



Manus Island attacks

Govt's moral bankruptcy

Peter Mac

Events on Manus Island last week have totally discredited the vindictive offshore processing policies of the Coalition government. On Sunday February 16, government officials told horrified Manus Island detainees that Australia would never accept them for settlement; Papua New Guinea would, but if they weren't found to be genuine refugees neither the Australian nor PNG governments would help them.

Despite the likelihood of persecution or death if they returned to their own countries, they were all advised to do so.

The detainees protested bitterly, and an exchange of verbal insults took place between them and the guards. On Monday evening refugee advocate Ian Rintoul and others began receiving desperate calls from detainees via mobile phones and the centre's public phone that local GS4 security service guards and vigilantes had broken into the compound, and had launched a vicious assault with machetes, clubs, knives and shotguns.

A 23 year-old Iranian detainee died. Sixty-one other asylum seekers sustained injuries, 13 of which were serious and one critical. Forty were taken to hospital; two were flown out to Australia.

Immigration Minister Scott Morrison immediately blamed the detainees, for breaking out of the centre. However, most of the injuries occurred within the centre, not outside it, and only the detainees were injured.

An interpreter, Avita Bokal, has now revealed that the attacks actually began on Monday morning, when guards used steel chair legs and rocks as weapons. The detainees defended themselves using plastic chairs as shields.

Horrified at the injuries, she intervened on behalf of one who was trying to reach the medical centre with an injured friend who had suffered massive head injuries. He "looked like a piece of meat" and appeared to be beyond medical help.

Despite his injuries the guards ordered him to get up. They refused to let his friend accompany him, nor would they let Ms Bokal push the wheelchair. After an argument she was forced out of the compound, placed under guard, and told she would be deported for interfering. Other interpreters were warned not to talk to her.

In the evening after hearing gunshots she climbed onto a roof and witnessed the attack on the detainees. In one instance she saw medical staff attempting to force a tube into the lungs of one patient through a gaping hole in his throat, in order to force in air and prevent him drowning in his own blood.

The local member of the PNG parliament



confirmed that the "mobile squad", a notoriously brutal paramilitary police branch, had used gunfire and rifle butts against the detainees.

Some detainees escaped from the compound and were cared for by local people. Six were arrested, taken to the local jail and crushed into a vile, mosquito-infested cage which was already crowded with convicted criminals and prisoners with psychiatric problems. They could only sleep on a mattress on the concrete floor, and there were no functioning toilets or showers.

They were released after two days, in anticipation of a visit by Angus Campbell, director of Operation Sovereign Borders.

How did we get to this point?

Ms Bokal broke the confidentiality conditions of her contract by revealing what happened last week, and thereby sacrificed her job. She now expects prosecution by the government.

Before she arrived on Manus Island she supported offshore processing, but now advocates the immediate closure of Manus Island and Nauru. The Manus Island conditions are truly horrific, with unbearable heat,

malnutrition and outbreaks of disease. The only relief for detainees with dental problems is extraction of affected teeth by a local resident.

About 1,350 men have been detained there, some since late 2012. They are rarely let out. When they are, they can't even go for a swim to relieve the heat, because of crocodiles. Mental depression is endemic.

Ms Bokal stated: "I would rather die than live in the camp".

When she arrived on Manus Island she was puzzled by the detainees' silence. Then she learned they had been warned that any "trouble-maker" who objected to the conditions or complained about mental or physical health problems would forfeit the right to legal advice and be put into isolation, and his application for asylum would not be processed.

However, after the official address those warnings lost their repressive effect, with explosive and tragic results. A group of former Salvation Army staff who had been stationed on the Island described last week's events as "an inevitable outcome of a cruel and degrading policy".

Settlement in Australia is now forbidden to any asylum seeker who attempts to reach Australia by boat. Settlement in Papua New Guinea is their only option, but its capital, Port Moresby, the most law-abiding place in the

country, has been classified as the third most dangerous city on earth.

The UN Refugee Convention requires signatories like Australia to give asylum seekers legal protection. However, Australian law does not apply in Papua New Guinea or Nauru, both of which teetered on the brink of legal and social breakdown last year.

Since it accepted the current arrangement last year the Papua New Guinea government has not processed a single application for asylum. Indeed, it has a financial interest in not doing so, because of Australia's payment for the Manus Island centre.

There is little chance of the asylum seekers being accepted by PNG citizens, because of cultural differences and the widespread belief that the detainees are getting a better deal than them. The government is well aware of all this but has nevertheless enforced the offshore processing policy.

... where do we go from here?

Gillian Triggs, president of the Australian Human Rights Commission, has accused the government of ignoring its international responsibility for asylum seekers.

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Why bulk billing is important

Guardian

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Demonising the DPRK

From the day of its foundation, the DPRK (North Korea) hasn't had a moment's rest from outside interference. Sabotage, invasion, mass destruction, germ warfare, nuclear threat, encirclement and crippling economic blockade have all been used in the US-led attempt to remove this impediment to regional domination. All of these efforts have failed. Naturally, the major capitalist powers subject such enemy or "rogue" states to an unrelieved campaign of vilification in order to enlist public opinion for aggression or at least neutralise opposition.

The latest salvo in this ongoing psychological war is the *Report of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea* to the UN General Assembly. Notable for Australians is the leading role retired High Court Justice Michael Kirby played as chairman of the commission. He has been very vocal in supporting the findings of the commission that the violations of human rights in the DPRK are crimes against humanity and that they may equate to political genocide.

Michael Kirby said that the claimed violations parallel in many ways the crimes of the Nazis before and during World War Two and that, while world leaders may not have been aware of the extent of the Nazis' crimes, his report supposedly removes any such lack of certainty about the "regime" in the DPRK. The leaders of that country should be brought before the International Criminal Court or a special, ad hoc UN tribunal, according to Mr Kirby. Clearly, that would require "regime change" and, presumably, a war.

The involvement of former Justice Kirby seems at odds with his reputation as a voice of reason on the judiciary. His dissenting opinions on the High Court were consistently for a more progressive position. The "reasonable grounds" test for the evidence given by defectors from the DPRK, however, is shaky at best. Many of the 80-odd witnesses live in South Korea where it is an offence to promote friendship with the DPRK and where a hate industry against the north churns out its lurid product unceasingly.

Trying to get an objective impression of conditions in the DPRK in those circumstances would be like making an assessment of the leadership of Cuba from the testimony of the Cuban expatriates living in Miami. The Cuban Five know just how impossible it is to obtain justice in those rabidly anti-Communist circumstances.

Mr Kirby's parallel with the Nazis draws a monumentally long bow. Hitler's government used the resources of a powerful, developed country to annihilate whole populations that it did not approve of. Six million Jews alone perished in that project of extermination that was conducted on a massive, industrial scale. And, contrary to what Michael Kirby claims, the leaders of the Western allies were aware of the human rights situation in Nazi Germany and the countries it occupied but weren't particularly concerned until the Third Reich began to encroach on their interests. Likewise, the heads of the leading capitalist countries today know full well the gruesome human rights situation in Saudi Arabia and similar compliant countries but choose to ignore it. No need for regime change there.

The DPRK's defensive response to relentless attack is understandable as is their decision not to cooperate with the UN's commission. The lessons from Iraq's cooperation with UN's investigators looking for evidence of non-existent weapons of mass destruction would have been well and truly learned. And while the DPRK's reaction to threats can appear exaggerated, it should be noted that it recently initiated talks with the Republic of Korea (South Korea) in order to establish better relations. The dialogue takes place in the shadow of looming US-South Korean military exercises that regularly raise tensions and promote mistrust in the region.

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

PRESS FUND

The Abbott government says we should accept a higher retirement age and payment for Medicare services, in order to reduce the federal debt. But they approved a \$15 million grant to confectionary-maker Cadbury to enable it to reinstate guided tours of its Tasmanian factory, and they intend to purchase a fleet of surveillance aircraft for use on our northern borders, at a cost of billions of dollars – presumably to police the cruel and astronomically expensive offshore processing arrangements. If you think that's an outrageous misuse of taxpayers' money and you want to do something about it, you should send us a Press Fund contribution for the next edition! We offer our thanks to the following supporters this week:

WA Branch CPA in memory of Alf Sharp \$100

Mark Mannion \$5, AM \$15, "Round Figure" \$10.

This week's total: \$130 Progressive total: \$1,370

Alf Sharp

The CPA WA Branch pays its respects to our comrade Alf Sharp who passed away on the February 4. Comrade Alf was a *Guardian* reader and driving force for our Party in the South West in Western Australia.

As a *Guardian* subscriber he was always informed and expressed his views openly on issues reported in our Workers' weekly. Comrade Alf is a great loss to his beloved family and our branch of the Communist Party of Australia in Albany.

Alf was a strong supporter of the Cuban revolution through his long-time membership of the Australia Cuba Friendship Society (ACFS) Perth, the struggles of Latin America and his trips to Nicaragua and other countries in Central America.

We convey our sincere condolences to his wife Bev, his daughter Debbie, his sons and grandchildren.

Rest in peace comrade Alf we will miss you forever and remember you always.

CPA WA Branch ☼

Unionists protest at attack on rights

AMWU (Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union) members have let their feet do the talking in protest at attacks on freedom of speech and assembly waged across Australia by Coalition governments masquerading under the cloak of "public interest" or "law and order."

About 4,000 unionists and community supporters took to the streets of Melbourne last week to draw attention to the "Silencing Act" of Victoria's Napthine government, which is aimed directly at the ability of community groups and unions to be able to freely protest in public places.

Four busloads of AMWU shipbuilders from Williamstown's BAE yards travelled into the city to join comrades at the Victoria Trades Hall Council rally, which marched from Carlton through CBD streets to the State Parliament steps.

They were protesting at proposed amendments to the state's Summary Offences Act 1966, which

will add to the arsenal of police powers by giving officers the ability to "move on" people from protests, pickets and rallies.

Police will also have a new power to impose "exclusion orders" against individuals, excluding them from coming within a set distance of a public place where there is a gathering such as a picket or rally. Failure to obey the order can result in a jail term of two years.

The powers follow strong-arm police tactics against residents and environmental groups who have tried to stop preliminary work on the Napthine government's infrastructure project for an \$8 billion road tunnel through Melbourne's inner north.

It is the Coalition government's key political hope for its re-election in November, but the new law has drawn fire from the Human Rights Law Centre, civil liberties groups and unions.

Victorian AMWU secretary Steve Dargavel said the

anti-democratic law coincided with a Coalition national agenda to silence its critics.

"This is a growing national trend to stifle dissent; it's part of the broader Coalition agenda to try to reign in the powers of unions to represent members. They are trying to gag working people," he said.

AMWU member Charles Scerri said he attended the rally because he was fearful Australia would go the way of some overseas countries where police attacked anyone trying to protest.

"It's not just about unions, it's about freedom of speech and people's rights to peacefully assemble anywhere," he said.

Fellow shipbuilder Jake Goodwin said: "We were talking to some of the cops here and quietly they agree, they're members of a union, they've got interests outside work and they want their kids to be able to have a free life." ☼

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Ms Bokal says the government should admit it made a mistake and correct it. But the government won't conduct an internal investigation into the attack, and intends to run a pilot program to resettle asylum seekers on the island. They even want Cambodia to accept asylum seekers on Australia's behalf!

They also want to issue "temporary humanitarian concern" visas, similar to the infamous temporary protection visas, which allowed the visa holder to live in the community, but prevented family reunions and enabled the government to forcibly repatriate the holder at will.

The new visas apply retrospectively to 20,000 asylum seekers awaiting bridging visas. Those who accept one of the new visas will automatically forfeit the right to reapply for permanent residency. The precedent set by retrospective arrangements also poses a major threat to human rights in Australia.

After news of the attack emerged, Tony Abbott snorted haughtily: "We are a beacon of decency and generosity but we cannot allow people to take advantage of our generosity this way."

