcher journalist with the *Greenleft* and Andrew Chuter a maths teacher from Erskinville.

Denis too, has been active in the community over many years and with the Port Jackson branch of the CPA and has attempted to either protect the community from the ravages of the developers or to foster community spirit through the local youth centre or community centre. Most recently he has been involved in protecting the

Glebe estate from destruction both by Labor and Liberal state governments.

Both of these comrades deserve your support in the coming period up to the September 8 local government elections. We ask all our members and supporters to get in touch with either candidate and offer support both financial and physical. We need people to leaflet and people to staff the booths.

Contacts for the candidates:  
Tony Oldfield  
[admin@battler.org.au](mailto:admin@battler.org.au)  
Denis Doherty  
[cpa@cpa.org.au](mailto:cpa@cpa.org.au) ☘

## Plans in US for takeover of WA naval base

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In addition, Congress has shown no real willingness to curb military spending, despite the US national debt.

Song Xiaojun, editor of China's *Naval and Merchant Ships* magazine commented that China would cut off economic ties with Australia if it participated in any sovereignty dispute, for example, over the disputed islands in the South China Sea which has rich deposits of oil and gas.

That would not have serious economic implications for China in the immediate future as it already has vast stocks of coal and iron ore, much of it imported from Australia. On the other hand, it would have major

implications for the Australian economy.

The adoption of the Stirling option cannot be ruled out. The US depends on its overseas bases to exert its imperial power and its war plans. It has worn out its welcome in several countries, not least because of the arrogant and abusive attitude of US military personnel to local residents, particularly women, who are in constant danger of sexual attacks.

The doors are now shutting for the US. In 1975 it lost its bases in Vietnam and later the Clark Airfield in the Philippines. Pressure is mounting on the Japanese government to kick the US out of its massive Okinawa base. The US has already been

forced to agree to the removal of 9,000 marines who need new homes. Some will go to Guam and Haiti. And the remainder? Australia?

The Stirling proposal may not only be adopted but could become the thin end of the wedge, with the West Australian coastline eventually becoming a bristling line of US military ports, airfields and encampments.

It is entirely possible that as a first step in this process the US will demand increased access to the Stirling base, and that a Labor or Liberal government will be all too willing to comply. The Australian people must prevent this happening. ☘

Sydney District Committee, Communist Party of Australia  
invites you to a public meeting on



## Latin America in Revolt

Saturday 11 August  
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Light refreshments provided Entry \$20, conc. \$12

Inquiries: Hannah on 0418 668 098



# COAG disability wrangle – Coalition ugliness on display

Bob Briton

**Horse-trading at the recent Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting turned uglier than usual when the issue of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was tabled. The Prime Minister was keen to get state government agreement to part-fund trials of the much-vaunted scheme but at first only South Australia, the ACT and Tasmania would agree. Premiers from Queensland, NSW and WA stood by the current Coalition line that the scheme is too lavish given Australia's delicately poised economic position and that their state coffers were empty. The blast they got from public opinion was richly deserved and forced NSW and Victoria into a partial backdown.**

In the end, Premiers O'Farrell and Baillieu offered roughly half what was requested for the funding of trials at selected locations across the country. The Coalition is giving lots of notice that it will pursue a more stridently right-wing agenda than federal Labor. It will not, for example, consider funding increases for public education of the order recommended in the Gonski report handed down last December. Shadow education minister Christopher Pyne likened the idea of such increases to tailoring the household budget on the basis of a possible Powerball lottery win. The government is remaining coy on the issue. In truth both "sides" of parliament are happy with the continued drift of enrolments away from under-funded public schools into private ones.

Part of the Coalition's attack on the NDIS is that the issue of ongoing funding is not officially sorted.

The Coalition and Labor are both committed to one of the main articles of the neo-liberal faith – low corporate and personal income taxes. Funding from those sources is, presumably, taboo. A Medicare-style levy has been raised and neither the Liberals nor Labor have ruled it out. The thinking appears to be that a tax by another name for something that is popular with the public would not provoke an electoral backlash.

The reason the NDIS has been well received by the community is that the current situation is so obviously dysfunctional. "It's under-funded and it's fragmented ... and access to services is a very cruel lottery: it depends on where you live; it depends on the kind of disability you have; and it depends on how you got that disability – a very cruel lottery with too many Australians missing out on the basic services that they need," as Julia Gillard pointed out last year.

Too much also depends on the personal wealth of the individual, the availability of family members for the provision of care and the generosity of volunteers and charities.

The trials will mark a significant lift in funding to people with disabilities. In NSW the government currently provides \$17,000 a year for each person with a disability. Under the proposal this will be raised to \$21,700 each with the federal government lifting the total spend to \$35,000. There is ongoing debate about who should cover any cost blow-out. The federal government says it should be shared 50-50. NSW says the Commonwealth should wear it.

Funding is only one of the mysteries regarding the proposed NDIS. The concept came to

light with the release of a report from the federal government's Productivity Commission (PC) last year. It recommended a market-based model with greater emphasis on competition between providers and the possible winding back of the role of governments from providing services.

"The NDIS is not the brainchild of the PC but has its origins within the finance sector," *The Guardian* noted in a two-part feature last September. (September 7 & 14, 2011) "The political process has been driven by Bill Shorten, [then] assistant treasurer and minister for superannuation and financial services. On his initiative, in 2008 when he was parliamentary secretary for disability services, the Labor government appointed a committee, the Disability Investment Group (DIG), to make recommendations for a new disability policy framework for Australia.

"The seven members of the Group came from the big end of town, mostly from the finance sector. The companies they held positions in included AustralianSuper, Philanthropy Australia, Kathleen



Council of Australian Governments meeting turned uglier than usual.

Townsend Executive Solutions, ANZ Trustees, MossCapital, PricewaterhouseCoopers, and the Allen Consulting Group. The Group also included Allan Fels, former chair of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.

"The government's terms of references centred on identifying

'opportunities to increase private sector involvement and investment in the funding of disability services and related infrastructure...'. And that is what the Group did."

And while the bean counting and scheming go on, desperation at the ongoing neglect of people with disabilities continues to grow. ☘

## Disgruntled Torres Strait Islands leaders in walk out

Darren Coyne

**Torres Strait Islands leaders last week walked out of a consultation meeting with Queensland government officials over proposed changes to Queensland's Animal Care and Protection legislation. Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) chairman Toshie Kris, mayor Fred Gela and Torres Strait Council mayor Pedro Stephen led a walkout of about a dozen people who had gathered to discuss the changes.**

It's understood they made statements saying that the hastily arranged meeting was not proper consultation at all and that they didn't want to be "tainted by association".

"The bureaucrats weren't expecting much better. They had been sent up here to do the dirty work," a source told the *Koori Mail* newspaper.

The disgruntled mayors have since written a protest letter to Premier Campbell Newman complaining of the haste in which his government was trying to ram the legislation through Parliament.

The Bills, which have had their first reading, are still to be passed, and there has been no indication from the government about when they will again go before Parliament. It was still to be signed off and forwarded at the time the *Koori Mail* went to press.

### "Significant impact"

Earlier last month, the TSRA had called on the government to consult properly with Torres Strait Islanders over the proposed changes, saying they would have "significant impact on customary practices for dugong and turtle hunting".

Mr Kris said the hunting practices had been carried out "by our

ancestors for thousands of years and are vital for our cultural identity and cultural well-being".

"For this reason it is critical that we are meaningfully consulted and that our views and recommendations are considered in a genuine way as part of this process," he said.

Torres Strait leaders are particularly angry about requirements that would prevent turtle or dugong meat being sent for ceremonial purposes to communities in places like Cairns and Townsville.

Queensland Agriculture Minister John McVeigh introduced the legislation to State Parliament late in June to make dugong and turtle hunters meet animal

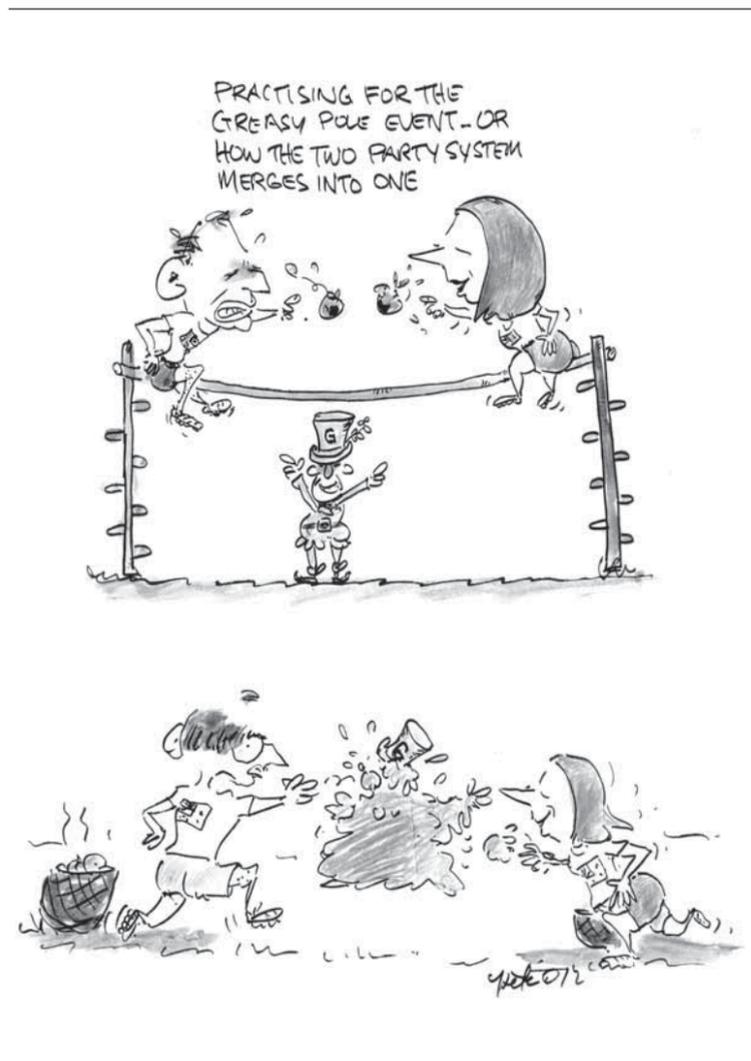
welfare standards. At the time, Mr McVeigh said the current exemption of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to hunt dugongs and turtles was "too easily exploited by some rogue hunters who have no regard for animal welfare".

