



# Eviction plan for oldest suburbs Massive land grab

Peter Mac

**The NSW government plans to evict more than 400 public housing residents from Sydney's historic Millers Point and The Rocks within two years, and to sell off their houses and flats. The move would destroy a community whose ties stretch back five generations.**

Residents received the catastrophic news of the government's decision in a letter pushed into their letterboxes or under their doors, like an advertising leaflet. There was no prior discussion. It was a grossly insensitive act and an insult, but it also showed that the government is worried about resistance.

The government claims that rental subsidies are too high in these areas, and that selling the properties would provide funds for construction of new public housing, and would eliminate the high costs of maintaining the old buildings. They warned that resistance would slow down the provision of new homes for the 27,000 people on the public housing waiting list. (Rental subsidy is the difference between market rent for the area and public housing rent.)

However, there is no guarantee that the sale proceeds would be ploughed back into public housing. They'll almost certainly just disappear into consolidated revenue.

Moreover, not all the buildings concerned are old. The Sirius building, a reinforced concrete block of 79 flats, (which featured in Ruth Park's novel *Playing Beattie Bow*) was built in the 1970s.

And whether buildings are old or new, failure to maintain them over a long period actually increases costs, because what was at first a simple remedial process eventually becomes a major exercise after surfaces or building elements fail.

Successive governments have not allocated sufficient funds for necessary works to the public housing stock in the area, and have let some of the buildings become uninhabitable. The O'Farrell government is using the dilapidated condition of some of the 298 dwellings as a convenient excuse to forcibly evacuate and sell off all of them.

The purchasers of the 50 buildings sold to date were certainly not deterred by high maintenance costs. They couldn't wait to get their hands on buildings that have wonderful character and magnificent views, and are a short walk from the heart of the city's central business district, including Barangaroo.

One estate agent gushed: "It's a spectacular area and once it's gentrified ... it will be such

an exclusive suburb". A house recently sold by the government was auctioned for more than \$3 million, and the maximum price paid for a property in Millers Point in the last 12 months was \$6.3 million.

### Location, location!

The Rocks and Millers Point, Australia's oldest suburbs, have seen major battles over recent decades because of their high real estate value. They were originally inhabited mainly by the families of wharf labourers and storemen, and many of the houses were provided for them by the former Maritime Services Board.

In the 1970s, the NSW government approved a major redevelopment of The Rocks that would have involved demolition of most of its early buildings. That appalling initiative was defeated after a campaign that involved concerned citizens, the National Trust and community organisations.

The campaign was led by the Builders' Labourers Federation, which placed the world's first green bans on the proposed demolition sites. That caught world attention and spurred the formation of "green" parties in Australia and overseas.

The union was attempting to preserve the rights of the residents, not just to save the buildings. Last week Sydney's Lord Mayor, Clover Moore, wrote: "Many residents in the neighbourhood have connections that go back generations. They can talk vividly about Sydney's history as a working harbour. They have an irreplaceable connection to their local neighbourhood."

Millers Point is listed on the State Heritage Register as "a living cultural landscape". The listing provides the buildings with a degree of protection against demolition or abuse, but the community which also contributes to the area's significance is now under threat.

Peter Phibbs, professor of urban planning at Sydney University, described the eviction plan as clumsy, inhumane and inconsistent with the government's policy regarding ageing. He commented acidly: "It seems to be driven by people trying to get their hands on some quick cash ...".

More than 40 percent of the current residents are now aged 60 or over. A government report warned that the mental and physical health of residents with long-term ties to the area, especially the aged, would be damaged by enforced relocation.

It also noted that low-income rental stock in the city of Sydney had fallen by up to 45 percent between 2006 and 2011, and recommended



The Sirius complex was built to rehouse public tenants who had been displaced after a controversial redevelopment of the historic Rocks suburb during the 1960s and '70s.

the provision of affordable housing in the area for some residents.

The Minister for Community Services, Pru Goward, replied that the government would "make every effort to assist tenants to find a property close to their preferred area," but would not build any more public housing in the Rocks or Millers Point.

### Resist and defeat!

The government certainly has an obligation to use its resources wisely, to satisfy the demand for affordable housing. However, it is also obliged to respect residents' emotional and cultural links to places their families have called home for generations.

But the government intends to sell off the properties to the super-wealthy as fast as possible, and is far too impatient to even allow the current residents to live out their time in dignity in their current homes.

Implementation of the Rocks/Millers

Point eviction plan would set a precedent for the eviction of tenants from public housing in the inner city suburbs of Balmain, Glebe, Kirribilli, Woolloomooloo, Redfern, Surry Hills and Waterloo, all areas of rapidly rising rental prices.