Morrison has now admitted that the detainees' injuries were inflicted inside the compound, but neither

he nor Abbott has admitted to any wrongdoing. In an astounding display of callousness Abbott said the death and injuries were tragic, but at least there was no damage to the camp facilities, and he defended Morrison's actions, saying you wouldn't want a wimp running border protection. However, in an inadvertent admission of guilt he stated defensively that he would not give in to "moral blackmail".

Thousands of detainees who have committed no offence now face indefinite detention on Manus Island and Nauru. That amounts to unjustified imprisonment on a mass scale, a crime the federal government is carrying out in the name of the Australian people. The matter surely deserves to be brought before the International Court of Justice. ☼

The Communist Party calls on the Abbott government to:

- Close the detention centres on Manus Island and Nauru
- End offshore processing and mandatory detention,
- Process applications for asylum as rapidly as possible,
- Abandon the policy of issuing temporary visas,
- Abandon the "turn back the boats" policy and repair relations with Indonesia,
- Establish offices in transit countries where applications for asylum can be lodged, and assure applicants that their cases will receive thorough, fair and prompt attention,
- Provide those offices and the Immigration Department with sufficient resources to do so,
- Ensure that Australia's obligations with regard to the treatment of asylum seekers under the UN Refugee Convention are met, and
- Treat all asylum seekers as potentially good Australian citizens who could assist the nation's development and enrich its cultural heritage, as millions of others have done.

Trans-Pacific Partnership "Strangling democracy"

Anna Pha

The Australian government never hesitates in preaching the values of Western democracy and how Australia is an outstanding example. We regularly elect governments in "free and fair" elections and our Westminster-style parliamentary system is relatively open to scrutiny.

Australia's parliamentary system has many shortcomings, but at least legislation is usually public before it is passed and trade unions, consumer, environmental, health, education, and other groups and individuals have an opportunity to express their views and to lobby and campaign for changes. If enough pressure is mounted, it is not unknown for a government to back down.

But even these limited democratic rights are being denied during the negotiations of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). This so-called "architecture for a 21st century trade agreement" is designed to serve US corporate and strategic interests and to act as a model for future agreements.

The present round of negotiations (17th) is taking place in Singapore where Australia, New Zealand, the US, Peru, Chile, Mexico, Canada, Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam and Japan are still battling it out over the specific provisions. Although "battling it out" is not the right term to use when it comes to Australia's sycophantic subservience to the US and its corporations.

Shrouded in secrecy

The big corporations are at the table, being consulted on every move but the public are being kept in the dark. If it were not for WikiLeaks and Fairfax media in Australia, we would still have little idea of how the Australian government is signing away our democratic and sovereign rights.

The Senate has called on the government to release details but it has flatly refused, treating this democratically elected, representative body with total contempt.

Cabinet will decide whether to sign. Only after it is signed, will the government reveal the text! (See page 7 for ratification process.)

Trade and Industry Minister Andrew Robb heads Australia's

negotiating team. Addressing an Asialink function in Canberra last year, Robb said that making the government's position public would be a way to "make sure we get done in the eye".

That is not to suggest that Robb has not done any consulting about the TPP's details. "Look, we've had over 700 briefings with any party that we think has got a vital interest in the agreement because the only way we can negotiate something that's relevant and acceptable to the community in Australia is to know how any particular proposition by other parties in other countries would affect them," Robb told Linda Mottram on ABC 702 on February 17.

By "community" he means the business community, not the people who will be on the receiving end of the TPP.

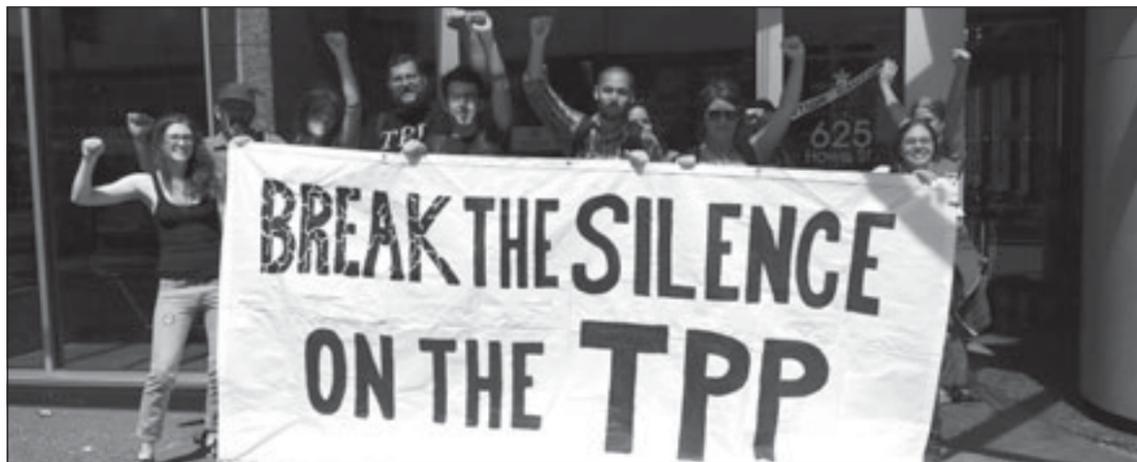
"So there's quite an endless sort of briefing process that goes on. And every time there's a new nuance introduced to the negotiation, our – my officials will go back to all these parties involved ... the last time we had several days for negotiation, I think there were representatives of nearly every agricultural industry, ... and every day we had meetings, I met with them and gave them updates and quizzed them on things that may or may not be acceptable," Robb explained.

"It's just that we're not releasing text but we are discussing these things endlessly with stakeholders and in the end they're the ones who – they represent their industries and they know what's in the interests of those industries ..."

That is just the point; the government is looking after big business but not the people. He omits to mention that the US corporations, in particular, are driving the agenda – Big Pharma, big financial institutions, mining corporations, etc.

Anyone who might oppose what the government is doing is kept in the dark in case they lobby or protest. "And in many ways, a lot of those that are opposed and are using the PBS and other things that people understand, they've got an anti-trade agenda. Now, they're entitled to that, but we disagree with it. We think trade is critical to building sustainable jobs in Australia to make sure that we grow as a country."

No one is opposed to trade. What



people want is fair trade. The Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET), one of the main forces representing the interests of Australian people and the Australian economy, is promoting fair trade. In no way is it "anti-trade."

But it is dishonest to keep referring to it as if it were just about trade. The TPP is much more than a trade agreement. It is these other aspects that the government is particularly concerned to hide.

Robb brushes aside the major stakeholders in the TPP, the Australian people who stand to lose a great deal if it goes ahead.

If given a voice they might even attempt to protect the Australian economy, food standards, local film industry, jobs, wages and the planet! Obviously that would be too much for a government that lectures to the rest of the world on democracy.

Not just a trade agreement

The TPP might be referred to as a trade agreement, but only about five of the 26 chapters that were leaked are about trade. The remainder go to the heart of the powers and role of government, in particular, they seek to override the government's sovereign powers and responsibility to legislate in the interests of its people, its economy and environment.

The government's capacity to act or likelihood of not acting because of fear of being sued for hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars covers almost every aspect of life. Government authority could be challenged over such things as:

- price of prescriptions
- environmental protection
- workers' rights
- local content on TV
- foreign investment rules
- food and tobacco labelling
- coal seam gas mining
- financial regulation
- internet privacy
- environmental protection
- government procurement, and much more.

The government claims it is committed to protecting the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and Australia's interests. But how do we know? Its promises mean nothing, especially when it so fears the reaction to its actions that it treats them as top secret.

One of the most dangerous, amongst many, policies on the table is the investor-state disputes settlement (ISDS) provision, which the Abbott government is supporting. Labor had held back on this, despite the US's insistence it should be in the final agreement.

ISDS gives foreign corporations the power to sue the Australian government for potential (what they might miss out on), not actual, losses in profits resulting from government legislation or policy relating to health, environmental and other policies.

Cases under the ISDS will not be heard by an Australian court but by international tribunals whose decisions override Australian courts.

The Democracy Centre has called such international arbitration "a privatised justice system for global corporations".

"Decisions in these closed door

tribunals are made by three investment lawyers working on a for-profit basis with no obligation to balance the public interest with the profit-making interest of corporations," Thomas Mc Donagh explains, in an article published by the Democracy Centre. (<http://democracyctr.org> "Getting Action: Strangling Democracy", 26-11-2013)

"Governments, meanwhile, have no corresponding right to bring legal action against corporations in these arbitration tribunals when they breach national environmental regulations or human rights laws. It's all one-way traffic," Mc Donagh warns.

"The conflict of interest between corporations hard wired to maximise profit – even if it comes at the cost of our fresh water sources, our public health laws and our basic services – and policy making designed to serve the public interest is nowhere more apparent than in these arbitration cases. The means of mediating this conflict of interest and blocking unbridled profit-making is the democratic process.

"The TPP leaks make it ever clearer, however, that [free] trade agreements are the mechanisms that corporations are now using to thwart democracy and to undermine the ability for us to pressure our governments to take action on a range of urgent public issues," Mc Donagh said.

For more info, <http://democracyctr.org>, report titled "Unfair, Unsustainable, and Under the Radar"; www.aftinet.org.au

Pete's Corner



Sydney

International Women's Day march and rally

**Fight for the Right to
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No to Zoe's Law!

Equal Pay now!

Saturday 8 March 11am
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Family-friendly event

Parents are encouraged to bring their children!

The march will finish at Hyde Park

Stalls and entertainment on the lawns

More details: [facebook.com/events/275435865939502](https://www.facebook.com/events/275435865939502)



Govt offensive on public sector wages and conditions

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) has accused the federal government of duplicity after details of its new public sector enterprise bargaining policy were revealed to the union.

These details reveal that the government plans to start making radical cuts to the pay and conditions of 160,000 of its employees within weeks. These plans include:

- significant cuts to employment conditions and allowances
- all pay rises to be linked to trade-offs in conditions
- wage increases from between 0% to a maximum of 2.5% depending on employees accepting reduced rights and entitlements
- no central negotiations with the CPSU
- tightly directed control of what agencies are allowed to negotiate.

CPSU national secretary Nadine Flood said "The Coalition government is telling us it is not ready to

talk about bargaining, yet it appears it has all but drafted the fine print on a highly-aggressive policy to cut real wages, conditions and rights.

"Under this government's approach, public sector workers are facing a double whammy. Firstly thousands of jobs are being cut and the remaining staff are being flogged harder to get the work done. Secondly, no-one is going to get a pay rise that keeps up with inflation, unless they agree to have their rights and conditions cut.

"As we saw with SPC Ardmona and Toyota, this government is more interested in having a political go at workers and unions than making fair and productive workplace agreements.

"Does the community really want their local Centrelink office or Customs checkpoint to become the next battleground in Prime Minister Abbott's war on wages and conditions?" Ms Flood asked.

The union has 160,000 workers in the Australian Public Service (APS) on agreements that expire on June 30. Instead of talking to the CPSU about its bargaining policy, the government has drawn up a plan to force agencies to cut workers' rights with no genuine negotiations.

"Multiple sources across the public service have told us the government has completed its bargaining policy and has briefed APS agencies," said Ms Flood.

The new policy will be called *Australian Government Employment and Workplace Relations Policy* and will apply to all APS agencies as well as non-APS agencies such as the CSIRO. It has been through a Cabinet process and could be released within a week.

The government is blocking any whole-of-service negotiations with CPSU, and is instead imposing a centralised system designed to severely restrict how agencies

can bargain. The new policy also includes:

- move to stripped back "principle-based agreements": strip matters out of enterprise agreements and move them into policy which the employer can change without union and employee agreement
- agency level negotiations only: drive to deliver central government agenda, but no central government negotiations with unions, bargaining only at agency level with agencies expected to deliver set agenda
- agencies will have limited room to negotiate: this is already causing serious concern from agencies
- agencies directed to have an Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) representative at negotiations: APSC person in room to oversee what agencies discuss with the union and ensure adherence to central agenda
- central vetting: APSC, working closely with Minister Abetz, to closely vet all agreements
- no pay increases unless linked to narrowly defined productivity: only cuts to direct employee costs are recognised, no recognition of productivity improvements delivered through savings measures, including reduced jobs, increased workloads, and pressure to deliver same outcomes with significantly less staff
- pay rises from between 0% to 2.5% and linked to significant employment conditions trade-offs to fund any increases: employees

could receive 0% if unwilling to reduce existing rights and entitlements

- cut personal (sick and other) and carers leave to 15 days maximum: cut from current 18-20 days to a service-wide maximum standard of 15 days
- all allowances subject to central vetting: move to abolish or reduce agency allowances, allowances to be vetted by representatives from Secretary, APSC and Minister Abetz's office
- voluntary redundancy under pressure: tightening of redundancy processes
- reduce role of unions: move to reduce engagement with unions and limit recognition of union delegates.