The changes fulfil an LNP election promise made after the ABC aired footage of hunters cutting the flippers off a turtle lying struggling on its back.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Minister Glen Elmes also promised that the government would work with Indigenous communities to ensure the new standards were met.

*Koori Mail* ☘

Pete's Corner



Sydney

## SOUP KITCHEN

SUNDAY 19 AUGUST

6-8pm

### GAELIC CLUB

64 Devonshire Street, Surry Hills  
(2 mins walk from Central Station Devonshire Street exit)

## HOUSING ACTION LAUNCH and FUND RAISER

soup and bread provided	speakers	entry
drinks at bar	entertainment	\$20 / \$12

More than 20% of people in private housing in Sydney are under housing stress, but between 2000 and 2010, the number of public housing dwellings in NSW fell about 10%, or more than 12,000 properties. Sydney Council has a "social cleansing" agenda, cutting the proportion of public housing in the City from 10.4% in 2006 to 7.5% as part of the Council's 2030 Vision. HOUSING ACTION is standing for the Sydney City Council in the September 8 local government elections for increased public housing and stop the privatisation of public land.

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# Qld unions plan state-wide strike

Queensland unions have announced a state-wide strike on September 12 in response to the new Liberal National Party (LNP) government's plans to sack thousands of public sector workers. Delegates from 34 unions at a meeting of the Queensland Council of Unions (QCU) voted unanimously to support the day of industrial action. The date is the day after the Newman movement hands down its first budget.

The QCU reports Premier Newman as saying more than 4,400 public sector positions had been cut, and at least another 15,000 were expected through to the September 11 Budget. The government has put a freeze on renewing thousands of contracts that come up for renewal at the end of July and in August. It is refusing to reveal how many.

QCU president John Battams said the announcement of 2,000 job cuts in the Transport Department on July 31 highlights the need for transparency around the contracts and bonuses of senior bureaucrats.

The QCU has called on the LNP government to respond to claims that some public service chiefs are being paid performance bonuses or other incentives for sacking or "booting out" workers.

"... if bonuses or incentives are being offered to meet job cut targets, we need to know which bureaucrats are in line for the bonuses and which departments and how many workers are in the firing line," Battams said.

"It's a worry if there is a personal financial incentive to sack people, and I hope it's not true."

It was confirmed last week that workers at the government-owned printer GoPrint will be joining the growing queue of unemployed. "The closure is to take effect virtually immediately," AMWU assistant state secretary Danny Doherty said.

The union also accused the government of breaking pre-election promises not to privatise. "The government will strip out the publicly-owned assets of GoPrint for the benefit of private sector, and then retain just a few workers and say it's not privatisation. That's just sneaky and has been the LNP's tactics with GoPrint all along," Mr Dougherty said.

"Workers at GoPrint have been a political football over the past few weeks and now the government has revealed its true intention to ignore its 'no privatisation' promise," he said. GoPrint, a 150-year-old, publicly-owned asset, which ensures that important state documents are



printed properly and securely, will now be cut up and flogged off to the highest bidder.

Another 50 jobs will go at Q Fleet's vehicle maintenance repair facility in Zillmere, and another 100 jobs at government furniture agents SDS.

"These are long-term permanent workers who have families and

mortgages. It's going to be a hard time ahead for them," Doherty said.

Public Works Minister Bruce Flegg and Premier Newman "are happy for important government documents to be printed anywhere, which raises alarming security concerns," Mr Dougherty said.

"More importantly, another 200 Queenslanders are now out of work. These are real people..."

"It's time this government looked at the human impact of its political agenda," he said.

## Strong support for state-wide strike

Allison Welch from the Teachers Union said their 44,000 members support the day of action. "We have to fight to represent the people that are in our classrooms, the next generation of Queenslanders," she said.

"They are going to have to wake up and find that they've got no jobs because there aren't any because the public service has been cut."

President of the United

Firefighters Union Mark Dearlove said the state-wide strike will send a clear message. "Stand side-by-side and let the government know that we're against unfair legislation being pushed through Parliament to bash unions," he said.

"We're against conditions being stripped from our awards and our agreements."

Phil Blair from the construction union said builders are supporting the campaign. "We're not just going to stand by and let [Campbell Newman] undo everything the unions have done in this state," he said.

Nurse Karen Shepherd said public sector cuts will put extra pressure on the health system. "If people out in the communities are losing their jobs it has a domino effect because what happens is that they can't afford to go to a GP and get medications," she said.

"So they leave things too late and you can just see how this effects everybody - it's a ripple effect."

Unions say the day of action will be the start of a long campaign. ✪

## NSW firefighters fight funding cuts

Nothing is sacred when it comes to the budget-slashing O'Farrell government, not even when the lives of people are at stake. The Liberal premier has ordered Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW) management to cut employee-related costs by \$25 million per annum. According to the Fire Brigade Employees Union (FBEU), "The only way this can be achieved is by cutting overtime, wages, conditions and/or jobs."

The union said the savings required exceed the entire FRNSW overtime bill, so even the complete elimination of all overtime (an impossible goal) would still not be enough to avoid job cuts.

Management has developed a number of strategies to meet the government's cost-cutting. The centrepiece is taking stations off line at different times, putting public lives and property at risk.

And contrary to Commissioner Mullins' repeated and very public assurances, the Department plans to

jettison safe and effective minimum staffing levels of four by preparing to order crews of only two to respond on pumping appliances.

"Stand by for bag-loads of management spin about safe crewing levels being needed on the fireground, but not on a truck," the union warned.

Commissioner Mullins has urged the union to work with him "to avoid the prospect of workforce reductions".

The union has been in discussions with the Commissioner and expressed its preparedness to consider different ways of doing things, but has ruled out cutting existing award wages or conditions. This leaves a reduction in overtime as the only option left before job cuts.

The FRBEU had supported a reduction of overtime via extra permanent and retained firefighter jobs and a reduction in firefighters' sick leave before this budget crisis hit. "We will continue to do so," the officials said. But it remains

opposed to taking permanent stations off line as a cost-cutting measure.

It rightly asks, once started, where would it stop? Does anyone seriously believe that the Department will continue to run with 630 permanent relieving staff when it can simply close a station instead? "It is not the answer - it is the start of a race to the bottom and a guarantee of more job cuts, not less."

Likewise it remains firmly opposed to any reduction to safe and effective minimum staffing levels.

The FBEU has notified the Industrial Relations Commission of a dispute and requested that FRNSW take no action in the meantime until the matter is heard.

Meanwhile the union has advised its members to follow well established arrangements irrespective of any direction or order to the contrary from FRNSW management. ✪

## Asbestos alert

The CFMEU has become aware that the Bechtel Construction Pty Ltd site on Curtis Island near Gladstone, Queensland, has imported buildings that have been made from converted shipping containers. They have been assembled in Indonesia and supplied by the international company METITO Pty Ltd, to house the Motor Control Centres for the Sewage Treatment Plant.

"CFMEU members on the Bechtel job on Curtis Island have voted unanimously to demand the company remove the sheds from the Island and send them back to Indonesia. Work will not be carried out in that area of the site until the sheds are removed," said Assistant Divisional Secretary and National OHS Officer, Lindsay Fraser.

The internal linings of the sheds consist of asbestos cement sheeting/tiles on the walls, floors and ceilings. This has been confirmed by testing.

"As we are all aware the importation of asbestos products has been banned through the Customs Act in Australia since 31 December 2003,"

said CFMEU QLD/NT Safety Officer Andrew Ramsay.

"The asbestos in these sheds came to light after a fire in one of the switch boards caused the sheeting to be broken and exposed the fibres to the workers involved."

"The union is concerned that many electricians may also have been exposed during fit-out of these sheds before the alarm was raised."

CFMEU Construction National Office is alerting members around Australia, particularly on remote job-sites, of the possibility of illegal dumping of this type of converted shipping containers for use as offices or sheds on those sites.

"The CFMEU is alerting OHS Officers and members in all branches to check their sites for imported products of this kind and alert their employers to the potential hazards."

"The incident also raises questions about the validity of Material Safety Data Sheets on building products coming from other countries, which the CFMEU will be investigating further," said Mr Fraser. ✪

Adelaide

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Communist Party of Venezuela

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# “What the frack” Unconventional gas and its place in WA’s energy future

Richard Titelius

**On June 20, West Australian Upper House Greens Member of Parliament Alison Xamon brought on her motion to have a moratorium on the fracking of unconventional gas until a transparent and effective regulatory framework and comprehensive environmental assessment regime was introduced.**

In the debate, the Liberals directly supported fracking. The Nationals who had some concerns, still supported their Liberal coalition partners. They did so in purely economic terms, ignoring the scientific literature on the negative impacts that gas fracking has on the environment, greenhouse gas emissions and functioning of the human body.

The ALP joined forces with the Liberals/National Party, claiming that the geology of WA is different to that of the USA, and therefore it would

be safer than over there to manage WA’s unconventional gas extraction and processing.

Greens Upper House MP, Alison Xamon, however, is determined not to give up the fight against gas fracking. She spoke at a public meeting of more than 50 people on July 31, which was convened by Greens MLC Lyn McLaren in the port city of Fremantle. Xamon outlined strategies to keep the issue bubbling until the next time a moratorium on gas fracking in WA can be proposed.

This includes applying political and public pressure on the Environmental Protection Authority to undertake assessments of gas fracking which consider the full range of science available. It should include issues of public health and safety, long- and medium- term effects on the environment, and especially greenhouse gas emissions and their known effect on climate change.