Moreover, the logic of the government's economic rationalist argument is that all public housing tenants should be relocated to the areas of cheapest rent, the city's outermost suburbs.

The eviction plan has been condemned by community organisations, the Council of the City of Sydney and the Tenants Union of NSW. The NSW Council of Social Services stated that the plan dumps the "social mix" policy that is crucial for the success of public housing projects.

A rally was held last Friday and others are planned for this week. *Guardian* readers are urged to attend and to participate in this vital campaign to save public housing in The Rocks and Millers Point. ★

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## Guardian

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### “Free speech” for whom

Those promoting the push to water down the *Racial Discrimination Act* – the corporate mass media – are the ones who have the means to put out their poisonous slurs far and wide. It is a push for division and is targeted at multiculturalism. It will be felt in particular by Indigenous Australians, with a history of being the brunt of discrimination, dispossession and attempted genocide.

The scrapping of section 18c of the Act that refers to the use of offensive language is a foot in the door to remove restraints on those in positions of power and influence to demonise sections of society (see the treatment and demonisation of asylum seekers).

As the ruling class enters a new phase in the system’s inherent crisis the means are being put in place to quell growing public opposition and to gag public speech itself: to drown out the voice of the people.

This is the class nature of “free speech”.

The *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (RDA)* was introduced by the Labor Whitlam government. The power of the national Parliament to pass the laws over-riding the states and territories arose under the “external affairs” power in the Australian Constitution. This in turn arose from the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination to which Australia is a signatory.

It was law whose time had not only come but was long overdue. Now, as with other international conventions that Australia has and is violating, the Abbott government is intent on paring back the RDA.

Attorney-General George Brandis said the government “would repeal (from the RDA) that language which constitutes an unreasonable limitation on freedom of speech”. The springboard is known as the “Andrew Bolt provision” named after the muck-raking, sensationalist Murdoch columnist who also has his own prime-time Sunday morning talk show. The provision came about because Bolt claimed that some people with light coloured skin only claimed to be Aboriginal so they could receive certain welfare payments.

And there it is: someone in a position of power in media publicly casts a slur. Bolt is a willing cipher, a means to an end. And what end is it? Where is it expected to lead?

To see an example look to Hungary where, in the name of free speech, last November in Budapest a statue was erected of Miklos Horthy, who ruled Hungary from 1920 to 1944. Horthy was a fascist who collaborated with Nazi Germany and who through anti-Jewish laws promoted by mass propaganda, sent more than half a million Jews to the death camps. At the same time in the north-east Hungarian city of Miskolc, a group of fascists participated in a book-burning. The police standing by did nothing.

Extreme right forces are now on the rise around the world, nowhere more clearly at the moment than in Ukraine. Australia is not an exception, as it is not immune to the global crisis currently racking capitalism. Sections of the ruling class are increasingly looking to and supporting these forces as a means to suppress opposition to ruthless austerity programs being imposed upon the population.

As the *Guardian* stated on its front page last week, this is the “time for fightback”. The article went on to call for action, including for the defence of the right to join a trade union as a basic human right.

These are the fundamental rights now under threat, and the attack on the RDA is part of this widening offensive. Last week’s Australia-wide March in March protests against the Abbott agenda must mark the beginning of growing opposition by the working people and their allies.

### PRESS FUND

Some asylum seekers who recently entered Australian waters in a fishing boat said they were intercepted by the Australian Navy and forced into an orange-coloured lifeboat. They were all sealed in, men women and children, and taken back to Indonesian waters. After the three day journey they emerged from the boat’s interior reeking of human waste and vomit, an experience chillingly similar to that of Nazi prisoners who were herded into cattle trucks. We intend to cover the struggle against this appalling abuse of human rights. However, we need your help by way of contributions to the Press Fund, which helps us cover the *Guardian’s* production costs, so please send us something for the next edition if you possibly can. Many thanks to the following for their generous support this week:

K McCandless, in memory of Pauline Mitchell \$100

K M \$15, Mark Mannion \$5, Armador and Roshan \$50, “Round Figure” \$10

This week’s total: \$180 Progressive total \$1,840

# Celebrate 70 years of struggle



Tom Costa centre.

**The Sydney’s Inner West Branch of the CPA is celebrating life of veteran communist Tom Costa. *Guardian* readers are invited to join Tom and his Comrades as many historic events are retold.**

Tom worked for an end to British colonial rule in Cyprus, an end to Turkish military occupation and division of the island, for the building of progressive Cypriot and Greek organisations in Sydney and for the rights of the working class in Australia and around the world.