What remains of the union's role and rights to negotiate hardly constitutes collective bargaining.

The policy for public sector workers may well be the blueprint for the rest of the workforce. The trading off of conditions for wage rises is bad enough, but the stripping back of "principle-based agreements" to "policy" which the employer can change without union and employee agreement takes it to a new level. Employers won't need individual contracts with that sort of power and flexibility.

This attack on federal government employees is of nightmare proportions compounded by the prospect of mass sackings. It is vital that the rest of the union movement and ACTU give their full support to the CPSU and members under attack. ✪

Electricity privatisation - "record of failure"

Prominent Australian economist Professor John Quiggin has launched a scathing attack on energy sector privatisation, concluding that it has failed to deliver promised benefits for consumers.

Professor Quiggin examined 20 years of pro-privatisation reform in his report, "Electricity Privatisation in Australia: A Record of Failure" (<http://johnquiggin.com/>), which included a detailed economic examination of the outcomes of power sales in Victoria and South Australia.

His research has revealed that many of the claimed benefits of privatisation have not been supported, with key findings including:

- price rises have been highest in states with privatised electricity network
- customer dissatisfaction jumped, with complaints to the energy ombudsman in privatised states leaping from 500 to over 50,000 per annum
- * resources have been diverted away from operational functions to management and marketing, resulting in higher costs and poorer service
- reliability has declined across a wide range of measures in Victoria
- promised increases to investment efficiency have not occurred
- real labour productivity has reduced as employment and training of tradespeople was gutted and numbers of managerial and sales staff exploded
- private owners are receiving unjustifiably high rates of return based on the low investment risk consumers in privatised states bear the cost of approximately 10 percent per annum interest on private owners' debt, compared to substantially lower government borrowing costs of three percent.
- "Privatisation, corporatisation and the creation of competitive

electricity markets were supposed to give consumers lower prices and more choice, promote efficiency and reliability, and drive better investment decisions," Professor Quiggin said.

"But after 20 years the evidence is that none of these promised improvements have been delivered.

"After a marked fall in real electricity prices across Australia from the 1950s until the mid-1990s under public ownership, privatisation and the introduction of the National Electricity Market led to a reversal of that trend.

"Prices have risen dramatically. A secure low-cost supply has been replaced with a bewildering array of offers, all at costs inflated by a huge expansion in marketing.

"My research comprehensively finds that the free market based reform process in energy has been a failure.

"Reforms have failed to deliver a competitive market that benefits consumers. The evidence is there that public ownership of critical energy infrastructure is the only sensible response."

Electrical Trade Union national secretary Allen Hicks said that despite this clear and irrefutable record of failure, state and federal politicians continue to claim that the only option for improvements was yet more privatisation.

"This research has destroyed those arguments," he said.

"Privatisation has produced no benefits to consumers, but has resulted in large financial losses to the public.

"This independent academic research has confirmed our long-held concerns that the sale of publicly-owned power assets is an absolute disaster."

Stop the Sell Off campaign spokesman Adam Kerslake said Professor Quiggin's research had confirmed anecdotal experiences

that a free market push for the electricity sector had not only failed to improve power affordability, it had actually lead to higher prices.

"In NSW, the future of our publicly owned electricity assets is under threat from a government with a strong privatisation agenda," Kerslake said.

"This rigorous independent academic research finally provides a factual basis to drive decision making, rather than the blind reliance on free market ideology which is spouted by many proponents of privatisation.

"In Victoria we have seen workers and the broader community enduring the detrimental impacts of electricity privatisation for two decades, which is why we are campaigning so hard to save our own power network.

"It is no surprise to us that a detailed examination of the economics of privatisation has concluded that these electricity reforms have been a 'spectacular failure' and that there is no justification for further sales."

The concept of choice may apply when buying a bar of chocolate but with electricity it is nonsense. The electricity that is delivered to your home comes down the same wires and has the same current regardless of who owns the generator, who reads the meter, who sends the bills or what contract you sign up for.

As the report demonstrates, the "extras" that come with "choice" are the marketing and other inflated costs. The real choice is generation in consumers' interests or profit generation for large transnational corporations.

The time to halt the privatisations and return all electricity generators and networks back to public ownership and control is long overdue. ✪

Public electricity delivers dividends

While the report on energy privatisation by Professor Quiggin (see above) shows how privatisation has failed, a recent report by the NSW Auditor General on the NSW electricity sector reveals the benefits of public ownership. The Auditor General found that publicly owned electricity network businesses are delivering massive dividends to the people of New South Wales.

The Auditor General's report identified dividends from the four publicly-owned network businesses - Ausgrid, Endeavour Energy, Essential Energy and TransGrid - had grown to almost a billion dollars last year, before other revenue such as tax and interest paid to the NSW government was taken into account.

"The NSW Auditor General's report demonstrates that the publicly owned electricity networks remain an extremely valuable public asset that benefits the people of NSW and should not be privatised," Electrical Trades Union (ETU) NSW secretary Steve Butler said.

"In the past 12 months, income from the NSW electricity networks is likely to exceed \$2.5 billion in total government revenue, once dividends, tax equivalents and government interest are taken into account.

If the O'Farrell Coalition government goes ahead with its plans to privatise the network, then these profits would flow straight into the coffers of private, possibly foreign, corporations instead of being available to fund public services such as hospitals, schools and transport.

Butler said the Auditor General's report highlighted the economic weakness of the NSW Treasurer's support for privatisation. "On one hand we have Treasurer Mike Baird, taking every opportunity to talk up privatising the NSW electricity network, while on the other hand he is using the financial windfall from these companies to claim the budget is back in the black."

"It's hypocrisy at its best.

"One thing is crystal-clear from the NSW Auditor General's report, and that is the NSW electricity businesses continue to make a valuable contribution to the bottom line of the state.

"The quicker the O'Farrell government understands the value of these assets and commits to public ownership and operation the better off NSW residents will be."

The government could also look at reducing electricity prices, especially for those on lower incomes. ✪

Save the Devil

Steven Katsineris

My son and I were in Tasmania recently, to visit my family. On our last day (Saturday February, 1) before returning to Melbourne, we decided to drive up the East Coast to Coles Bay and bushwalk into Wineglass Bay, before driving on to Devonport. So we packed up and left early in the morning from my parent's home on the southeast coast. It was a warm, sunny day, with little traffic on the road as we drove north.

Between the towns of Sorell and Buckland, we saw a dead Tasmanian Devil beside the verge of the road. This Devil had obviously been a roadkill from the night before by the look of the body. It was very sad to find a fairly young dead Devil, but this male Devil also had no Devil Facial Tumour Disease, which was even more distressing. The unfortunate loss of such a healthy individual is dreadful and tragic news for the endangered species, which is already suffering a drastic decline in numbers from this disease.

The Tasmanian Devil population has already decreased by more than 70 percent due to the spread of the contagious Devil Facial Tumour Disease among Devils. The disease has spread throughout most of the state, except for the West Coast region and some other areas.

While the threatened species

struggles to survive this cancer, its plight is further worsened by the deaths of Devils killed on the roads. To help save the endangered Tasmanian Devil it is vitally important to reduce the roadkill of Devils. Drivers can lessen the chances of hitting Devils and other wildlife by being very alert, watchful and driving slowly (especially between dusk and dawn) in wild and rural areas where Devils and other native animals live.

One indication from this death is that it at least shows that there are still some healthy populations of unaffected Devils in a few other parts of the Tasmanian bush, as well as on the West Coast. We left the body where it was in case someone from Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife passed by, as it was clearly visible from the road. We reported our sighting to the Tasmanian National Parks office when we got to Coles Bay.

Also, on our previous trip to Tasmania, the year before, we saw two healthy young Devils in daylight, one in the southern Tarkine on the West Coast as it walked alongside the road for some distance and one other that ran across the road between Dunalley and Murdunna on the Forestier Peninsula in southeast Tasmania.

The chances for the survival of this remarkable creature in the wild are greatly increased if enough people are aware, care and play an active role in helping ensure the



preservation of the Tasmanian Devil. Let's do what we can to assist efforts to reduce the roadkill of Devils and support those working hard to save them. This will make a real difference to preventing the extinction of the unique Tasmanian Devil in the wild. ☺

Protect Tipeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary

Steven Katsineris

The Tipeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary is situated in western India, in the far southern most part of Maharashtra State and is of great natural significance due to its amazing biodiversity. The sanctuary in the remote Yeotmal district has varied landscapes, from forested hills and gullies to mangrove swamps, with different types of luxuriant vegetation.

Tipeshwar comprises a patch of dense southern tropical forest that is unique in the region. Tipeshwar is also home to a wide variety of wildlife, including several rare and threatened species of animals. Tipeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary's name derives from the God-dess Tipai and is located near the Tipeshwar Village. There are other villages located around the wildlife sanctuary and the local people depend on the forest for food, firewood, medicine, timber, amongst other things.

The Tipeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary covers an area of around 148.63 square kilometres, with some of the most valuable remaining forest habitat in India and containing areas of rich and diverse plant communities. The main forest type is tropical dry deciduous forest tracts, including both natural forest and Teak forest plantations. There are also areas of Bamboo that occur as undergrowth in the Teak forests and in patches as Bamboo groves. As well, many herbs, grasses and other plant species are found in the sanctuary. The sanctuary has over 250 species of plants that are of considerable medicinal and economic importance.

Tipeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary is home to many species of fauna, including rare and endangered mammals, such as Bengal Tigers, Panthers (black leopards that are more numerous than spotted ones here), Small Indian Civet Cat, Indian Jackal, Sloth Bear, Indian Pangolin, Dhole (Asiatic Wild Dog), Indian Wolf, Four Horned Antelope and Blackbuck. Other mammals found in the sanctuary are Jungle Cat, Blue Bull (an antelope species), Chital (Spotted Deer), Sambar, Barking Deer, Gaur (Indian Bison), Stripped Hyena, Wild Boar, monkeys, hares, etc.

An outstanding variety of bird species can be found in the sanctuary, with more than 180 species spotted here. These comprise nine species of endangered birds, including Peafowl's and ten species of migratory birds.

The sanctuary is as well home to over 26 species of reptiles, with six species being endangered, such as Indian Cobra, India Rock Python, Rat Snake, Russel's Viper, Checked Keel Back and Common Monitor Lizard.

Tipeshwar has become a popular eco-tourism location, with guided nature study tours and wildlife watching in the sanctuary. The main attractions for visitors are the Peacocks, Wild Boar, Sloth Bears and deer.

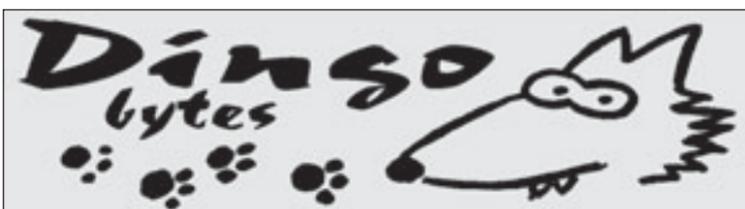
But in blatant violation of Indian forest and wildlife laws, stone quarrying is being carried out 1.5 kilometres from the boundary of Tipeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary and poses a serious threat to the sanctuary. According to Tipeshwar range forest officer (RFO) UD Chavhan, four stone quarries have been

operating near the sanctuary since 1988 and 2007. These quarries fall within the eco-sensitive zone of the sanctuary that strictly bans mining and are causing widespread environmental degradation. The quarry mining has adverse effects on habitat and thus impacts badly on wildlife. Such mining activities are a threat to the five Bengal Tigers that have rediscovered the Tipeshwar Forest and now live there, as well as the long-term recovery of Tigers in the sanctuary.