Doctors for the Environment

spokesman Dr George Crisp addressed the public forum on the known and suspected risks and hazards of gas fracking. The reasons why there is an emphasis on *suspected risks* said Dr Crisp, is that without rigorous scientific testing one cannot categorically state that conventional gas mining is hazardous or dangerous – especially in regards to the chemicals used as proppants\* in the gas fracking process.

The chemicals can affect ground and surface water or become airborne as a gas passing its way into the bodies of human beings and other living creatures in the area.

These contaminants come not only from the chemicals pumped down exploratory wells but from stirring up dangerous chemicals which, for millions of years, have laid thousands of metres below the surface.

Dr Crisp said that science knows what effects certain chemicals have on the various functions of the body but little or no research has been done

specifically linked to fracking. These include effects on the respiratory, cardiovascular, kidney and endocrine systems which can effect breathing and cause skin irritation, cell mutations, infertility and reproduction problems and cancer.

This is especially true of the various chemicals used with the proppants such as toluene, ethylbenzene, benzene and one of the most carcinogenic compounds known – 4-nitroquinoline-1 oxide which rapidly depletes healthy body cells and induces cancerous tumours.

Dr Crisp also spoke of high concentrations of ozone around some well heads in the US which exceed levels of ozone found over some US cities. High levels of ozone are linked to respiratory illnesses including asthma.

The world should be looking at renewable energy systems to generate energy rather than the non-renewable energy systems which the current capitalist paradigm is concentrating on.

Though new investment in renewable energy has outstripped that of non-renewable energy in recent years, it is not happening fast enough as the recent power blackout in India shows. This phenomena is not confined to India and has happened in a number of countries including US, China and Australia.

The Communist Party of Australia calls on community groups, trade unions, farmers and other activist groups to continue their fight to bring a moratorium to fracking for coal seam, shale and tight gas. We should be working towards the phasing out of extraction, and conversion to sources of environmentally sustainable renewable energy.

\*A proppant is the material used to keep induced hydraulic fractures open, during or following a fracturing treatment. Materials used include naturally occurring sand grains, resin-coated sand or high-strength ceramic materials like sintered bauxite. ☼

## Hiroshima Day 2012

ADELAIDE: Members of the Port and West Adelaide Branches of the CPA marked Hiroshima Day 2012 with another banner drop in their district – this time from the Jervois Bridge at Glanville. The banner calling for an end to uranium exports out of Port Adelaide has particular relevance given confirmation that Australian uranium was used in the crippled reactors at the Fukushima nuclear power plant. The people of Japan have suffered considerably from their government’s obsession with nuclear power and still live with the awful legacy of the dropping of US atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War Two. Australia’s uranium exports are enabling the proliferation of nuclear weapons with exports to India set to free up other resources for that country’s nuclear weapons program.

PERTH: In Western Australia Hiroshima and Nagasaki Day was commemorated at the James Street Amphitheatre with speeches and special screenings of the animated Japanese movie *Nausicaa* – which presents a post apocalyptic vision of the world after a nuclear paradigm gone wrong and contains references to a struggle for peace, the activists who fight for it and the toxic effects on plant and animal life. There was also a screening of the original 1950s’ movie of *Godzilla* demonstrating how nature points out the folly of man. Perennial anti-nuclear and peace activist Jo Vallentine addressed the gathering on the example of the reactor failure at Fukushima and the radioactivity which escaped into the water and atmosphere and continues to plague the

surrounding region. Other speakers included anti nuclear activist Mia Pepper who called for a mine closure plan for the one uranium mine still going ahead at Wiluna in the state’s northeast as the significant cost of closing down and remediating the site should not be born by the state. The final speaker was Nic Broderick, an associate professor in media at Murdoch University, who spoke of the traumatic effects on the survivors of the nuclear holocaust at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

SYDNEY: Participants in the commemoration in Hyde Park on Sunday August 5 enjoyed a lively performance by Japanese dancers Soran & Taiko and music by the Debbie Tennant. The main speakers were Greens MP and uranium spokesperson Jamie Parker, NSW President of the Construction Forestry Mining Energy Union Rita Mallia, Denis Doherty from the Anti Bases Campaign and retired Russian colonel Valery Yarynych. Welcome to Country was given by Aboriginal Elder Millie Ingram.

Jamie Parker said, “we need to build on the campaign – not just against nuclear weapons, but the campaign against the nuclear cycle.” Nuclear energy is being pushed as environmentally friendly. Denis Doherty said, “The major parties are keen on giving welfare to the arms corporations. We want the money spent her on good things. We don’t want another Hiroshima.” Valery Yarynych was involved in the missile crisis in 1962. He said we must act, “to remove a finger from the trigger, reduce the launch readiness of all missiles. And then, to move more firmly on the path of deep cuts in nuclear arsenals.” ☼



Comrades in Adelaide hang a banner over Jervois Bridge.



Sentiment at the rally in Sydney is clear.

### Sydney Hiroshima Day BBQ

Sunday August 19 from 1pm  
74 Buckingham St Surry Hills Sydney

\$15/\$5 Please bring a plate – Meat supplied

For more information: Tom 96998844



# “Don’t be duped by Western humanitarian rhetoric on Syria

## Interview with Russia’s UN ambassador

Former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan announced last Thursday that he would not be renewing his mandate as UN-Arab League special envoy to Syria when it comes up for renewal at the end of August. “The increasing militarisation on the ground and the clear lack of unity in the Security Council, have fundamentally changed the circumstances for the effective exercise of my role,” he told the media.

UN Secretary Ban Ki-Moon, took aim at divisions on the Security Council: “The persistent divisions within the Security Council have themselves become an obstacle to diplomacy, making the work of any mediator vastly more difficult.”

The White House made the same point more bluntly, directly attacking Russia and China for their failure to support action against Syria’s president Bashar al-Assad. Russia and China have on three occasions vetoed a UN Security Council resolution on Syria. US, NATO, Israel, Saudi Arabi, Qatar and the Arab Group are preparing to bypass the UN and openly take military intervention.

In an exclusive interview with *Russia Today*, Vitaly Churkin, Russia’s ambassador to the UN, explained Russia’s position, what is going on in Syria and why he thinks the conflict has spread beyond that country’s borders.

**RT:** Russia’s decision to veto this latest [third] resolution has caused consternation and widespread criticism of Moscow’s stance – is Russia supporting the Assad regime?

**Vitaly Churkin:** Of course not. It is all about what needs to be done in order to settle the crisis. Unfortunately, the strategy of our Western colleagues seems to be to try to whip up tensions in and around Syria at every opportunity.

And this time they took the occasion of the need to extend the mandate of the monitoring mission in Syria and attached a number of unacceptable clauses to their draft resolution. So, we needed to veto together with China that unacceptable draft to allow Kofi Annan more space to work on the document which was adopted by foreign ministers of a number of countries of the so-called “action group”, which calls for setting up a transitional national body and that requires of course a dialogue between various parties.

So, in this context, to introduce a resolution which would only entail pressure and almost inevitable sanctions on the Syrian government did not look like a good idea to us at all and we blocked the decision, which in our view was counter-productive.

**RT:** So, Moscow is not supporting the Assad regime, but America, Britain and France say Russia’s failed the Syrian people – how do you react to that?

**VC:** You know, they are quite good and bad and loud about their propagand. I think that’s what they have been doing by criticising Russia and China stridently. Today it was the British and French [UN] permanent reps who went out of their way, unfortunately, piling all sorts of falsehoods on the foreign policies of Russia and China. They should focus more on the need to help Kofi Annan.

Unfortunately, they have not done anything at all in order to set in train a productive and positive process in Syria. Instead, they have been working with the so-called “Friends of Syria”.

In fact, this is a group of countries who are enemies of the Syrian government, I would not call them the enemies of the Syrian people, but

certainly those who want to topple the Syrian government, disregarding the consequences which are extremely tragic; such a policy inevitably entails [tragedy] because the government or President Assad is not simply one individual or a group of individuals.

They represent a certain segment of the Syrian population, of a certain power structure, which has existed there for decades. To break it would cause and is causing considerable trouble and bloodshed. To reform it through dialogue would be a much more reasonable line of action and this is what Russia has been advocating.

**RT:** But dialogue has not achieved anything so far. Isn’t there now an overwhelming global sense that something has to be done to stop the killing of innocent people – what about intervention on humanitarian grounds, is that not acceptable to Moscow? I know that Moscow is very concerned about Chapter 7 [UN Charter – authorisation of force in relation to threats to peace] leading to perhaps military intervention. But what about some form of intervention to stop the killing?

**VC:** In a way, the monitoring group which we are trying to maintain is a way of political intervention – of practical intervention – in trying to deter violence. Unfortunately, it has not happened, it has not been successful.

You said the dialogue has not achieved anything. The problem is the dialogue has not started yet. The opposition groups refuse to enter into dialogue with the Syrian government, which says it is prepared for dialogue. They should try that offer of the Syrian government to enter into dialogue. And this is a major missing link, a major impediment in the way of Kofi Annan’s activity.

You know, humanitarian intervention unfortunately only sounds humane, but the fact of the matter is that any military intervention for whatever reason is inevitably going to cause more bloodshed.

And we know those greatest humanists in the world – US and UK – intervened in Iraq, for instance, citing all sorts of noble pretexts, in that particular case – non-existent weapons of mass destruction. What it caused – 150,000



Vitaly Churkin, Russia’s ambassador to the UN.

civilian deaths alone, to say nothing of millions of refugees, displaced persons and the whole dislocation in the country. So, don’t be duped by humanitarian rhetoric.

There is much more geopolitics in their policy in Syria than humanism. Unfortunately, the practical consequences of their policies are that the conflict and bloodshed are not abating.

**RT:** You’ve mentioned geopolitics and I understand you mentioned the fact that what’s happening in Syria is going to spread to Iran eventually. Can you explain that? That Iran is the eventual goal?

**VC:** I did refer to Iran, but in a slightly different context. I would not rule out that then they would move on to Iran, but I was not referring to that. In my remarks at the [Security] Council of the United Nations earlier today I was referring to their clear interest. And this is a major motivation of their policy and their effort to topple President Assad – in curbing Iranian influence in the Middle East and that entire region.