He was born in 1927 in Akaki, Cyprus, a small village of peasant farmers. At a young age he became conscious of the need to struggle for an improvement in the conditions of life of the people and against the oppression of British colonial rule. In 1943 he joined the Communist Party of Cyprus, AKEL.

In 1951 he migrated to Australia with his wife, Phroso, and young daughter, Mary. His other children – Con, Andrew and Dorothy – were born in Australia. From those early days, his wife Phroso became a tireless supporter and fellow traveller in a lifetime of progressive struggle.

Tom did not hesitate to join the Communist Party of Australia and became active in the communist movement, the trade union movement and in the organisations of Cypriot and Greek immigrants in Sydney.

He became a wharfie. In the Waterside Workers’ Federation he struggled to overcome the harsh exploitation of waterside workers

and took strong action against the war policies of the Menzies government.

He devoted much time to the plight of his fellow immigrants from Cyprus and also from Greece. He fought for the right of immigrants – who performed the most laborious jobs in Australian industries – to be politically active. He fought against political discrimination by the government in denying citizenship to activists.

He played a significant role in the establishment of the Greek Atlas League. He has and continues to be an active participant in the Greek Orthodox Community.

Tom is highly regarded for his many years of involvement in the

Cyprus Community and has contributed greatly to its strength and viability to the organisation and the Friends of AKEL. He has been at the forefront of solidarity with the people of Cyprus who strive for an end to Turkish military occupation and unification of the island in the interest of Greek and Turkish Cypriots.

Tom has always valued his membership of the Communist Party of Australia and he continues to be an active member of the Inner West branch of the CPA.

So, please join us on this rare opportunity to be part of history as we celebrate the life and struggles of an Australian immigrant communist. Details below. ☘

Join Tom Costa & Comrades

Sydney

## 70 years of struggle

Sunday April 27 at 2pm

636 New Canterbury Rd Hurlstone Park (enter from rear)

**Historical photos and oral history film**

**Cypriot food and drinks**

Donations on the day will be accepted by the Inner West Branch of the CPA towards ongoing struggle of the working class and oppressed peoples in Australia and around the world.

## Bob Crow

It’s with great sadness that the World Federation of Trade Unions received the shocking news that our comrade Bob Crow, General Secretary of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) had passed away at the early age of 52.

Comrade Bob Crow was born in 1961 and was a life long fighter, being active in the trade union movement for more than 30 years. In 2002 he was elected General Secretary of the RMT in the UK.

During his life he has participated in and led several important union struggles, fighting for the rights and the interests of the working class, gaining the genuine

respect and support of his colleagues and comrades. He was also an active militant of the class oriented trade union movement on national and international level.

Bob Crow’s demise is a great loss for the World Federation of Trade Unions and the international class-oriented trade union movement. The WFTU wishes to express its full solidarity with his union, RMT, and its sincere condolences to his family, colleagues and friends. In honour of his memory, the WFTU promises to continue and strengthen our common struggles with the RMT.

The Secretariat, WFTU ☘

# Spying scandal - Timor Gap shame drags on

Bob Briton

Australian security agencies spy on their own citizens and they help the US, UK and others to do so, too. The “five eyes” – the intelligence networks belonging to the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand – help each other to keep tabs on individuals, groups, political, military and other developments of interest across the globe. Australia is a junior member of this club and most people realise its basic purpose is to serve US strategic interests, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.

Despite this “deputy-sheriff” status, Australia has considerable spooking capacity of its own and, as recent events have shown, it puts this at the service of transnationals operating in Australia. Nothing is allowed to get in the way of the “national interest”; not even if it means cheating one the world’s poorest nations out of much of its potential oil and gas revenues.

The treaty on “Certain Maritime Arrangements in the Timor Sea” (CMATS) was signed in 2006 between the Howard government and the government of Timor-Leste (East Timor). The negotiations had been tense over the years. Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri and the ruling Fretilin party weren’t happy that the maritime boundary between the two countries was not drawn half-way between them but closer to Timor-Leste along the seabed limits of the continental shelf. The theft had been agreed between the Hawke government and Indonesia’s Suharto dictatorship with a treaty in 1989 and the boundary was a major factor in Australia’s hypocritical, indulgent stance towards Indonesia’s invasion of East Timor in 1975.