"Quarrying is proving detrimental to wildlife... If grazing, road expansion and encroachments are burning issues, quarrying is adding fuel to fire," said RS Virani, a zoology lecturer working for conservation in Tipeshwar. Last year conservationists like Virani and others foiled attempts to bring in new mining ventures in nearby forest and agricultural land. The area where mining is proposed is a corridor connected to the sanctuary.

India has over the years made good progress in protecting Tigers and other endangered wildlife, but allowing habitat destruction adjacent to the sanctuary to continue puts these efforts in jeopardy. The loss of habitat corridors around the reserve seriously threatens the recovery of Tigers and the survival of other animals that occur in the sanctuary. Please help and support efforts by local conservationists by urging the state government to stop illegal quarries operating around Tipeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary.

To help protect Tipeshwar and its wildlife, sign the petition:
www.thepetitionsite.com/106/646/790/india-stop-illegal-quarrying-near-tipeshwar-wildlife-sanctuary ☺



And the winner is – Rupert Murdoch once again. Murdoch's News Corporation was paid \$880 million after winning a legal battle with the Tax Office. The payout represents a large part of the \$16.8 billion deterioration in the federal budget announced by Treasurer Joe Hockey. However, the Treasurer failed to mention it when he was criticising the previous government for "the fiscal mess". Tax avoidance is an art form with big corporations and Murdoch's is no exception. The Abbott government will be making things easier for tax evasion at all levels – the Tax Office is to lose about 900 employees and big companies will be allowed to do their own assessments. Happy days for big tax evaders! Corporatocracy rules!

Fiona Nash is Assistant Health Minister who was in the news recently over her decision to have a new healthy food website taken down. Her chief of staff, Alastair Furnival, had to resign after revelations that he and his wife were heavily involved with junk food companies. There was another decision that appears to be conflicting with public interests – and that is de-funding of Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia. Furnival was the one to inform the staff of the organisation that it would no longer be funded after 46 years of work. This at a time when alcohol and drugs use and abuse are often main news stories. It came as no surprise that Furnival had been involved with the alcohol industry as a lobbyist. The Public Health Association of Australia stated that the government had to reinstate the council's funding and reinstate the website – and the sooner the better.

"Happy clappies" are not as happy as they used to be. Access Ministries is the leading provider of religious instruction in schools, delivering 81 percent of programs and getting millions from the public purse. Now hundreds of primary school principals have stopped offering weekly religious education in public schools despite a legal obligation to do so. The Howard government was the one to introduce the program and the Labor continued with it. It has no educational value whatsoever and, according to one of the school principals, it "is rubbish – hollow and empty rhetoric". Many parents still do not realise that these lessons are conducted by volunteers, not teachers. There was a positive change in how parents enrolled their children in the program. Before 2011 schools used "opt-out" forms which meant that parents had to fill in the form or their child would automatically be taught religion. In the past two years it is an "opt-in" form which means you have to make a conscious decision to enrol your child in religious education. Many have made a rational choice not to expose their children to religious indoctrination. Access Ministries got \$74 million in federal funding last year and state governments also pitched in. The money would be much better spent on providing extra science lessons.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreements

Don't trade away health

AFTINET*

The Australian government is negotiating a trade agreement spanning across 12 countries in the Pacific. But the deal is not only about free trade, and it poses real threats to public health.

The negotiations are shrouded in secrecy, but limited public information and leaked documents show that the agenda on health and medicines is being set by giant US pharmaceutical and tobacco corporations, and threatens to:

- Increase patent rights leading to higher medicine prices
- Undermine our Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
- Give special rights for corporations to sue governments for damages
- Restrict government public health regulations for food labelling

After three years of negotiations, the pressure is on to sign the deal this year. We need to ensure that the Australian Coalition government rejects any proposals which would affect the affordability of medicines and retains the ability to regulate in the interest of public health.

Pharmaceutical companies already have patent rights to charge high monopoly prices for new medicines for 20 years before we can access cheaper generic medicines. However, US trade negotiators, on behalf of pharmaceutical companies, are demanding stronger patent rights in the TPPA.

This would further delay the availability of cheaper medicines. Australians would have to pay higher prices for medicines, and in developing countries new medicines would become unaffordable.

In the US, where there is no national system to regulate the price of medicines, the wholesale prices of new medicines are three to ten times higher than the prices in Australia. This makes retail prices even higher, and many people cannot afford to buy medicines.

Through the Australian Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), health experts compare the price and effectiveness of new medicines with the price of cheaper generic medicines to assess their health effects. They then regulate the wholesale and retail prices of many medicines in Australia, so that pensioners pay no more than \$6 and others no more than \$36.90 for important medicines. As well as keeping the prices of medicines low for consumers, the lower wholesale price reduces the cost to the taxpayer. This makes the PBS more sustainable in the long term.

However, US-based pharmaceutical companies argue that the PBS is a barrier to trade, and oppose these schemes because they receive a lower wholesale price for their medicines. US trade negotiators have proposed changes which would restrict price comparisons, such as those

which are used in the PBS to make medicines affordable.

The Australian government should not agree to these proposals, which would lead to higher costs for both consumers and governments.

Restrict food regulations

Other proposals in the TPPA would restrict the ability of government to regulate food labelling, even if it is in the interest of public health.

Australia has laws which require information for consumers about what is in our food, like levels of fat, sugar and genetically modified ingredients, and warnings about safe levels of consumption for alcohol. As public health information improves, these may need to change through democratic public discussion and Parliamentary legislation.

Tobacco corporations to sue governments

Large tobacco companies like Philip Morris are pushing for the inclusion of special rights for corporations in the TPPA which would allow foreign investors to sue governments for damages if their investments have been harmed by a particular law or policy, even if the law or policy protects public health. Known as investor-state dispute settlement, or ISDS, disputes are heard by international investment tribunals, not domestic courts. These tribunals give priority to investor rights rather than whether the law or policy is in the public interest.

ISDS is already being used to undermine Australia's democratic legislation. The Philip Morris tobacco company is trying to use an obscure 1993 Australia-Hong Kong investment agreement to sue the Australian government for millions of dollars of damages in an international tribunal over the tobacco plain packaging legislation. The case is ongoing, despite the fact that the Australian High Court found that the law was a public health measure and the tobacco companies were not entitled to compensation under Australian law.

The Howard government did not agree to ISDS in the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement in 2004. However, the Coalition's trade policy is to negotiate on ISDS. We urge the Government to oppose clauses in the TPPA that grant special rights for foreign investors to sue governments.

The TPP could threaten our ability to place health warning labels on food, tobacco and alcohol products, or to shift towards a more sustainable food production system.

Labelling restrictions

Labelling on food ensures consumers understand what is in their food, its nutritional



content or whether it contains genetically modified ingredients.

The TPP could seek to standardise labelling requirements in the region, which could mean that countries are limited in their ability to control labelling for food, alcohol and tobacco products. This would restrict regulatory capacity even in light of new research.

Investors could challenge new legislation designed to protect our food security or public health.

If the TPP contains an ISDS mechanism, foreign investors may be able to sue Australian governments over legislation which increases standards of food safety through mandatory labelling or moratoriums on genetically modified food. The Philip Morris tobacco company is already using ISDS to challenge Australia's plain packaging legislation for tobacco, which was implemented in order to protect public health.

Negotiations around government procure-

ment in the TPP restrict the ability of governments to preference local products and services over imported ones, including sustainable, locally grown food. This would limit their ability to shift towards a more sustainable food system on a local scale.

Culture threatened

Australia has laws for minimum levels of Australian content in film, television and other media to ensure Australian stories are told, and Australian voices and music are heard.

Without these laws, there would be little Australian content because it is cheaper to import content from the US. Media companies in the US see these laws as a barrier to trade and want to reduce or abolish them. This would threaten our ability to preserve and develop our culture.

*Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network

Take Action!

The pressure is on to finish the negotiations by the end of this year.

AFTINET's website aftinet.org.au has resources you can use to:

- Send a message to the Trade Minister
- Talk to your local Member of Parliament
- Discuss the TPPA with friends, relatives and workmates, or hold a local meeting
- Become an AFTINET member
- Donate to support the campaign
- Get more information.

Special rights for investors to sue governments

AFTINET

The US wants special rights for foreign investors included in the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP*), which would allow corporations to sue governments for millions of dollars if their investments are "harmed" by a law or policy, even if that law or policy is designed to protect public health or the environment. The proposal is known as Investor-State Dispute Settlement, or ISDS.

These disputes are heard by international investment tribunals, which prioritise investor rights above the public interest, and which do not have an independent judiciary or other safeguards of national legal systems.

Australia's democratic parliament and court system is already being undermined by an ISDS provision in an obscure 1993 Hong Kong-Australia investment treaty. After a group of tobacco companies tried and failed to get compensation through the Australian High

Court over the plain packaging legislation, US-based tobacco company, Philip Morris, moved some of its investments to Hong-Kong so it could use this agreement to sue the Australian government. Philip Morris clearly believes that an international investment tribunal will give it a more favourable decision.

Under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) US corporations have used ISDS to sue governments for tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars over legitimate health and environment legislation. Currently, the US Lone Pine energy company is using ISDS provisions in NAFTA to sue the provincial government of Quebec for US\$250 million because it suspended shale gas mining pending an environmental study in response to community concerns.

In Australia, farmers and members of communities influenced the NSW government to regulate coal seam gas activity close to residential suburbs and rural industries.

If Australia agrees to ISDS rules in the TPP, foreign companies could sue state governments for damages over this kind of regulation. Even if the government wins the case, it can cost millions in legal fees.

The Howard government did not agree to ISDS in the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement in 2004. However, the Coalition's trade policy is to negotiate on ISDS. We urge the government to oppose clauses in the TPP that grant special rights for foreign investors to sue governments.

"Carve-outs" and "exclusions" in areas like public welfare, healthcare and the environment have not worked in other trade agreements to protect the public interest. For example, the Peru-US Free Trade Agreement and the US-Central America Free Trade Agreement didn't stop the Renco lead mining company from suing the Peruvian government when they were required to clean up their lead pollution, or the Pacific Rim company from

suing the El Salvador government because it refused a mining licence for environmental reasons.

Investors have pursued cases in other countries by claiming the process of developing the law did not include "fair and equitable" treatment for them.

*The Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) negotiations involve Australia, the US, New Zealand, Canada, Peru, Chile, Mexico, Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia, Japan and Vietnam. The Abbott government hopes that agreement on the TPP would be reached as US President Obama is having difficulty in gaining Republican support in Congress for fast-tracking authority for the agreement. This authority would avoid the necessity of the agreement having to be approved by Congress before it is signed. Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network

"Our kids, our way, their future"

The Aboriginal Early Childhood Support and Learning Incorporated (AECSL Inc) is a peak advisory body on early childhood for Aboriginal children, families and the Aboriginal community. It works to ensure that Aboriginal communities have a strong and ongoing voice in how early years programs and services are designed and delivered, with all programs focusing on the diverse strengths of the child, family and community.

With Aboriginal children the major focus of all decision making processes, AECSL aims to build the capacity of Aboriginal families, Early Childhood professionals and community members. It stresses the importance of doing it "our way, always respecting cultural protocols, and the uniqueness of each child, family and community for their future". It believes that local Aboriginal communities are best placed to understand the local needs of their families and children.

"AECSL Inc will provide support for OUR KIDS, and will promote culturally appropriate development and learning approaches for the early childhood sector OUR WAY, and will value the importance of community capacity building and community engagement for THEIR FUTURE," the organisation says on its website.

The AECSL Inc five year Strategic Plan will ensure that all Aboriginal children and their families are fully engaged in the design and delivery of early years programs and have equal access to services that promote child and family welfare, safety and wellbeing.