And it is also a major motivation of the other Middle Eastern fighters for democracy – Saudi Arabia and Qatar – who are concerned about what they see as Iranian interest; in Bahrain as well. They claim the Shia protests there are sort of Iranian-sponsored even though some observers – including your colleagues and journalists who have experience on the ground – believe that it happens to be genuine protests against the system which is not entirely democratic, to put it mildly.

So, a clear geopolitical dimension is there

in the policies of a number of countries, who are extremely aggressive vis-a-vis Syria. And it has nothing to do with the interests of the Syrian people.

**RT:** What is the worry for Moscow, all these geopolitical implications you’ve explained so clearly, why is Moscow so worried about this? In what way could Moscow be affected?

**VC:** We are not worried about geopolitical implications even though we believe that greater confrontation with Iran is hurting, is unnecessary and we are directly involved in efforts to resolve peacefully the problem of the Iranian nuclear program. And this growing tension between Iran, the West and the Saudis is not helpful.

Our concern is that the Syrian people have to suffer the consequences of this geopolitical struggle and our concern is that the focus of everybody’s policy must be to the benefit of the Syrian people. And the only way they can put an end to this tragic conflict is to get to the negotiating table.

And there is a good ground, there is a document which was a consensus document adopted by the “group of action” – foreign ministers in Geneva – two and a half weeks ago which says that a transitional national body needs to be set up and it cannot be set up by sanctions, it cannot be set up by putting more pressure on just one side – the Syrian government which is claiming that it is ready for such dialogue, it has designated its representative for such a dialogue.

But so far the interest from the opposition is not there and we see extreme opposition groups; armed opposition groups resorting to more and more violence and even terrorist attacks like the one we saw yesterday in Damascus. This is not to say that the Syrian government has not resorted to excessive violence at times, they made very serious mistakes and blunders over the months but the time to end it is now. Unless we want to continue it for years, [we need to] enter into a dialogue.

**RT:** Russia has really stuck by its principles of non-intervention. Is there not a danger of being isolated, bearing in mind the continual vetoing of the sanctions of the UN Security Council and the supplying of military hardware to Syria. Of course Moscow says it is not being used against civilians, but what is it to do for

**The opposition groups refuse to enter into dialogue with the Syrian government, which says it is prepared for dialogue.**

# Russia to revive army bases in three oceans

Lyuba Lulko

**The Russian government intends to restore the military-technical support of its ships at the former military base in Cam Ranh (Vietnam), Lourdes (Cuba) and the Seychelles. So far, this is not about plans for a military presence, but rather the restoration of the crew resources.**

The intentions were announced on July 27 by the Russian Navy commander vice-admiral Viktor Chirkov. "At the international level, the creation of logistics points in Cuba, the Seychelles and Vietnam is being worked out," Chirkov was quoted by the media.

The issue was specifically discussed at the meeting with the leaders of the countries. President of Vietnam Truong Tan Sang has recently held talks with prime minister Dmitri Medvedev in Moscow and president Putin in Sochi. Cuban leader Raul Castro met with Putin in Moscow earlier this month. A little earlier the president of the Republic of Seychelles, James Michel made an unequivocal statement.

"We will give Russia the benefits in Cam Ranh, including the development of military cooperation," the president of Vietnam told the media.

Cuba, which has a US military base in Guantánamo Bay and is protesting against the deployment of new US bases in Colombia, wants to acquire an ally in Russia to be able to contain the United States.

Seychelles in the Indian Ocean has always been in the zone of Soviet influence. In 1981, the Soviet Navy helped the government to prevent a military coup and before the collapse of the USSR the Soviets had a constant presence in the area. In June of 2012, at the opening of an Orthodox church in the capital city of Victoria, James Michel spoke of Russia's role in combatting piracy and supported the Russian idea to build a pier in the port of Victoria, designed for the reception of the naval warships from the Russian Federation.

Following the statement by the vice-admiral, Russian foreign ministry and defence ministry made it clear that they were talking about rest and replenishment of the crews after the campaign in the area and not military bases. It is clear, however, that Russian warships could do both without

special arrangements, given the positive attitudes of the leaders of these countries towards Russia.

It is worth mentioning Putin's statement at the G20 meeting in June. After the meeting with US President Barack Obama, Putin made a sudden harsh statement to the press: "In 2001 I, as the President of the Russian Federation and the supreme commander, deemed it advantageous to withdraw the radio-electronic centre Lourdes from Cuba. In exchange for this, George Bush, the then US president, had assured me that this decision would become the final confirmation that the Cold War was over and both of our states, in getting rid of the relics of the Cold War, would start building a new relationship based on cooperation and transparency. In particular, Bush convinced me that the US missile defence system would never be deployed in Eastern Europe.

"The Russian Federation has fulfilled all terms of the agreement. And even more. I shut down not only the Cuban Lourdes but also Kamran in Vietnam. I shut them down because I gave my word of honour. I, like a man, have kept my word. What have the Americans done? The Americans are not responsible for their own words. It is no secret that in recent years, the US created a buffer zone around Russia, involving in this process not only the countries of Central Europe, but also the Baltic states, Ukraine and the Caucasus.

"The only response to this could be an asymmetric expansion of the Russian military presence abroad, particularly in Cuba. In Cuba, there are convenient bays for our reconnaissance and warships, a network of the so-called 'jump airfields.' With the full consent of the Cuban leadership, on May 11 of this year, our country not only resumed work in the electronic centre of Lourdes, but also placed the latest mobile strategic nuclear missiles 'Oak' on the island. They did not want to do it the amicable way, now let them deal with this," Putin said.

It is obvious that Russia will not stop simply at "resting" their sailors in the area.

Now back to the statement of Chirkov. Americans have not officially resented it. For example, the Pentagon spokesman George Little said that Russia had the right to enter into military agreements and relationships

with other countries, as does the United States, according to France Press Agency. The reason is simple: American analysts believe that Russia now cannot afford to create its own military bases.

The Americans talk about Russia's lack of influence, money and the actual fleet. Western media quoted an "independent expert on defence" in Moscow, Paul Fengelgauer. He said that Russia does not have the necessary naval resources to provide constant presence outside its territorial waters, as it has only 30 major warships that serve five fleets. Therefore, the possibility of placing an additional station does not mean the expansion of sea power by Russia.

This is largely an objective assessment. But since the crisis in the West in 2008, Russia has begun to recover part of its navy. The loss was not that great – about a quarter of the Soviet reserve. We should also consider fleet modernisation. Chirkov said that this year Russia's naval forces can be replenished with another 10-15 warships, including destroyers and nuclear submarines.

As for the influence, judging by the words of the Russian President, Russia is also actively growing in this regard. As we can see, the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans are involved. This is not only for geopolitical reasons, but the growing economic presence of Russia in those regions. For example, "Gazprom" is actively working on offshore Vietnam. In the Caribbean, it also participates in the construction of a Meso-American pipeline and field development in Venezuela. An ammunition plant is under construction in Cuba.

However, one should start with a solid contractual basis. Take, for example, agreements on mutual defence that the US has with the Philippines, Japan, Colombia, and Mexico. In the presence of such agreements military bases cannot be challenged as a military expansion. Russia has room to grow – of the 16 military bases operating in the Soviet era, today there is only one left – Tartus in Syria, or two, if we consider the base in Sevastopol.

Slightly bridged, for full text visit [english.pravda.ru](http://english.pravda.ru) Pravda.Ru



Russia's reputation and, indeed, its relations after this crisis is over?

**VC:** We'll see. I think doing the right thing and not simply following somebody's catastrophic policy is something which makes me proud and something which eventually will be born out as the right course of action and the right policy under these very difficult circumstances.

And about vetoes – if I am not mistaken, the US has cast 60 vetoes on the Palestinian issue alone. So, why don't you question my American colleagues about the impact of the image of the US in the Middle East of those continuous vetoes? Sometimes even vetoing their own presidential and secretary of state's public statements. So, the veto is a part of the UN Charter and there is nothing wrong about casting it when you feel the need to do so.

**RT:** Can we talk about what happens next now? No agreement in the UN Security Council, but Russia has said that it would like to see the extension of the UN observer mission to Syria. But the monitors haven't made any visible impact on the mission so far. So what's the point in keeping the mission alive when so far it has failed?

**VC:** What would be the point of their departure? We think that we have at least more chances to get objective information if it is there. If the situation were to improve, they would be on the ground already, so, they would be able to participate more actively in the political process and also in dealing with the humanitarian situation.

Pulling them out is going to entail negative consequences. Unfortunately, now and again we seem to be entering another diplomatic battle. Now we are going to have a discussion about really making it a technical rollover without loading it with political conditions and implications.

Footnote: After Russia and China vetoed the Western-backed UN Security Council resolution, US Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice said that the United States and its partners "have no choice but to look to partnerships and actions outside of this Council to protect the Syrian people."

Information Clearing House



A file photo taken in 1982 shows a Soviet Union submarine docked in Cam Ranh Bay.

# Cuba crash reveals dissident links with European politicians

Emile Schepers

**On July 22, a car accident in Cuba killed dissident leader Osvaldo Payá, head of the Christian Liberation Movement, and a Cuban colleague, and injured a Spaniard and a Swede who were riding in the same car. The incident illustrates the degree to which anti-socialist dissidents in Cuba are linked to important political circles both in the United States and Europe.**

The accident happened near Bayamo in Eastern Cuba. The Spaniard, Angel Carronero was driving, and a Swedish political activist, Jens Aron Modig, was dozing in the front seat. Payá and another Cuban dissident, Harold Cepero, were in the back seat. According to Cuban police reports, the car was travelling at a high rate of speed when, having ignored warning signs, it hit a patch of road where the pavement had been taken up and was temporarily replaced by dirt surface with loose gravel.

Carronero seems to have hit the brakes suddenly, causing the car to skid and slew off the road and collide sideways with a tree. The side of the car was bashed in, and Payá was killed instantly, while Cepero died in hospital as the result of an embolism. Modig and Carronero were slightly injured and treated, but also required to give testimony to Cuban authorities.