It does this by working in partnership with representatives from early year's stakeholders, community partners and all levels of government, Aboriginal parents and researchers.

Angela Webb is the President AECSL. She was one of the speakers at the "Stop Abbott, Save Medicare," rally in Sydney on Saturday February 15. The AECSL is one of many community organisations on the receiving end of the Abbott Coalition's cuts. The following is her speech to the rally:

I am very concerned about the \$6 Medicare fee – it's an assault on the most vulnerable in Australian society just like Abbott's proposed cuts to Aboriginal services.

I am president of AECSL, Aboriginal Early Childhood Support and Learning Inc, the only Aboriginal managed organisation providing support and advocacy in early childhood in NSW. It has operated for over 20 years.

AECSL's motto is: "Aboriginal early childhood – our kids, our way, their future".



Everybody needs to fight the assault on quality early childhood for Aboriginal children.

In mid-December last year, AECSL was notified by the Commonwealth that their funding would cease on December 31, 13 days before the date.

How could any government treat any organisation in this way?

The Commonwealth and state governments say they are committed to closing the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in health and education.

Commonwealth action suggests that they are washing their hands of Indigenous early childhood education.

Quality early childhood for Aboriginal children is an essential foundation for educational success. To be successful early childhood services must be responsible to needs of Aboriginal children and their cultural contexts.

AECSL supports and advocates for early childhood education for Aboriginal children and families in NSW.

Without AECSL support many services are vulnerable. Already AECSL has cancelled the major professional development conference for 2014. Over 300 community people, including staff and management, have benefited in the past from this activity.

The Annual Report on Closing the Gap progress released this week indicated some mixed outcomes for Indigenous children. There are positive early signs on preschool enrolments but progress on reading, writing and numeracy targets is poor. Early childhood years are the foundation for literacy and numeracy, critical to Aboriginal children.

In 2014, AECSL with Macquarie University is implementing a professional program to support numeracy and science education for Aboriginal children. This too is threatened if AECSL closes its doors.

Tony Abbot said of the Closing the Gap targets, that "Our challenge is to turn good

intentions into better outcomes". Tony Abbot is clearly lacking good intentions for early childhood for Aboriginal children and families.

AECSL needs you to advocate with governments to sustain its activity in NSW. Look to our Facebook page or website for ways you can give support.

Everybody needs to fight the assault on quality early childhood for Aboriginal children.

NB: AECSL is still awaiting the last release of funds from the Commonwealth (it has been promised) and expects to continue to operate for some months offering its support and advocacy services while attempting to secure an alternative funding source for its sustainability. There will be a social media campaign in February/March with information on Facebook and their webpage: aecls.org.au ✪

Australian Parliamentary process for trade agreements

AFTINET*

Over the last decade the growing opposition to secrecy in trade negotiations has resulted in some examples of greater transparency. Since 2003, World Trade Organisation proposed texts, offers and background papers have been placed on the WTO public website. In the case of the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), which dealt with extension of intellectual property rights, there was so much controversy that governments agreed to release the text in 2011 before it was signed. So there are precedents for release of the text before it has been signed by governments.

The demand for release of the text has been a feature of campaigns on the Trans Pacific Partnership and other trade agreements, and has been endorsed by the Senate, but so far the Australian government has not agreed to do this.

In Australia the current process for trade agreements is that the text remains secret until after it has been agreed by the negotiators and signed by governments.

The Trade Minister presents the text to the Cabinet, which is made up of the Prime Minister and other Cabinet Ministers. The decision to sign the text is made by Cabinet, not the whole Parliament.

The text cannot be changed after it is signed.

After signing, the text is tabled in Parliament for 20 sitting days and goes to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties for review before the legislation to implement the agreement is presented to parliament. The final ratification of the agreement will take place after the implementing legislation has been passed by both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

At this point the text becomes public. There is an opportunity for public

submissions to the review. But the Committee cannot change the text of the agreement and can only make recommendations. Because it is a Joint Standing Committee of both the House of Representatives and the Senate, the government of the day, which has a majority in the House of Representatives, will have a majority on the committee, and the committee is likely to recommend that the agreement be finalised through the Parliament passing the implementing legislation, even if there are critical submissions.

Parliament only votes on the implementing legislation, not on the whole text of the agreement. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), for example, has 29 chapters and only a few of these will require changes to legislation. One example which would require legislation change is changes to tariffs or taxes on imports.

However, many other chapters will restrict the ways in which current and future

Australian governments can legislate, but will not require legislation. For example, the inclusion of the right of foreign investors to sue governments over domestic legislation (investor-state dispute settlement or ISDS) does not require a change to Australian legislation. Other changes, like changes to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, could be done by changing regulation rather than through legislation.

If the government does not have a majority in the Senate, as is the case with the Abbott Coalition government, the Senate can have an impact on agreements like the TPP by holding its own inquiry or review of the agreement, and by voting against or amending some or all of the implementing legislation.

Voting against the implementing legislation would prevent or delay the final ratification of the agreement.

* Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network – affinet.org.au ✪

Powerful interests mobilise to end anti-Cuban blockade

WT Whitney

The US economic blockade of Cuba, cruel and reviled across the globe, has persisted for as long as the period between the US Civil War and World War I. But it may not last forever. Just recently, stirrings of disenchantment among powerful forces have cropped up nationally and in Florida, epicentre of Cuban émigré opposition to Cuba's revolutionary government.

On February 11 the Atlantic Council released its poll on attitudes toward the blockade expressed during January. The Council surveyed 1,000 people nationwide plus 617 Florida residents and 525 Latinos, all by telephone. The report became a main focus of news stories on blockade dissent appearing simultaneously.

Of those surveyed nationally, 56 percent – Latinos, 62 percent – want normalisation of relations, 61 percent oppose travel restrictions, 62 percent okayed US business dealings with Cuba, and 61 percent oppose Cuba being designated a terrorist nation. Among Floridians offering opinions, 63 percent call for normal relations and 67 percent oppose both travel restrictions and the terrorist label. And 52 percent of Republicans want normalisation, as do 64 percent of Miami-Dade County residents in Florida.

"The majority of Americans on both sides of the aisle are ready for a policy shift," concludes the Atlantic Council. "Most surprisingly, Floridians are even more supportive ... This

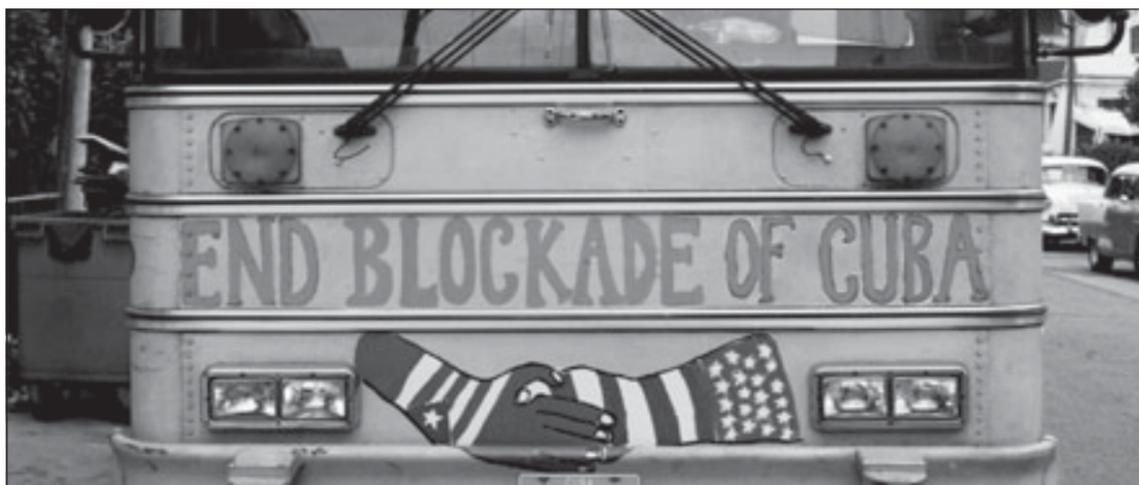
is a key change from the past." And "Economic arguments prove to be most convincing for normalisation."

The splash from this survey report coincided with other ripples. The *Washington Post* interviewed Cuban exile Alfonso Fanjul, "one of the principal funders of the US anti-Castro movement" and someone, who with his brother, "amass[ed] one of North America's great fortunes." Fanjul discussed trips to Cuba in 2012 and 2013.

"I'd like to see our family back in Cuba," he said, and "if there's an arrangement within Cuba and the United States, and legally it can be done and there's a proper framework set up and in place, then we will look at that possibility." Cuban American businessman Paul Cejas travelled with Fanjul: "The embargo is really an embargo against America ourselves, because Americans cannot do business with Cuba, where there are incredible opportunities for growth."

Ex-Florida governor and former blockade apologist Charlie Crist, Democratic candidate to be Florida's next governor, announced a change of heart. Lifting the blockade, he said, "could help the Florida economy, creating more jobs in the state and allowing Florida businesses to sell goods and services to an island that has been largely closed to most commerce with the United States for more than 50 years."

On February 10 the *Miami Herald* published Senators Patrick Leahy's (Democrat) and Jeff Flake's



(Photo: Lady Mery)

(Republican) op-ed piece "Time for a new Policy on Cuba." Citing survey results a day before their release, they note that, "A majority of Americans, including Cuban-Americans, wants to change course," and "so do we."

While dismissing Cuba as repressive and failing economically, the Senators argue that "Trade with Latin America is the fastest growing part of our international commerce... Rather than isolate Cuba with outdated policies, we have isolated ourselves ... Current policy boxes US entrepreneurs and companies out of taking part in any of this burgeoning Cuban private sector."

Remarkably, news in November, 2013 that President Obama was questioning US Cuban policies quickly became old news. At a Miami

political fundraiser he had suggested that "in the age of the Internet, Google and world travel," old policies "don't make sense."

This time, news of the survey triggered real discussion even though, significantly, its findings were not new. In fact, annual Gallup polling on Cuba since 1999 has consistently demonstrated nationwide majorities in favour of "re-establishing US diplomatic relations" and ending the blockade. Other surveys yielded similar results. A Florida International University opinion poll in 2008 showed that "a majority of Cuban-Americans now favour ending the ... economic embargo and restoring diplomatic relations" with Cuba, 55 percent and 65 percent, respectively.

In releasing its report, the Atlantic Council attached a remarkably forthright advocacy statement to its recitation of data. The report may be useful for having updated long established trends, but why did it command so much attention?

The Council is no bit player in establishment circles. Former Secretaries of State Dean Acheson and Christian Herter founded it in 1961 as a support mechanism for NATO.

It maintains close ties with prominent US and European NGOs involved with diplomatic and security issues. Weapons manufacturers are corporate members. Directors, some honorary, include diplomatic, defence, and intelligence honchos like Henry Kissinger, James Schlesinger, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, George Shultz, Wesley Clark, Michael Hayden, and Robert Gates.

Perhaps now, with movers and shakers taking things in hand, change really is on the way. But a thorny detail may need attending to: Cuban leaders are unlikely to discuss big changes with US leaders without, first, the Cuban Five political prisoners having been sent home. That's the opinion of Stephen Kimber, author of the only English language book (*What Lies across the Water*) on the case of the Five.

Some of the recent stories on changed attitudes allude to Cuban imprisonment of US contractor Alan Gross – he violated Cuban laws – as accounting for US intransigence on the blockade. Thus the scenario comes into view, maybe, of an exchange of prisoners ushering in talks on re-establishing relations. *People's World* ☼

Sochi Games under fire

Edward Lozansky

When Baron Pierre de Coubertin founded the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1894, he must have been motivated by the hope of reviving sporting competitions on the pattern of the Olympic Games in Ancient Greece.

De Coubertin's contemporaries noted that he wished to create a festive atmosphere around the Games, to be imbued with the noblest human aspirations and emotions.