The propaganda machinery in dissident circles in Cuba and also in the United States immediately went into high gear. Payá's family was cited

as claiming the car had been hit from behind and driven off the road. Bogus websites even showed a photo of the supposed damage to a car, but it was a completely different car, not even the same colour. The head of the US National Endowment for Democracy put out an op-ed claiming that Payá had been murdered by the Cuban government. Republican Party candidate Mitt Romney jumped into the fray, hinting at political murder.

Payá, whose moment of glory had come in 2002, when he presented a petition to the Cuban People's Power parliament calling for a referendum on structural changes (a petition which was rejected), had been seen as marginal to Cuba's small scale dissident movement lately.

But on July 30, the two survivors of the crash spoke to reporters, telling them that there was no second car that had bumped them from behind or driven them off the road. It was an unfortunate accident. Those who have followed imperialism's 50-year campaign to reverse the Cuban Revolution can predict that no mere infusion of truth or common sense will prevent the "Castro murdered Payá" line from taking on a life of its own.

The accident does raise important political questions. First of all, what was a leading Cuban dissident doing blazing along the highways of Cuba in the company of Carronero and Modig? They are not your ordinary tourists, although they came into Cuba (deceptively) on tourist visas.

Jens Aron Modig is the head of the youth branch of the Swedish Christian Democratic Party, a right-wing junior



Osvaldo Payá.

member of the conservative coalition that currently rules Sweden.

Carronero is a leader of the youth branch of the People's Party, or PP, the right-wing party of Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. The PP has roots in the Franco-fascist period in Spain, and the PP's former Prime Minister, Felipe Aznar, is one of the leading anti-Cuba politicians in Europe; he has been quoted as hinting that former Cuban President Fidel Castro should meet the same fate as Gaddafi of Libya.

Moreover, there are claims that on their way to hook up with Payá in Cuba, the two Europeans had met in the United States with the International Republican Institute and

the National Democratic Institute, dependencies of the National Endowment for Democracy and recipients of US taxpayer money directed to the purpose of overthrowing the Cuban government, as well as those of other left-leaning Latin American countries. And as if to drive home the point, Modig, in Havana, said he recognised that bringing in money to give to Cuban dissidents was illegal and apologised for so doing.

Modig said that the money was for establishing a youth branch of Payá's organization.

So there you have it: Connivance on the part of major US and European political entities connected to major power centres in funding efforts

to destabilise Cuba, and working through so called "independent" Cuban dissidents.

On July 26, anniversary of the attack on the Moncada Barracks and a major holiday in Cuba, President Raul Castro stated for the umpteenth time that his government is ready to meet with the United States government and talk about anything at all, but on a basis of equality. A US State Department spokesperson immediately belittled the offer.

That is unfortunate. It is time to defund entities like the National Endowment for Democracy, and sit down over mojitos and talk, for heaven's sakes.

*People's World* ☛

## Foreign companies stripped PNG of community-owned forests

Jeremy Hance

**Eleven percent of Papua New Guinea's land area has been handed over to foreign corporations and companies lacking community representation, according to a new report by Greenpeace. The land has been granted under controversial government agreements known as Special Agricultural and Business Leases (SABLs), which scientists have long warned have undercut traditional landholding rights in the country and decimated many of Papua New Guinea's biodiverse rainforests. To date, 72 SABLs have been granted – mostly to logging companies – covering an area totaling 5.1 million hectares or the size of Costa Rica.**

"While logging has driven the spread of SABLs, oil palm development has been used as its justification," the Greenpeace Report, *Up for Grabs*, reads. "However, only nine SABLs (311,000 hectares) are controlled by listed oil palm or biofuel companies. Most companies that hold subleases or development agreements over SABLs have no prior experience with agricultural development."

Currently 75 percent of the land in question is owned by foreign corporations, mostly in Australia and Malaysia. Companies from these two countries now own over three million hectares of Papua

New Guinea forest, many of them for up to 99 years. Companies mostly chop down primary rainforest for raw logs to be shipped to China, causing log exports to jump 20 percent in 2011 alone.

The report dubs SABLs as "the greatest alienation of land from its people in the history of Papua New Guinea." The Pacific nation is unique in that 97 percent of land is communally owned.

According to Greenpeace, lax governance, corruption, and predatory companies allowed for the massive land grab. Last year, following rising criticism, the government suspended any new SABLs and issued a Commission of Inquiry, whose report is set to go public later this year.

As many of the forests are logged, Greenpeace fears they will then be converted to oil palm plantations, a process which is already begun in parts of Papua New Guinea.

The report warns that a new code of conduct for the oil palm industry is urgently needed to avoid the deplorable deforestation and indigenous rights abuses seen in Malaysia and Indonesia.

SABLs have not only disconnected communities from their traditional land and imperilled biodiversity, but, according to the report, could also become a massive greenhouse gas source.

"If these SABLs were logged

and then deforested, almost three billion tonnes of CO2 would be released – this is equivalent to Australia's total CO2 emissions for the next six years."

The report sees possible hope in a government change-over in Papua New Guinea. A recent agreement has ended a long stalemate over competing Prime Ministers.

"One of the first tasks of the new Papua New Guinea government must be to suspend logging under SABLs and review and amend legislation so that communities are protected from the rapacious appetite of foreign-owned logging and agriculture companies," Paul Winn, Forests Team Leader with Greenpeace, said in a statement.

Winn, who referred to SABLs as "national scandal" also urged Australia to provide "financial and technical assistance to develop a National Land Use Plan with the key objectives of protecting customary land rights and maintaining forest resources for future generations."

A recent study found that between 1972-2002, nearly a quarter of the Papua New Guinea's forests were already lost or degraded by logging, a situation which has likely only worsened in the last ten years.

[www.mongabay.com](http://www.mongabay.com) ☛

## A bit rich

Richard Bagley

**Workers at Britain's official Olympic clothes supplier are on the warpath over poverty wages as low as £2.60 [A\$3.85] an hour at the firm.**

Its boss gloated after revealing bumper profits for the first six months of 2012 – and predicted they'd hit £575 million [A\$852m] to £620m [A\$920m] by the year's end.

That's £10m-15m more than previous estimates with the difference put down to the manufacturer and retailer's high profile supplying Team GB's suits and those of thousands of support staff at the Games.

On its website Next boasts that "Everyone at Next is thrilled to be playing a very special part in the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games."

But its workers beg to differ and union GMB rounded on austerity-loving Next boss Simon Wolfson after he declared, despite

the evidence, that Britain is not in recession.

Lord Wolfson is reported to take home around £800,000 a year – over £3,000 a working day – but his employees are on rock-bottom wages.

GMB reported that Next had advertised for £2.60-an-hour apprenticeship posts, £4.42-an-hour warehouse jobs for 16- to 17-year-olds and store work for £4.98. For over-21s it offers a mean £6.08 – the national minimum wage.

The union is demanding living wage rates of £7.20 an hour, rising to £8.30 in London.

GMB regional secretary Paul Maloney said, "Wolfson's own employees cannot afford to shop in his stores given that he pays them so badly."

"That shows how far capitalism has moved from Henry Ford who wanted his employees to be paid enough to buy his cars."

*Morning Star* ☛

Sydney

### Public Meeting: Nuclear South Wales? Resisting O'Farrell's Uranium Push

Thursday August 16 6:00pm - 8:00pm Tom Mann Theatre

136 Chalmers Street Surry Hills (Near Central Station Devonshire St Exit)

In March the NSW government passed the Mining Legislation Amendment (Uranium Exploration) Act 2012, overturning a 26-year bi-partisan ban on uranium exploration in the state. The Beyond Nuclear Initiative is holding a public meeting to allow the community to hear from key stakeholders and discuss the potential social and environmental impacts of the government's decision.

[beyondnuclearinitiative.com](http://beyondnuclearinitiative.com)

# Greek steelworkers fight on

**On Monday July 31, the steelworkers at the Aspropyrgos Steelworks returned to work following an heroic nine-month strike (272 days). They conducted a rally, lifted their fists and held carnations in their hands. They implemented the decision of their 20th General Assembly, which took place on the Saturday. The assembly stated that they would suspend their strike and continue to fight using other forms of struggle.**

On Friday July 20, the government attempted to break their strike by using its state forces whose brutal attack included the use of chemicals, beatings and arrests.

The strikers, along with all the members of the trade union board of the "Greek Steelworks" headed by the president of the trade union Giorgos Sifonios entered the gate in a coordinated and organised manner as true winners of the nine-month strike.

Prior to this the employer posed outrageous offensive demands and was backed by riot police forces. He demanded that the workers enter the factory one by one, showing the police their identity cards and waiting for the employer's permission to enter the territory of the factory.

The decisiveness of the steelworkers forced the employer to yield.

The riot police forces as well as the remaining police forces were withdrawn and the workers entered the factory on their own and headed to their posts applauded and cheered by those present: "this nine-month strike will not be forgotten". "The steel is hardened by blood and sweat, the steelworkers will not surrender", "struggle, rupture, overthrow, the steelworkers lead the way".

The proposal from the board of the trade union to suspend the strike and continue fighting by using other forms of struggle was presented by the president of the board, Giorgos Sifonios and adopted by the vast majority of the assembly.

The report stated: "272 days ago, when Manesis [the owner] blackmailed us forcing us to choose either a five-hour workday or 180 dismissals we held an assembly and unanimously

decided to go on strike. We did what every honest, self-esteeming worker and their class should do.

"Our action was rich. We organised 20 General Assemblies of the Union, where we collectively assessed the situation and decided upon our next steps. All the members of our families participated in the struggle, both women and children.

"We fuelled an unprecedented solidarity movement from every corner of Greece and from many countries worldwide. We organised more than 50 activities, meetings, concerts, book presentations, activities for children and women in front of the plant. We celebrated together Christmas, the New Year's Eve, Carnival and Easter. Through our struggle we became 'one family', as workers should be.

"Thousands of workers came to the gates of the 'Greek Steelworks' factory, young people, pensioners, pupils, students, workers from all over the world.... All over Greece as well as in tens of cities abroad there were hundreds of meetings and solidarity action.