The IOC Statute specifically emphasises that interference of politics in the preparation and conduct of the Olympics is utterly impermissible. Pierre de Coubertin could hardly have been so naïve as to believe that the statute would be strictly complied with. Still, he certainly did not imagine the extent of the impact on the Games of political intrigue, as well as unbelievable commercialisation, boycotts, bribery, doping, and on two occasions – in Munich in 1972 and in Atlanta in 1996 – even terrorist acts.

The Sochi Olympiad, or rather the epiphenomena connected with it, beat all previous records in terms of the scale of political interference and of the ferocity of world media attacks aimed at boycotting or disrupting the Games.

We are witnessing a species of odd symbiosis between such motley groups as traditional Russophobes, Cold Warriors, radical elements among the LGBT community and human rights organisations, as well as some individuals within the

Russian liberal circles who, along with Islamist extremists, openly talk of inflicting moral or physical damage on the Olympiad.

The impression is that all of those groups would dearly love to see the Games fail ignominiously, while a successful completion of the Olympics would mean a personal disaster for them.

The Western press is doing its damndest to broadcast across the world any fault or mishap at the Games – from a broken toilet bowl or a stray dog spotted in the street to terrorist threats – frequently in a grossly inflated form to enhance the effect.

Until recently, it was virtually impossible to find a single good word about the Olympiad in the Western media; it was truly touching to watch the glee of the Games' ill-wishers when one of the Olympic rings failed to unfold during the opening ceremony.

One of the more revolting episodes in this mass hysteria was the monstrous and nauseating insinuation – the drawing of parallels between Sochi 2014 and Berlin 1936. Without stooping to argue with those who make such comparisons, I would like to remark that if there are any parallels with Germany to be drawn, it is not with Berlin in 1936, but with Munich in 1938.

It was in that year that Britain and France made the notoriously disgraceful concessions to Hitler and Mussolini, which played a significant role in encouraging Nazi Germany to start WW2. And now *Washington Post* correspondent

Sally Jenkins castigated the IOC for choosing Sochi to conduct the 2014 Olympics despite threats from terrorists.

It appears that from now on, IOC members will have to consult terrorists and appease them in selecting a venue for the Games, in the manner of British PM Chamberlain and his colleagues in Munich in 1938.

The *Washington Post* has for years been the indisputable world champion in anti-Russian propaganda.

To be fair, over the last couple of days the Western press – apparently waking to the criticism of indignant readers and commentators – has somewhat mitigated the vitriolic drive of its Sochi Games coverage. One could see some limited praise for the organisers and it was indeed heartening to hear Donald Trump – hardly the biggest admirer of Russia or Putin – politely rebuke the Fox News anchor by saying that it was perhaps about time to give Russians a break and note something good about Sochi, when the guy kept pushing him toward yet another portion of criticism.

Meanwhile, the Olympiad in Sochi follows its course and will end in resounding success. However, let us face the reality: it does not look like the future Olympiads will be able to revive the ideals of the Games as conceived by their founders in Ancient Greece and by Baron de Coubertin. *Russia Today* ☼

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Venezuela's Bolivarian government defends against rightist violence

WT Whitney

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's government is facing its biggest challenge since his electoral victory on April 14, 2013 – still unrecognised by the US government. Nationwide street protests coinciding with Venezuela's "Youth Day" turned violent on February 10. Disruptions continued and two days later in Caracas swarms of masked demonstrators taunted police, ringed public buildings, destroyed official vehicles, and lit fires. Gunfire left three people dead and over 70 wounded. Dozens were imprisoned.

Serious confrontations erupted in Tachira and Merida states, well known for harbouring anti-government paramilitaries from nearby Colombia. Official spokespersons characterised the killings of two victims in Caracas with single shots from one gun as assassinations and, as such, provocations.

Disturbances emerging immediately after Maduro's slim election victory caused 11 deaths. Uprisings then and now, observers say, followed a single script, that of casting Venezuela's Bolivarian government as precarious, now because charismatic leader Hugo Chávez, who preceded Maduro, is gone. Power brokers within Venezuela's still thriving capitalist sector aim at destabilisation. The current turmoil has parallels with the failed, US supported, anti-Chávez coup in 2002.

Washington officials, mindful of Monroe Doctrine traditions of dominating a continent, have little enthusiasm for the Bolivarian Revolution Maduro now heads. It is anti-imperialist, socialist, and – for the region – integrationist. And Venezuela has oil.

With student protesters and others in the streets, millions of US dollars delivered over the past decade

to groups aligned with Venezuela's traditional centres of power and influence seem to be bearing fruit. The National Education for Democracy and the US Agency for International Development served as conduits for funding, much of it directed at organising students in private universities.

Intermittently during the Chávez era and since, those students figured prominently in protests against inflation and shortages. Their demonstrations are big news for 85 percent of national media that is privately owned. Reports have surfaced that behind the scenes importers manipulate currencies and distributors hoard commodities.

Venezuela's Unified Socialist Party, led by Maduro, made big gains in municipal elections on December 8, 2013. Opposition strategists took the message that elections aren't helpful in their project of ousting the Bolivarians. Consequently, protesters' rhetoric within weeks turned to "regime change." Then violent confrontations materialised, spreading widely during the week of February 10. Whether thugs involved are students or infiltrators is unclear, but some admitted to payoffs.

The wealthy Henrique Capriles, the right-wing presidential candidate in elections won by Maduro, condemned the violence. One effect of his dividing opposition ranks was to spotlight veteran hardliners in charge of the current protests, two in particular.

National Assembly deputy Maria Corina Machado, born into wealth, urged protesters to remain in the streets, blaming the government for the killings. She faced allegations of involvement last year in another destabilising plot. Machado once visited the office of President George W Bush in connection with her leadership of the US funded Sumate group, notable for propelling



Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

the anti-Chávez referendum of 2004. She became a "Yale World Fellow," according to Yale, partly because "Sumate's network of volunteers grew to include more than 30,000 members from all over Venezuela." Machado sent two sons to Yale, alma mater of both Bush presidents. In 2002 she signed a document expressing support for the coup government briefly in power then.

Leopoldo López, another elite, heads the rightist Popular Will Party. Facing an arrest warrant as intellectual author of the February 12 disturbances, López tried unsuccessfully to exit Venezuela. He graduated from Kenyon College in Ohio, a nursery for future CIA operatives, says Canadian-Cuban political writer Jean-Guy Allard. He attended Harvard's Kennedy School. Working for the International Republican Institute in

2002 he led the coup plotters' march on the presidential residence.

But now is not 2002: dissident military and police are not involved, security forces control the streets, and by the week's end anti-government protests were losing steam. Government supporters marched by the thousands in Caracas on February 15.

The night before, President Maduro presented a multi-faceted program outlining plans for "a secure country;" demobilisation of armed gangs; a "Movement for Peace and Living Together" in each state; nationwide sport, cultural, and musical tours; a "new communications (meaning TV) culture;" "maximum social discipline" in prisons; and action against "drug traffickers and paramilitaries entering the country."

While the United Nations,

Organisation of American States, and European Union denounced violence and called for dialogue, the US State Department condemned "weakening of democratic institutions in Venezuela." US Senator Marco Rubio accused the Maduro government of creating "an unprecedented wave of repression." Secretary of State Kerry on February 15 threatened "serious negative consequences" should Venezuela's government succeed in arresting López.

Foreign Minister Elías Jaua told reporters on February 17 that his government "confronts a fascist attack at the hands of groups trained specifically to cause violence". Venezuela expelled three US Embassy officials on February 16 for reaching out to the university students.

People's World ☸

Sanctions against Ukraine blackmail

Threats of sanctions against the Ukrainian government look like blackmail, and a demand for early elections is a way to force Kiev towards the EU, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said. The sanctions will only encourage extremists, he added. The statement came just prior to President Viktor Yanukovich leaving Kiev and the parliament appointing the speaker interim president until a May poll. Yanukovich rejected the appointment of the speaker and said that he remained the legitimate president.

Yanukovich had made a statement on television in which he compared the situation in Ukraine with the rise of Nazism in the 1930s.

"Everything that is happening today is, to a greater degree, vandalism and banditry and a coup d'état. I will do everything to protect my country from break-up, to stop bloodshed."

He continued, "I am not leaving

the country for anywhere. I do not intend to resign. I am the legitimately elected government."

Lavrov blasted the sanctions against Ukraine, some of which have already been imposed by the US, and are now being eyed by the EU, as "double standards." Such actions will only encourage extremists to continue violence in the country, he said.

"The [Ukrainian] opposition cannot or does not want to dissociate itself from extremists. The US lays all the blame on the Ukrainian government – this is a double standard," Lavrov said.

"The EU is also trying to discuss the imposing of sanctions, at the same time there are uninvited missions coming to Ukraine. Such actions resemble blackmail," the minister said. [Since Lavrov's statement, the EU decided on sanctions – Ed]

Not only are such threats "inappropriate," but also will aggravate the conflict in Ukraine, Foreign

Ministry spokesman, Aleksandr Lukashevich, said.

There is "no doubt" a "plain coup attempt" is going on in Ukraine, with armed rioters widely using firearms, the spokesman added.

"We strongly condemn the actions of radicals and extremists, who are mostly responsible for violence and bloody riots. Serious responsibility also lies with the opposition, who have been unable to fulfil the agreements reached with the government," Lukashevich said.

The so-called Maidan [Independence Square] leaders must "immediately stop bloodshed" and "continue seeking a peaceful resolution to the crisis without threats or ultimatums," he stressed.

Russia's President Putin, in response to a proposal from President Yanukovich, is going to send ombudsman Vladimir Lukin to Kiev to mediate talks between the government and the opposition,

Kremlin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, after the two leaders had spoken on the phone.

"It's well known that Lukin has vast diplomatic service experience, is admired among rights activists and used to lead a large opposition party," Peskov said.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Lukashevich said that there are plenty of "false flag reports," such as Russian riot police taking part in quelling the riots, which are distributed over social networks and by "some politicians."

"As regards to the accusations of Russia, there is a proverb saying that a guilty mind is never at ease. We are deeply concerned with what is happening and how the Western states are commenting on it and are trying to affect it. In Western media, the situation is presented in an extremely perverted way, some simple mantras are hammered into heads like that the West is calling on the government to keep its hands off Maidan," Lavrov said. However,

the Western politicians and media prefer not to go into detail on what is happening on Maidan.

"Police pelted with Molotov cocktails, the killings, the seizure of buildings – none of that is being commented on or explained," the minister said.

The individual sanctions that the US and the EU are trying to impose are "absolutely illegitimate" from the point of view of the international law, the Russian Foreign Ministry said. The only legitimate sanctions can be imposed by the UN Security Council, the ministry stressed.

Another senior Russian diplomat said that an information war has begun in Ukraine creating a dangerous situation.

"Invented stories about mass hostage taking and murders are being spread via social networking services. All this creates a very dangerous atmosphere," Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin told Rossiya 24 TV.

Russia Today ☸

Letters to the Editor
The Guardian
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as Victoria sweltered though several heatwaves with temperatures hovering on 40 degrees and more, I wonder are there any people left in Melbourne and the rest of the state and country who still really believe our weather hasn't dramatically changed. And realise we need to get active and do something to stop things getting worse.

Steven Katsineris
Vic

On climate change

Welcome some wonderful rain. After months of dry, hot weather, a little rain has come, with cooler conditions and relief at last from the searing heat. No smoke haze, no smell of burning bushland and grassland and the threat of fires. Lovely to breath in the fresh air, feel the rain on my face, smell the fragrant bush, see the trees and plants wet and know I don't have to water the garden.

It's been a struggle to keep the plants and animals, domestic and native alive. Even a modest bit of rain brings joy and makes the weary spirit soar. Hopefully that's the end of another scary, tiring summer. I'm sure the whole community is feeling very relieved. My heartfelt sympathy goes out to those who have lost homes and possessions in the fires.