"Its rich experience and conclusions will be used in future struggles.

"What have we achieved through our struggle? Our struggle put in the forefront the strength and the value of the united class struggle, the greatness and the strength of workers' solidarity. It demonstrated vividly who produces the wealth and who steals it.

"At the gate of the 'Greek Steelworks' factory the clash of the two opposing classes, of the two opposing worlds and civilisations was vividly demonstrated.

"They did not manage to divide us, no matter how hard they have tried, because we worked based on the principle 'one for all, all for one'. All the state apparatus, the government, the parties of capital, the class judicial system, the mass media, tens of riot police forces' buses, tens of police cars and hundreds of secret police officers were coordinated in order to protect their boss, Manesis, and to strike a blow against their enemies, the workers, strikers.

"Manesis will soon bring back to the table the demands to change the



Steel factory workers shout slogans during a rally in Aspropyrgos.

working hours and the salaries that are defined by our collective agreement. He has withdrawn them temporarily due to the strike.

"We return to work by our own decision and will, in an organised, coordinated manner, holding our heads high.

"We thank from the bottom of our hearts all the workers in Greece and all over the world who for nine months supported our struggle morally and materially. We would especially like to thank PAME (All Workers' Militant Front) that helped us throughout our struggle, day and night, and will continue supporting us in the future. It supported in practice all our decisions and initiatives, it spread the message of the heroic steelworkers all over Greece and across the world. This is why the opponent slanders it and fights it on a daily basis.

"We return to work with our head held high and continue fighting for the satisfaction of our demands, using other forms of struggle."

Communist Party of Greece (Abridged) Full text available at [inter.kke.gr](http://inter.kke.gr) ✪



## Global Briefs

**USA:** On July 31, the US State Department again included Cuba on its arbitrary, unilateral list of "countries which sponsor international terrorism." The US keeps Cuba on this list to try to justify its illegal blockade of its small, peace-seeking socialist neighbour. The US continues to do everything it can to limit Cuba's financial and commercial transactions and to strangle its economy, all with the ultimate aim imposing a regime which responds to US interests.

**ECUADOR:** Cristhine Assange, mother of the founder of Wikileaks, Julian Assange, speaking in Quito, said that her son has the support of the Australian people, but the government of his country is a lapdog of the USA. Julian remains in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, after requesting political asylum to this South American country on June 19. His mother is in Ecuador to highlight the risk her son faces of being extradited to the United States, even of being sentenced to death penalty for revealing compromising cables for Washington. Cristhine met with Foreign Minister Ricardo Patiño and President Rafael Correa. During her conversation with Correa, she said that a grand jury to investigate her son to try him had been created in the United States, and referred to the possible cancellation of his passport by the Australian government.

**INDIA:** Thousands of people, some travelling hundreds of kilometers, took part in a five day sit-in organised by the four Left parties – Communist Party of India (Marxist), Communist Party of India, All India Forward Bloc and Revolutionary Socialist Party. It began in New Delhi on July 30, against price rises and to demand the right to food through a universal public distribution system. The general secretaries of the four parties addressed the sit-in on the first day. They said the government should give people access to cheap food grain. At a time when 82 million tonnes of food grain is stored, it is grave injustice to deny people access to food and let it rot. They also demanded a halt to export of food grain at subsidised rates.

**VIETNAM-RUSSIA:** Vietnamese President Truong Tan Sang made a five-day official visit to Russia at the invitation of his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. The aim of the visit was to strengthen the comprehensive strategic partnership and traditional friendship between the two countries and boost their multifaceted co-operation. Vietnamese and Russian relations in the 21st century were established and made official by the signing of the joint declaration on the Vietnam-Russia strategic partnership in March 2001 during the Russian President's visit to Vietnam. The ties between the two nations have developed into long-term strategic partnership based on equality and mutual benefit. Since 2008, the two countries have maintained an annual Diplomatic-Security-National Defense Strategic Dialogue at a permanent Foreign Ministerial level and to date, the two countries have signed more than 60 co-operation documents promoting the development of Vietnam-Russia relations. Vietnam is currently studying the possibility of signing a free trade agreement with the Tariff Alliance (Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan).

## The attempted US siege of Bolivia

Patricio Montesinos

**THE exacerbation of internal social disputes, tense relations between the governments of Santiago de Chile (Chile) and La Paz (Bolivia) in the context of their maritime disagreement, and press revelations as to US bases possibly being installed on the Paraguayan border with Bolivia are all evidence of a clear Washington plan to besiege this nation.**

Recent events related to Bolivia demonstrate that the US government is plotting the overthrow of President Evo Morales, with the aim of derailing the process of integration underway in Latin America, which is contrary to the empire's hegemonic interests, in the wake of the recent coup d'état against Paraguayan President Fernando Lugo.

The United States believes that Bolivia could now be the weakest link in the chain currently linking a significant group of countries immersed in revolutionary processes and the defence of the sovereignty and independence, and in which nobody wants a repeat of

Washington's former domination in the region.

Political analysts are saying that in this new perverse plot, the US government has the backing of the right-wing government in Chile, which has adopted a harder position against its neighbor Bolivia, and the Paraguayan pro-Federico Franco coup organisers financed by the Pentagon and US secret services.

Press reports a few days ago revealed that an ultra-right deputy implicated in Lugo's overthrow negotiated the installation of US military bases on the Paraguayan-Bolivian border with the Barack Obama administration.

To date Washington has not reacted in the context of this dangerous news, as is the case when it is engineering destabilising acts or military aggression anywhere in the world, but it is true that there is no smoke without fire, as the saying goes.

The US conspiracy also includes internal acts of subversion in conjunction with Bolivia's weakened and discredited traditional Right, directly implicated in the recent police mutiny in this country,

and in the exacerbated indigenous conflicts in Tipnis, utilised to create an image of chaos and weakening of support for President Morales' executive.

Naturally, the conservative national press, plus international media such as the CNN network and Spain's El País, part of the Prisa consortium, are part of the Bolivian destabilisation operation.

However, in spite of Washington, which scorns the intelligence of the millenary indigenous culture, Bolivian authorities and the people are fully aware of every move made by their adversaries to turn around the process of change underway in the nation, where serenity and an appropriate response at the right time and in the right place are paramount.

The conspiracies against Bolivia, similar to those instigated in Paraguay and Venezuela and Ecuador, to cite certain countries which are constant US targets, will not be able to achieve their objective because Evo has sufficient popular support to deal another defeat to his enemies.

Granma ✪

Letters to the Editor  
The Guardian  
74 Buckingham Street  
Surry Hills NSW 2010



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

## Is the coal industry bubble in NSW about to burst?

At this stage it is an even bet. I would say the focus now is on developing new coalfields in the Gunnedah basin but here in the Hunter valley the signs are around indicating a possible slowdown in mine development and mineral exploration. The new mega pit that Coal and Allied plan to open at Muswellbrook ironically called Mt Pleasant is still not happening as of this moment. With the Australian dollar being traded as high as it is and plummeting coal prices I think that the investors in these projects are getting the jitters about the prospects of good returns on their money and are backing projects somewhere else.

Just last week the local papers here in the Upper Hunter were talking about Wambo Mining's plans to possibly offer 50 redundancies to its workers if the situation there doesn't improve by the end of the month. I would add that Wambo isn't the only mine that is having a good hard look at just how they are travelling at this point in time. The current price that the miners are getting for their coal loaded at the terminal in Newcastle is around \$84.00 Aust a ton, well down from this time last year.

On top of the ever increasing production costs, high Australian dollar

and falling coal prices, the mining companies have now been handed a 5.52 cent per litre reduction in the amount that they can claim in their diesel fuel rebate. Some of the bigger coalmines here near Muswellbrook use as much as 2 million litres a week so the reduced rebate will certainly be adding a bit of pain to their added list of woes!

All of the coal mined in the Hunter Valley is railed to the port of Newcastle where it is loaded onto bulk carriers. The port has seen massive expansion over the past five years or so but the exporters have hit a snag recently with the NSW government planning department turning down a plan to build another coal terminal called T4 (Terminal 4).

T4 would add another 120 million tons of export coal to the port's maximum capacity of 253 million tons. It is expected that in around another six to eight years there will be around 300 million tons of coal exported from Newcastle. Some of the investors in these coal projects are looking at the Chinese economy which is showing signs of flattening. They are now considered risky business ventures.

The coal that will be used to fill the newly constructed coal terminals is expected to come from new mines in the Gunnedah basin and Narrabri districts of northern NSW. These new mines will come at a huge cost to the Leard state forest where it has been approved to clear 5,500 ha of native forest to make way for Nathan Tinkler's new Maules Creek mine along with another new pit and the expansion of another, all into the Leard forest.

The total annual output of this trio of evil will be around 30 million tons over a 30-year lifespan of the mines. The Maules Creek mine will be the first fly-in-fly out coalmine in NSW.

With all this added coal coming onto the world market from both NSW and QLD mines it doesn't say

much for those government officials who tell us we are facing a disastrous future from the effect of climate change and we all pay a bit more now for basic items to live on because of the carbon tax, while the very same people are doing their best to approve more coalmines!

It is high time that we Australians had a bigger say in the amount of foreign investment and foreign ownership of our resources. I am fully behind the idea that our power stations and coalmines should be nationalised with 100 percent ownership by the Australian community NOT by foreign corporations.

Tipan  
Hunter Valley, NSW

## Nationalise Kurnell

So, Bill Shorten is upset about Caltex's closure of its Kurnell Refinery, and worried about our future energy security. Well, pardon me for being Captain bloody Obvious, but would it be too much of an imposition for the federal government to actually consider taking over the site?

The infrastructure and experienced workforce are already there. Under present circumstances, it will cost Caltex some \$260 million to "remediate" the site, and over 600 people will have lost their jobs – their skills gone forever.

Yes, there is some financial loss being taken at the moment, so Caltex is off to Asian climes to enhance its profit margins. They are not really interested in Australia's national interest, except as a market. But in future all energy sources will be more valuable; where there's a will there's a way, so it is perfectly feasible for Australians to make an industry like this pay.

Is this too much to ask? That governments actually act with some vision and have some direct control

public meeting  
with  
Venezuelan revolutionary  
**Dr. Carolus Wimmer**  
Deputy to the Latin American Parliament, International  
Relations Secretary of the Venezuelan Communist Party.

MUA Meeting Room  
2-4 Kwong Alley North Fremantle  
Thursday 16th August at 6:00pm

## DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

Write a letter to the Editor

over the supply and pricing of fuel, in the "national interest"? These days they seem to be more interested in selling the public wealth to pillaging transnationals, than actually doing the work of governing.

Bob Treasure  
Warrimoo, NSW

## Homelessness

Rob Gowland's review of *Home is Where the Heart is* [Guardian July 25] reminded me of a news item I saw recently about a single mother forced to live in a tent on a caravan park.

I thought what a ridiculous situation when a woman like Gina Rinehart, who has never done a day's work in her life, can be worth \$20

billion. My friend said to me "Aren't you glad we have got this house?" Yes I'm very glad. I looked across at my big ginger cat curled up on the settee and thought this bloke lives better than the poor woman in her tent.

The same news broadcast reported the latest pay rise granted to members of federal parliament. It never ceases to amaze me how critics of government spending are struck dumb when the polities are hiking up their own salaries. But at least our local member has donated his rise to a charity.

On seeing this most people would sigh and say that's life. I say no, that's not life, it's the nature of this stupid system.

I sigh and say who wouldn't be a communist.

Ron Barrett  
Mt Druitt, NSW

# Culture & Life

## Assault on the vulnerable

**Tory cuts kill. It's a stark truth proved by the shocking case of Christine and Clive Arnold, who are living under the shadow of a benefit cut that threatens their home, Christine's health - and even her life.**

The attacks on disability benefits are not the Coalition's biggest cuts but they are surely the most shameful.

They are a naked assault on the group least able to defend themselves. They are a measure designed to drive millions into misery, poverty, illness and an early grave.

There is no justification for them on financial grounds – not when the government can find bottomless billions to bail out the banks.

There is no justification for them on the grounds of fairness. Never mind the right-wing lies – disability benefits aren't supporting millions of work-shy scroungers, they're a vital safety net that brings a measure of dignity and security to society's most vulnerable.

And there is no justification on economic grounds, not when benefits such as the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) help disabled people to work.

The benefit cuts are a false economy – just like the closure of Remploy factories employing thousands of disabled people, and just like the rest of George Osborne's cuts. [George Osborne is the British Chancellor of the Exchequer – government's treasurer.]

They mean more misery, more fear and more despair. Growing poverty and growing dole queues. And ultimately a toll in human life among the victims who can't or won't struggle through in the face of the Con-Dems' vicious class war.

### No surprises

At times this summer it has felt like a matter of not if the riots would return to London but when.

As the temperature rose and the Olympic security crackdown took full effect there was unrest in the air – and no wonder.

The bean feast inside the Olympic Park is a stark contrast to the situation on the streets outside, where a year on from the rioting almost nothing has changed.

Some of London's poorest boroughs got a lick of paint to avoid offending the delicate sensibilities of tourists.

But the Olympics are just one more a reminder that the state will squander billions on corporate extravaganzas while slashing spending on those who need and deserve it.

The rows of empty seats, left bare by corporate sponsors while locals are denied tickets, are a final insult on top of a long list of injuries.

Poverty, unemployment, soaring rents and crowded housing all remain. And so do cuts to education and benefits – and police brutality and racism, the spark that lit last summer's flames.

Twelve months after police shot Mark Duggan dead there is no sign of any answers and no sign of his killers being brought to justice.

And so there is no sign of the justified anger over his death being assuaged, or of the Metropolitan Police being forced to tackle the



problem of the racists and thugs it harbours in its ranks.

In this heated climate it will only take one more spark to ignite another inferno – one that would come as a shock, but not as a surprise.

### Visa cardsharps

If there was any better example of the corporate desire to profit from every nook and cranny of our lives it is the spectacle reported of thousands of fans imprisoned in Wembley Stadium without access to food or drink.

Visa sealed a deal with Olympic bosses that gave it sole rights over all payments made by card during the Games.

And that meant closing down all the cash machines at Wembley because they would hand a few pennies per transaction to competitors.

The greed backfired during five hours of desperation for the young and old, not least families who had no way to feed their children on a day out which should have been a pleasure.

The people's games? As if.  
*Morning Star* ☺



Sun 12 Aug -  
Sat 18 Aug

**Inland Heart: The Photography of Jeff Carter** (ABC1 Tuesday 14 August at 10pm) is a little film (it only runs half an hour) on *Artscape* written and directed by Catherine Hunter, but for anyone with an interest in the history of the Australian people it is definitely worth watching. In July of 2010, Catherine Hunter and cinematographer Bruce Inglis joined Jeff Carter on a road trip to western NSW. Jeff was keen to renew acquaintances with people he had first photographed in the 1950s. But first they had to find them, not so easy when the person you're looking for is a drover somewhere on the road with a mob of cattle. In October that same year, Jeff Carter died aged 82.

Jeff Carter was a photographer, a bushie who criss-crossed the country in search of stories and photographs that illustrated the lives of real people. As he said himself, "the way country battlers toiled and lived fascinated me ... in a favoured country like Australia there seemed no reason for the harshness and poverty of their lives. I like to think my images not only prick our social conscience while celebrating the working class, but evoke pride in a way of life that is sadly passing."

A socialist and proud of it, Jeff Carter spent sixty years photographing battlers. As he points out with excusable hyperbole in the film, in "half a million or a million photos" that he's taken there are only a handful of scenic shots. (In fact, he left behind a photo archive of over 50,000 images of Australian life, from the bush



A Super Jumbo Wing (SBS1 Saturday 18 August at 7.35pm).

to the beach, but always with the emphasis on the people.) His interest was the people he met: he didn't just lob in, snap off some shots and then depart. He lived with them, camped with them, for weeks at a time. His sincerity and genuineness earned him their friendship, which lasted for years, even decades.

It was to magazines like *People* and *Pix* that he sold his shots and his stories, and from those magazines they often travelled around the world. An exhibition of Jeff Carter's work, under the title *Beach, Bush and Battlers* and drawn from the collection of the State Library of NSW is presently travelling through NSW until the end of 2013. If you live in that State watch out for it.

The three-part British series **How To Build** is intended to leave us impressed with the prowess and skill of British manufacturing. Its three episodes deal with the designing, testing and building of the wing of the A380 Airbus super-jumbo, the building of a luxury road car by the

McLaren racing car outfit and a multi-million dollar British communication satellite. So why is it underwhelming?

I think because there was a time when Britain was the leading manufacturer in the world. They made everything that was worth having. But those days are long gone. Lots of countries make communication satellites now. Lots of other companies make luxury road-racers. Even Lexus, a Japanese company, makes one that outperforms some of the most famous European marques. And who cares anyway? Such gas-guzzling toys for very rich boys are an anachronistic hangover from a time of extravagant consumption.

Britain's only claim to manufacturing fame here is that it makes part of the two-storey A380 Airbus. Once, it would have made the whole plane.

Mind you, the bit it makes – the wing – is a massive undertaking in its own right, as this week's episode, **A Super Jumbo Wing** (SBS1 Saturday 18 August at 7.35pm) makes very

clear. It is a hefty 17.7 metres from the front to the back, and a whopping 36.3 metres from the fuselage to the wing-tip. The vast wing is used to store the plane's massive load of fuel (as one of the people interviewed points out, if you took it to your local service station to fill up with fuel you would be there *all week*).

The project provides jobs for thousands of British workers in two facilities: research and development at Filton near Bristol, and actual manufacture at one of Europe's biggest factories, at Broughton in north Wales.

Despite the impressive stats, however, the program is so dry that one is in danger of nodding off. It does pick up however when the wing is finished and together with the wing for the other side is transported under police escort to join up with other equally massive convoys bringing together the wings from Britain, the sections of fuselage from Germany, the undercarriage from somewhere else and the engines from somewhere

else again, the whole lot to be assembled in a French factory like a giant Meccano set. The images of the huge sections being manoeuvred through small French villages and then fitted together in the French plant are quite impressive.

We have certainly come a long, long way from the days of the lone inventor assembling his flying machine in his barn. One thing that is not covered in the film is how people upstairs are expected to get out safely in an emergency. I once saw a television documentary about how planes could be made safe against fire but airlines wouldn't do it because of the cost.

What will be the public opprobrium when one of these super-jumbo monsters crashes and all that fuel burns along with the passengers? Airlines today are an indispensable part of modern travel. What will be the effect if it finally becomes clear that operating airlines safely might not be compatible with running them profitably? ☹



Sydney

## AGENT ORANGE JUSTICE

Mori Gallery, 168 Day St, Sydney (near Trades Hall)

Exhibit runs till August 11

Launched by NSW Governor Marie Bashir, Vietnamese Consul-General Mai Phuoc Dzung Part of the international campaign to hold the US (and Australia) responsible for its 10-year chemical warfare against Vietnam, and get it to clean up the toxic mess left in parts of Vietnam's environment and win compensation for the 3 million Vietnamese who are devastated, some of whom are fourth generation victims.

During the show week, there will also be films about Agent Orange, a reading from *The Seed* (a play by a daughter of an Australian veteran who is Agent Orange-affected), seminars and talks, and sales of books, DVDs and prints.