And grateful thanks to the work of the volunteers of the CFA and other organisations: without their fantastic efforts things would have been much worse this summer. And

BA Santamaria

Gerard Henderson has ignored the real issue in his article, "Sectarian effort to smear PM" (*The West Australian* 15.2.2014) when he claimed that it was anti-Catholic sectarianism that has led to criticism of PM Tony Abbott because he was mentored by BA Santamaria, the late right-wing political activist.

There are many Catholics who are also very critical of BA Santamaria's legacy in Australian politics. It is well known by older generations that he founded the National Civic Council (NCC) and the Democratic Labour Party (DLP). The DLP, of course, was not a labour party. It was formed to keep a more progressive ALP out of office for about two decades by always directing its preferences to the Coalition.

I suggest that Gerard Henderson read the book, "Santamaria and the Politics of Fear", which was edited by Paul Ormond. All contributors to this book are practising Catholics, who

were very critical of Santamaria's politics. The book, by the way, was launched in 2000 by Hilton Deakin, Emeritus Bishop of Melbourne. I am not a Catholic, but Hilton and I became friends through our work in the East Timor solidarity movement.

Various aspects of Santamaria's politics are analysed and the contributors came to the conclusion that Santamaria was a fascist. He was a strong supporter of Franco and Mussolini and promoted fascism in the lead-up to World War II.

Later, he became a strong supporter of the US invasion of Vietnam and the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, two very shameful periods of our history that even most conservative Australians believe were morally wrong. I well remember, as would many older Australians, his trenchant attacks on those involved in the peace, social justice and human rights movements.

Santamaria did not support these concepts as was evidenced in the NCC paper *News Weekly*, which set out to blacken the reputations of those fighting for peace, social justice and human rights.

My understanding is that before he died, Santamaria agreed that he was wrong on the Timor issue and more recently, the revitalised DLP has spoken out against the Indonesian genocide in West Papua.

The legacy of Santamaria lives on in Australian politics although he has been dead for over a decade. His influence can be seen in the right wing of both the ALP and the Liberal Party and would be one of the factors

that has led to Australian leaders of both parties getting us involved in a series of US initiated wars and to having callous (un-Christian?) attitudes towards asylum seekers coming to our shores.

This is not about sectarianism; it is about whether one supports the politics of social justice or not. Santamaria did not and neither does his disciple, our PM.

Andrew (Andy) Alcock
SA

The democracy they want

Today there are three capitalist democracies that are being challenged by serious street protests; Ukraine, Egypt and Thailand. What makes these protests interesting is how the imperialists respond.

If the imperialists "democratic" rhetoric matches their actions they would be condemning the street protests in Ukraine as violent anti-democratic behaviour but they haven't: nowhere is even the word democracy brought up by the imperialist media. Bigger our democratic propaganda they laugh, we want Ukraine to be controlled by us in the EU so let's support overthrowing a democratic elected government. So clearly bourgeois democracies are only acceptable if the bourgeois dictatorship controls them.

Another example of this is in Egypt; the religious majority won the election and generally the

imperialists would be comfortable with this but the Brotherhood as Arab people have sympathy for the Palestinian struggle which is seen by the imperialists as a threat to the satellite state of Israel which they are still building.

The best outcome for the imperialists was to take the position; who cares about democracy once again, let's put back in place a military dictatorship which we can control by offering corrupt billions to it. So democracies are conveniently overthrown until the imperialists get the "democracy" they want.

The third example of prolonged street protests against capitalist "democracies" is in Thailand. In some ways this is the most interesting because it bucks the other two examples and has some origins of anti-capitalism which we sympathise with. Within the language of the street protests is the hatred of the billionaire ex-Prime Minister Thaksin. He is so powerful that even though he no longer lives in Thailand he can control it via his sister who is the current Prime Minister.

To their credit they chased this billionaire out of the country but once again imperialism plays its part by giving Thaksin a refuge to hid in. Although most of the opposition in Thailand seem to have a conservative historical cultural agenda their hatred towards the billionaire dictatorship does give hope that these capitalist dictatorships can be beaten back.

Peta Darren
Vic

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

"They don't want to work"

A friend of mine in the then USSR once encountered a visiting American tourist, a psychiatrist in private practice in New York, then – as now – the psychiatric capital of the world. My friend asked this professional career woman whether, if he went to America, he would be able to get a job (he drove a taxi in Moscow). She informed him that he would "certainly" be able to get a job, because the only people in the USA who were unemployed were "blacks or people who don't want to work".

A self-employed psychiatrist in New York would be unlikely to ever actually meet an unemployed person except perhaps as a beggar on a street corner. Certainly, they'd not be able to afford to consult the good lady. To move her socio-economic position even further away from that of the unemployed, her husband was a corporate head-hunter. That is, he was "consulted" by large companies when they wanted to hire a new executive. He discussed their requirements with them, then sought out suitable executives at other firms, took them to lunch and "smoozed" them while seeking to stitch together a "remuneration package" that might entice them to jump ship by dumping their present company and coming to work for his client.

Such "executive placement consultants" are paid a very good screw indeed, so between them this New York couple were very well off.

And yet they *knew* that the only unemployed people in America were "blacks or people who don't want to work". In their minds it was an indisputable fact. It seems to me that all arch-conservatives also know this to be a certainty. Certainly, Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Federal Treasurer Joe Hockey are convinced of it. It's a very convenient point of view for people like them, because if unemployment *were* the result of people being unwilling to work, then the government is off the hook: unemployment is no longer a socio-economic problem, and it is certainly not *their* problem.

The snag is, of course, that unemployment is *not* the result of people being unwilling to work. It is the result of a shortage of jobs, of the lack of work itself. And *that* is a systemic fault, a fault in the economic system itself, a fault in capitalism. As a young man said at a meeting I attended years ago, "a system that cannot provide jobs for all the members of society has no future".

That is true, but that rotten system will actually only disappear when the people have had enough and decide to stand up and get rid of it. Until then, capitalism will tenaciously cling on and will go on causing mass unemployment willy-nilly as it arbitrarily shifts production from one country to another in search of lower costs, de-industrialises whole countries and wastes the productive capacity of others as it seeks always to maximise its profits regardless of social needs and social impacts.

Capitalism and unemployment have gone hand in hand since the beginning of the industrial revolution, when farm labourers and small peasants were thrown off the land to either starve or seek employment as factory-hands in the steam-driven wool and cotton mills that were beginning to appear or as labourers in the mines that opened up to provide the coal and iron ore for those and the new steel mills.

The chaotic, unplanned nature of capitalism meant that these same mines and mills experienced the ever-present cycles of boom and bust, as the American Civil War cut off supplies of cotton to the Lancashire mills for a time, to be replaced by production in India and Egypt. After the end of that war, the Lancashire mill owners enjoyed a period of boom conditions until 1920. Some of them made enough money that they actually took a paternal interest in their workers' welfare, developing grandiose schemes for "model villages" and other healthy projects to benefit their grubby, hungry employees.

The crash of 1920 ended Lancashire's



supremacy in cotton and threw thousands out of work. Concepts like the dole or unemployment relief did not spring spontaneously into the minds of government or employers. The people had to demand them and fight for them, before grudging governments reluctantly provided a modicum of relief.

We do well to remember that, within living memory, and in far richer countries than Australia, people thrown out of work *starved*. "If you worked, you ate. If there was no work, you went hungry." Initially, to get the dole, workers had to labour on public works like clearing the weeds out of Sydney's Centennial Park ponds. And the dole itself was not paid in cash but as a flour-bagful of rations. It took a hard fought campaign by workers led by their trade unions to get the dole paid in cash.

Employers (especially outback station owners) liked the idea of people working just for their tucker, and the well-organised shearers in particular had to fight for the rights of casual farm workers to be paid an actual wage.

That fondly-remembered "golden age" when workers were obliged to work for whatever the boss was willing to cough up as compensation, whether it was wages or just tucker, is the kind of social system that the likes of Prime Minister Abbott and Treasurer Hockey not only would like to see again in Australia but which they are actively working towards.

Make no mistake, there is no humanity in capitalism. If it means higher profits for them, capitalists will move every single factory in Australia to a foreign country where the wages are lower. Like workers in other developed countries – in Europe, for example – Australians who want a job will soon have to either leave the country in search of work or else accept whatever starvation wage is on offer here.

McDonalds has just announced the opening of a giant burger-bar on the NSW Central Coast and are crowing that it will provide 1,500 new jobs. But they will all be McJobs, at minimum wages and like all McDonalds, only kids will be employed. What a future! ☹



Sunday March 2 –
Saturday March 8

The ABC has apparently decided that Sunday isn't Sunday without David Attenborough. After devoting two Sundays to David Attenborough explaining the rise of mammals, the next was given over to David Attenborough romping with the pterosaurs. This week, in *David Attenborough's Natural History Museum Alive* (ABC1 Sunday March 2 at 7:30pm), without leaving the confines of London's Natural History Museum, he romps with all manner of extinct creatures, from a feathered Archaeopteryx who demonstrates the latest scientific finding (that it had the necessary musculature to allow it to actually fly rather than just glide as previously thought) by flying around the interior of the museum, to a giant sloth as tall as Attenborough himself, that lumbers across the tiled floor of the museum to peer – eyeball to eyeball – at the popular naturalist-broadcaster as though wondering whether he might substitute for a tree.

If that sounds a trifle arch, it is because the program is in fact very arch. It appears to have been intended to introduce children to the science associated with the study of extinct animals. Attenborough enters into the spirit of the thing wholeheartedly, pretending to interact with each of the various extinct animals examined. I found the archness of

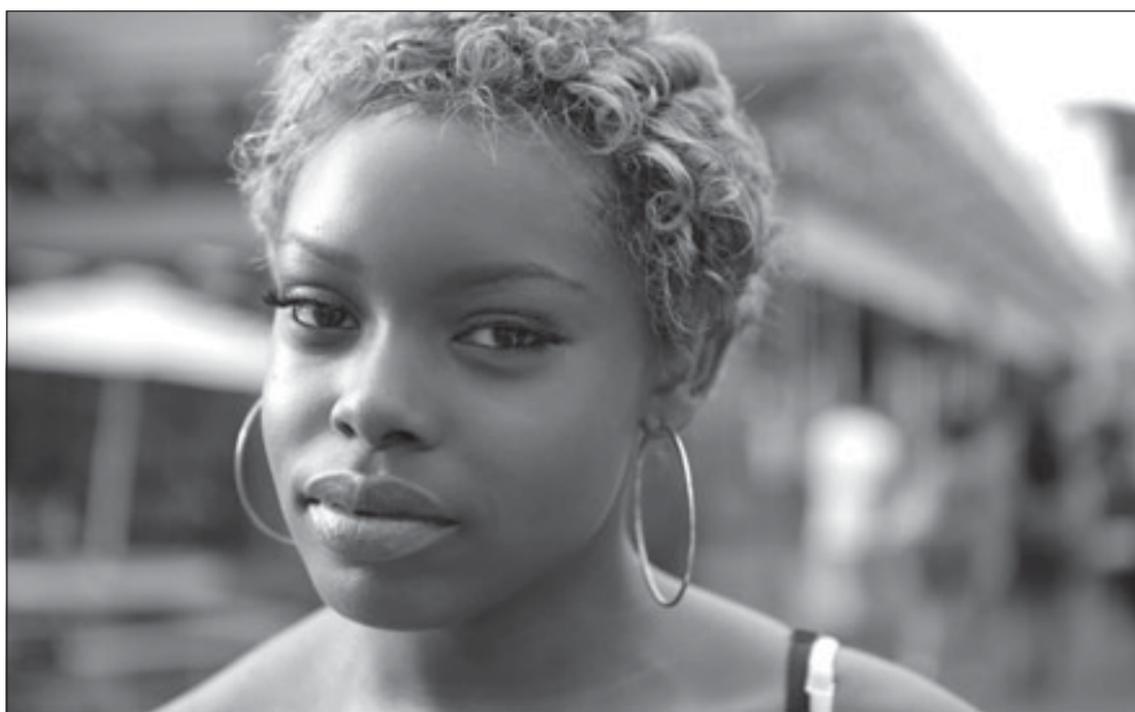
the pretence rather off-putting, but I suspect that young people would not. And the program does allow him to impart a surprising amount of the very latest scientific information and opinion about the animals being studied.