Organised by Agent Orange Justice – Australia Vietnam Solidarity Network

Contact: info@agentorangejustice.org.au. Phone: Carol 0403 194 174

www.agentorangejustice.org.au

Sydney

# POLITICS in the pub

August 10

## BRITISH GOVERNMENT AS BIG BROTHER – NEW LAW TO ACCESS THE INTERNET OF ALL ITS CITIZENS – PRIVACY IMPLICATIONS FOR AUSTRALIA

John Dowd, AO, Int. Commission of Jurists;  
Stephen Blanks, NSW Council Civil Liberties

August 17

## CORPORATE THUGGERY CONTESTING AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT – TOBACCO, MINING

Pat Ranald, ACTU;  
Tony Maher, Nat. President CFMEU (mining & energy Division)

August 26

## The reinvention of the world: An address by John Ralston Saul

Evatt Foundation. Sunday 26 August, 5pm. Concert Hall, Sydney Opera House. (\$45/\$35). NOTE THAT THIS IS NOT A REGULAR FRIDAY SESSION OF POLITICS IN THE PUB.

August 29

## The Financial Crisis and its aftermath in the USA and UK: a feminist perspective

Diane Elson, Professor, Essex University. The 5th E.L. "Ted" Wheelwright Memorial Lecture. 6pm, Eastern Avenue Lecture Theatre, University of Sydney. NOTE THAT THIS IS NOT A REGULAR FRIDAY SESSION OF POLITICS IN THE PUB.

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This Sydney newsagent  
regularly stocks The Guardian

Book review by Bob Treasure

# GERM Warfare – School Education in Finland

Noted educationist and author, Pasi Sahlberg, has written a timely and very relevant book explaining the stunning success of the Finnish education system over the past two decades. Not surprisingly, it puts a powerful case that is the direct *opposite* of current fads in educational “reform” so popular in the US, England and Australia, indeed, in most of the “advanced” capitalist world.

One of the truly pleasing aspects of Sahlberg’s work, *Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn About Educational Change in Finland?* is that the Finns have clearly adopted a very socialist, some might say Marxist, approach to educating their children. It has been a long and patient process but has yielded results that far outshine all the neo-liberal economist think-tank “experiments” flooding OECD countries at the moment, using innocent children as guinea-pigs.

Sahlberg has identified the present wave of global market-based educational thinking with the acronym *GERM: Global Education Reform Movement*. “It is like an epidemic that spreads and infects education systems through a virus. It travels with pundits, media and politicians. Education systems borrow policies from others and get infected. As a consequence, schools get ill, teachers don’t feel well, and kids learn less,” he writes.

## The “Race to the Top”

Strangely, Finland never really intended to be at the top of the global education tree. After World War II Finnish prospects looked bleak: the country was small, frozen for half the year, undeveloped industrially, and with very average educational capacity. Political parties of all shades agreed that the nation’s best resource was its people, and that all its youth should receive the most thorough education possible.

Thus, while other, wealthier states sought to be “best” and win the race to the top by setting up “lighthouse”, “opportunity”, “selective” and “superior” schools for elite students, the Finns concentrated on trying to provide good schools for all children: equity in education was to be the driving principle.

They focused on the process of teaching and learning, on ensuring dedicated, academic people entered the role of teaching. Cooperative learning, problem-based teaching and portfolio assessment are strategies widely cultivated throughout the system.

In direct contrast to what is now happening in the US, England and Australia, the Finnish government of the 1970s absorbed private schools into a single, unified, comprehensive and *inclusive* public system, provided for as equitably and fairly as possible. By the year 2000, as revealed in the globally applied OECD tests known as PISA (Program for International Student Assessment), Finland emerged as the most effective educational provider, consistently, in all facets of learning: language, maths, scientific reasoning and problem-solving, with a narrow gap between “top” and “bottom” students – in short, with the most equitable outcomes.

The GERM virus is quite different, however. Sahlberg points to three main symptoms of the disease: competition, school choice, and standardised testing.



Author, Pasi Sahlberg.

## Competition

Neo-liberal pundits often contend that “competition”, not the quest for profits, is the basis of capitalism. For education to be successful, they say, it must embrace competition. Thus whole systems, nation vs nation, private vs public, school vs school, teacher vs teacher, and, most intensely, student vs student, must be encouraged to compete in order to “win” success. Frequently, learning today is framed in “game” formats which allow victory for the quickest and smartest, in order to achieve “engagement”.

In Australia, free enterprise stalwarts like Howard, Kemp, Greiner, Metherell, Kennett, and now O’Farrell and Baillieu have, following the examples of their mentors in the UK and USA, sought to encourage competition by making education a matter of consumption, of parental “choice”, as in a supermarket. They have de-zoned public schools, favoured private providers in their funding policies, and set about dismantling centralised, “bureaucratic” school systems to “free up” the education market-place.

All this has been done with little or no reference to research, or solid evidence. If they had bothered to check, they would have found that *no one* learns better under competitive stress. This only creates feelings of panic, helplessness, impotence, confusion and rejection. In a competitive environment, there are usually only a few winners – the rest are “losers”.

Sahlberg identifies several symptoms of competitive schools: frenetic, unrelaxed classrooms, exhausted teachers, as well as higher rates of anxiety, resentment, and in the extremity, suicide, among students. In all the countries where “market-oriented” experiments have taken place, educational outcomes – after sometimes showing spectacular results at first – are in decline overall. As Sahlberg points out, “... when schools compete against one another, they cooperate less.”

## School choice

Hand in hand with the idea of competition goes the doctrine of “choice”. When parents

get to choose, the theory goes, pressure falls on schools to perform: everybody, most notably the teaching staff, works harder, otherwise they will soon lose favour and eventually, their jobs. The law of the jungle prevails: the “best” schools flourish, the “worst” drop off.

This chaos might even be partly fair, if everyone had an equal ability to choose. But obstacles such as geography (where you live), income (school fees), and suitability (maybe the school doesn’t want to choose you) all mean that “freedom of choice” amounts to a *class system* of education: “good, middle, bad”. No prizes for guessing whose children will be going to the latter category.

“Choice” and “equity” are two mutually exclusive notions, here. When parents choose a particular school, (or anything, for that matter) they are implicitly saying this school is “better” than the rest, and that their child will be “better” for it. Over time the “better” schools cost more, and the “best” cost the most – the neo-liberals who say you can’t solve an educational problem by “throwing money at it”, are really saying it’s the *only* solution.

Over the 12 years of Howard rule billions of extra taxpayer dollars were thrown at private schools who once never received a cent of public subsidy, while at the same time fees for elite private schools outstripped the rate of inflation several times over – the total cost of school education had increased markedly. Yet the overall PISA performance of Australian students between 2000 and 2007 *declined* and the gap between top and bottom performance *widened*, with, as Sahlberg shows, every other education system trailblazing “wider choice”.

## Standardised testing

If schools are to be given greater autonomy to compete in the market-place of education, it becomes ever more necessary that they remain *accountable*: that their performance be measured against a common standard and appropriate (funding) action taken – thus mass standardised testing emerges as a tell-tale symptom of GERM.

It is spreading like a pandemic. In Australia

it is NAPLAN, but they are everywhere, and certain companies, most with their origins in the US, not only produce the model test items and the tests themselves, but also resources that are necessary to succeed in them. Schools spend thousands of work hours analysing them, practising them, and tailoring lessons to improve results in them.

Naturally, such time and effort devoted to test preparation means the curriculum is narrowed and time-programmed down to each lesson, hour and minute. The consequence is that mass tests are becoming more and more high-stakes (New York and Texas are just two examples of how high stakes testing creates high stakes corruption) and more and more similar: there is a growing conformity across the globe. Murdoch is already preparing on-line delivery of universal curricula, for a fee, of course.

The “accountability process” places no trust in teachers. Their capacity as intellectuals who make their own decisions, take their own diversions and add character to learning, all this is taken away so that they become automaton cogs in a wheel, downloading lessons from the internet, laden with anxiety about their job integrity. “Engagement with learning” comes a distant second place to the all-important test results and their publication on My School, where schools are ranked to better assist parents making their “choice”.

There are further symptoms to GERM. Growing rates of student resistance, rising truancy, classroom hostility and total disengagement from the boredom of classroom activity, as well as a greater reliance on coercive measures to enforce attendance and “test participation” – in short, an inversion of the very aims of the neo-liberal credo of a tame, well-drilled and enthusiastic workforce.

And then there’s angry, frustrated teachers, themselves in rebellion. The Finnish example in education, as explained by Sahlberg, is pretty straightforward, commonsense, and run-of-the-mill, but in the context of present day Australia it is downright revolutionary, and a banner for future struggles.

Pasi Sahlberg will be visiting Australia later this year. 🇺🇸



Communist Party of Australia

Website: [www.cpa.org.au](http://www.cpa.org.au)  
Email: [cpa@cpa.org.au](mailto:cpa@cpa.org.au)

**Central Committee:**  
**General Secretary:** Dr Hannah Middleton  
**Party President:** Vinnie Molina  
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010  
Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833  
**Sydney District Committee:**  
Brian McGee  
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010  
Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833

**Newcastle Branch:**  
PO Box 367  
Hamilton NSW 2303  
Ph: 02 4023 8540 / 0401 824 386  
[newcastle@cpa.org.au](mailto:newcastle@cpa.org.au)  
**Riverina Branch:**  
Allan Hamilton  
2/57 Cooper St  
Cootamundra 2590

**Melbourne Branch:**  
Andrew Irving [viccpa@netspace.net.au](mailto:viccpa@netspace.net.au)  
Box 3 Room 0 Trades Hall  
Lygon St Carlton Sth 3053  
Ph: 03 9639 1550 Fax: 03 9639 4199  
**West Australian Branch:**  
Vinnie Molina [perth@cpa.org.au](mailto:perth@cpa.org.au)  
PO Box 98 North Perth WA 6906  
Ph: 0419 812 872

**Brisbane Branch:**  
PO Box 33, Camp Hill, Qld 4152  
Ph: 0449 202 189  
[cpabris@live.com.au](mailto:cpabris@live.com.au)  
**South Australian State Committee:**  
Bob Briton, PO Box 612, Port Adelaide BC,  
SA 5015 Ph: 0418 894 366  
[www.adelaidecommunists.org](http://www.adelaidecommunists.org)  
Email: [sa@cpa.org.au](mailto:sa@cpa.org.au)

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Website: [www.cpa.org.au/guardian](http://www.cpa.org.au/guardian)  
Email: [guardian@cpa.org.au](mailto:guardian@cpa.org.au)