Because of this up-to-date information, I found myself riveted to the screen despite the rather precious nature of the program's chosen format. You probably will too. Admittedly, the cgi work is quite impressive (although we are becoming blasé about that these days). Produced by a BAFTA and Emmy award-winning team, the program was filmed by the same team behind recent 3D blockbuster *Gravity*, with visual effects produced by a team whose combined credits include work on the successful *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* franchises.

Being born a girl means you are more likely to be subjected to violence, disease, poverty and disadvantage than any other group on the planet. *I Am A Girl* (ABC2 Wednesday March 5 at 8.35pm) is a documentary that paints a picture of the reality of what it means to be a girl in the 21st century. Feminism may have promised equality and sought a better and fairer world for women, but the reality is that girls and young women make up almost a quarter of the world's population, yet still face the greatest discrimination of any group on the planet.

Stylistically the documentary is poetic and observational, capturing the day-to-day realities of being a girl. The film follows a day on earth as it transpires for six girls from a pastiche of diverse cultures and societies around the globe. The interwoven narratives use the motifs of landscapes and "coming of age" events, whether that is graduating from school, motherhood or an early marriage.

"What does it mean to be a girl in the world today? Aged between 14 and 19, Breani from the rough part of New York, Manu from PNG, Aziza from Afghanistan, Habibi



Breani from New York, *I Am A Girl* (ABC2 Wednesday March 5 at 8.35pm).

from Cameroon, Kimsey from Cambodia and Katie from Sydney seem to have little in common. ... Breani is a wanna-be rap artist whose songs are upbeat; Manu has been ostracised by her traditional family for becoming pregnant to her boyfriend; Aziza is determinedly pursuing schooling in Afghanistan after her father has been murdered by the Taliban; Habibi is preparing to be married; Kimsey recounts the heartbreaking story of becoming a child prostitute to support her family; and Katie, on the face of it the most fortunate in a middle class life, talks about her battles with depression.

"This remarkable documentary goes beyond the surface to show their strengths, fears, frailties and hopes. We are taken into their lives, thoughts and confidence by Australian filmmaker Rebecca Barry (*Footy Chicks*), who never intrudes or imposes herself on the narrative. She wisely offers no voice-over commentary, but allows

her camera to glide in for close-up shots and records the girls' stories in their own voices. At times you feel this observer status must have been incredibly hard to maintain, as when the camera closes in on Manu, alone and scared, preparing to give birth in an overcrowded and unhygienic Port Moresby hospital, or when Kimsey is threatened by her thug of a boyfriend.

"Kimsey's story is by far the hardest to watch, and her stoic retelling of how she was convinced to sell her virginity at 12 years old is only the start of a series of injustices. But the film is far from being an exercise in teaching privileged middle class audiences to be grateful for what they have. It is compelling, emotional and very, very beautiful. ... It isn't without flaws. Of all the stories I had trouble connecting to Habibi, whom we follow over four days preparing for her wedding. ... She is adamant that she is marrying for love, but the film doesn't explore how someone

in their late teens came to meet and marry a man 20 years her senior or examine how much of a choice she had." – *Her Canberra*.

India: A Dangerous Place To Be A Woman (ABC2 Wednesday March 5 at 9.30pm) – the title says it all. Despite having had a woman as Prime Minister, the reality facing the majority of Indian women is grim, with the social attitudes of many men, especially among the poor and uneducated, being very backward indeed. This film explores this reality today, in the light of the protests that erupted across India in December 2012 following the death of a young woman who was brutally gang-raped aboard a moving bus.

Radha Bedi, a 28-year-old British Indian, goes to India to discover the tougher reality of life for young women there. She meets girls who have suffered appalling brutality, and she meets men who blame women for the violence they suffer. ☹

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Why bulk billing is important

Dr Con Costa is a Sydney GP and national president of the Doctors' Reform Society (DRS). The DRS was formed in 1973 to support a proposal for a publicly-funded universal health insurance system. Medibank (now Medicare) was successfully created despite opposition from the Australian Medical Association (AMA). The DRS is strongly opposed to the introduction of a Medicare co-payment as are other medical organisations including the AMA, College of GPs and health unions. Dr Costa was one of the speakers at the "Stop Abbott, Save Medicare" rally in Sydney on February 15. The following is his speech:

Before I talk about the effect that a \$6 co-payment will have on our health care system I want to take you back to the days before Medicare.

Some of you may be too young to remember what our public health system looked like before Medicare, so let me paint a picture for you.

Before Medicare

Before Medicare (and Medibank) it was not unusual for people to be locked up and put in jail because they were unable to pay for the medical bills. In fact, at one time, in South Australia it was the most common reason for being jailed. Many Australians, at that time, lived under the threat of punishment for failing to pay for the costs associated with their family's medical care and treatment.

Before Medicare, there were few doctors outside of the lower North Shore or the eastern suburbs. People living in the western suburbs or much of rural Australia couldn't afford to see a GP so the GPs didn't venture out west. Many of the people living in these areas were forced to resort to the emergency department of their closest hospitals for basic treatment and care. They would wait for hours in outpatients departments to see a doctor.

Before Medicare, the only women who could access women's health checks were wealthy women. Women who could not afford pap smears, mammograms and other essential check-ups simply went without. As the primary care-givers, this also meant that these women couldn't access medical care and check-ups for their kids and families.

Before Medicare, immunisation rates were dependent on community health or public immunisation programs and schools. That was the only way that children could access this type of preventative health care. Today, many of these programs no longer exist, so children from families who can't afford to see their local GP will resort to going to their local hospital and waiting in the emergency room to be immunised. We could potentially see a rise in epidemics of disease and illnesses we have already fought so hard to hold back.

This is what our health care system was like before Medicare. I want you to keep all this in mind before I start talking about the \$6 co-payment that the government may introduce.

Since Medicare

Since Medicare and bulk-billing were introduced: doctors have gone out west to areas where they are needed, we have a better economic provision of health care for all Australians, bulk-billing has kept access to GP viable for all Australians by keeping a lid on GP-related costs. It is important to note that Medicare-related costs have not increased in over a decade. This means that since Medicare was introduced the health care system has already been more affordable and sustainable for patients and for government.

The importance of the affordability of seeing a family doctor or local GP is priceless to our public health system. If most people can see a GP it means they can access routine health checks and screening, and all-in-all they can receive preventative care that provides early

and effective treatment at a much lower cost for the community and the country, compared to high hospital costs.

Just imagine how much worse off and costly it would be if a third of all Australians had no access to a GP.

Remember: There are no longer the public immunisation programs, community health services, check-ups, dental programs etc that there were in pre-Medicare days.

So, in essence the state of our health care system would be worse than pre-Medicare days when people were jailed for health bills!

Rural areas and poorer country towns, women, Indigenous Australians and those living in outer urban areas of major cities would be amongst the biggest losers. These groups have most to lose from LNP proposed cutbacks.

The government has spoken a lot about the disadvantages of bulk-billing. But, in fact, bulk-billing has kept medical costs very low and sustainable without any increase over the last decade. Bulk-billing means that whilst there are enough doctors using the billing rebate of \$36 (per-consult), Medicare can control the market in health care and associated costs – including blood pathology tests and X-rays, mammograms, MRI scans etc.

Bulk-billing at risk

If the Abbott government proposed \$6 co-payment is introduced it won't just be \$6 that Australians will have to fork out from their pockets. Many more doctors will stop bulk-billing. Currently non bulk-billing doctors charge on average \$65 per standard consultation. The AMA recommended rate is \$72 per standard consultation. So if we do stop bulk-billing there will be a significant cost per person, per visit overnight.

The implications of a \$6 co-payment need to be considered also.

Allegedly, the Abbott government says it will save \$180 million per annum. That is a saving of \$180 million from a \$140 billion system. This is a piddling amount of money when you compare what we are set to lose.

Higher costs

The Doctors' Reform Society disputes Mr Hockey's budgeting outlook on this issue. We argue that in the long term the government won't save any money if a \$6 co-payment is introduced. If bulk-billing is scrapped in place of a co-payment, most pathology, X-ray and MRI centres would follow suit. Currently just a routine check-up of 10 battery tests or a standard MRI costs \$500. Those who are in need of regular monthly or even weekly check-ups to keep on top of their health to avoid being sent to hospital will be unable to afford such costs.

So what will they do?

Many Australians who can't afford these high costs will simply have no choice but to flood back into emergency departments to have their blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol levels checked and their scans and X-rays done. Such a response will only seek to place increased pressure and stress on our hospitals.

A recent report from the AMA about Australia's poor public hospital performance shows we already cannot afford to let Medicare and our current bulk-billing health system go. Our



Dr Costa speaking at the "Stop Abbott, Save Medicare" rally in Sydney: "Mr Hockey's message to Australians is quite clear: if you don't pay you go without; in health terms, if you don't pay you die". (Photo: Anna Pha)

hospitals simply cannot be put in such a position without disastrous consequences for those who need emergency responsive treatment and intensive care.

So as you can see the Abbott government proposed \$6 co-payment will cost Australians a lot more than \$6. It will destroy the Medicare and bulk-billing system that has been put in place to provide affordable and sustainable health care in this country and replace it with expensive private health insurance. It will mean an Americanisation and privatisation of our health care system.

Americanisation

Just to provide you with a snapshot of an American-style system of health. I had a patient who recently returned from a family holiday to Hawaii. Her four-year-old son came down with an ear infection and she was forced to take him to a local doctor who charged her \$500 for a consultation plus the additional costs associated with the medication and scripts she was given to treat to her child. That is what we can expect from such a pay-as-you-use system.

The proposed pay-as-you-go \$6 co-payment will not save money or make the health system more sustainable, it will simply drive up costs to the individual and families. It will create a two-tier health system where the rich are slugged a ridiculous amount for health care, driving up Private Health Insurance costs and premiums through the roof, while at the same time excluding those who cannot afford to pay from our health care system altogether.

Mr Hockey's message to Australians is quite clear: if you don't pay you go without; in health terms, if you don't pay you die.

This is not about saving money; this is an ideological attack on bulk-billing! Medicare outlays by the federal government have been flat-lining for over 10 years. The real increase in the health dollar is in the hospitals and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).

Where we have seen the big increase in health costs are the high costs of hospital care and government over generous deals with the big pharmaceutical companies. The same cholesterol drug that cost \$40 in Australia, \$20 wholesale at your local chemist, costs only \$2 in New Zealand and \$3 in the UK. Our

government is simply not getting a good deal for Australians.

I might not be an expert economist or a politician; I'm just a GP with over 30 years' experience in public health. But if I wanted to save money and make our health system sustainable for an ageing population, I would definitely NOT destroy primary health care and bulk-billing by introducing a co-payment to reduce GP care.

A sustainable approach

Instead, I would:

Expand primary care into the community, including access to a GP so that people have the right to good healthcare in the home and community at cheaper costs.

What we need to do is expand Medicare into nursing homes, rural communities and palliative care. That proper servicing in the community would save a lot of money by taking pressure off the growth in expensive hospital care.

When new contracts are up for signing with Big Pharma this year, Mr Hockey could save the health system billions of dollars by negotiating a fairer price on pharmaceuticals for all Australians. That's a lot more than they would supposedly save by destroying affordable GP care.

We should include dental care under Medicare – so that Australians can again access treatment for their teeth. That means seriously considering the idea of universal dental care in an Australian system of universal health care.

I would review private specialist fees. It is unacceptable that a specialist can charge \$5,000 for a cataract operation, make \$40,000 in one morning alone and cost the health care system \$4 or \$5 million a year, when most Australians can't access or afford to see a specialist.

That's what we could do to ensure the affordability and long-term sustainability of a public health care system for all Australians and save the health dollar.

On a separate personal note, I feel that if we don't all stick together and fight to save Medicare for all Australians, both the haves and have-nots, many of us will become refugees in our own health system. And I fear the \$6 co-payment is only the beginning. ❖



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