In 2004, Alexander Downer promised to give Alkatiri a “lesson in politics” for his pursuit of his struggling country’s interests. It would get royalties from a Joint Petroleum Development Area and that’s it. Alkatiri would soon be removed from office in coup-like circumstances. The Howard government refused international

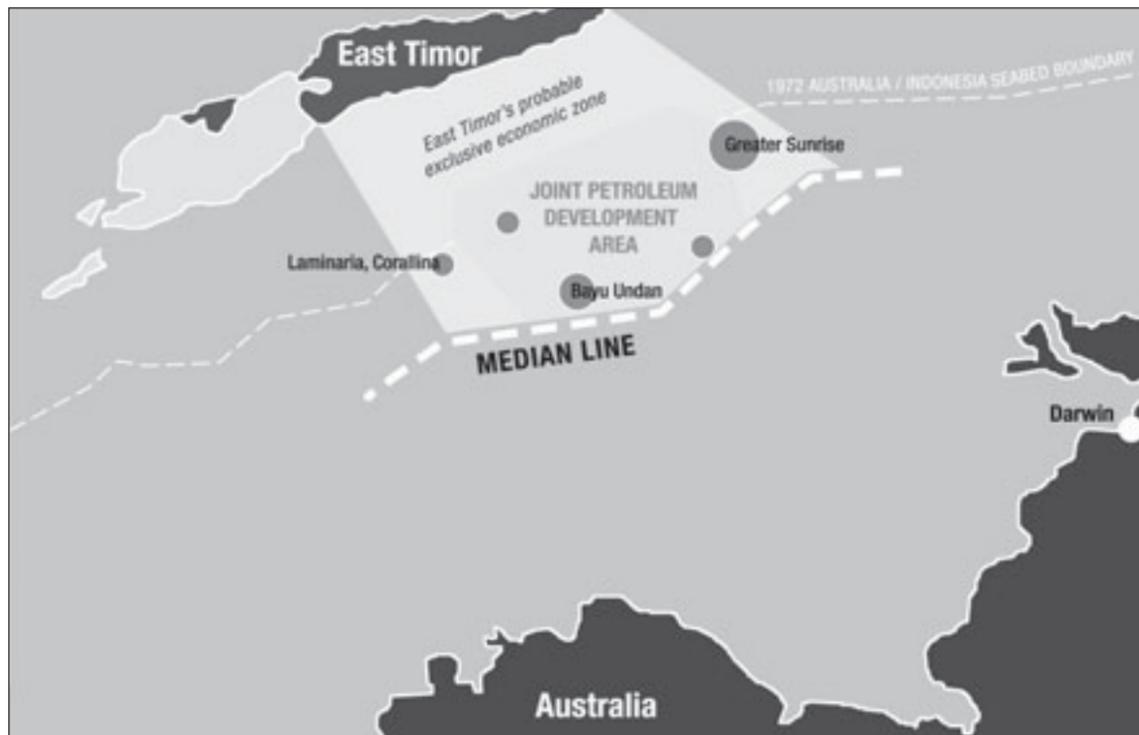
arbitration on the maritime boundary. The Australian public knew about the humiliation of Timor-Leste’s representatives in 2004 but it wouldn’t have been aware that Australian spies had bugged government offices in Timor-Leste so that Howard’s negotiators would have the drop on their local counterparts.

All these years later, a veteran spy told Canberra lawyer Bernard Collaery about the shameful operation he had been involved in. Collaery was acting for the government of Timor-Leste at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. The Timorese want the current treaty scrapped and a new one drawn up. They insist the negotiations that led to CMATS were not entered into in good faith by Australia and, in light of the whistle-blower’s recent revelations, who could argue with them about that?

But rather than move to repair damaged relations, the Abbott government has turned on Collaery and “Witness K” – the remorseful former ASIS agent – and the government of Timor-Leste. ASIO raided the lawyer’s Canberra office and seized large numbers of files. Witness K has had his passport confiscated to prevent him giving evidence on the matter at The Hague. They could both be slapped with criminal charges. Attorney-General George Brandis insists the heavy-handed actions were in the oft-cited “national interest”. Suggestions they are ultimately in the interest of oil and gas companies (such as generous Liberal Party donor Woodside Petroleum) draws a sharp reaction from the conservative camp.

“Woodside is a huge Australian company and they were proposing to invest billions of dollars in Greater Sunrise [oil and gas field] to create wealth, which would inter alia have been wealth for Australians, but obviously substantially for the East Timorese as well. So I was all in favour of that. I was all in favour of it,” Howard-era Foreign Minister Alexander Downer told Marian Wilkinson of the ABC’s *Four Corners* program.

No-one from the government’s ranks will comment on the spying



allegations but there is plenty of ominous talk about grave consequences for Timor-Leste if it persists with its legal challenge to CMATS. The Abbott government is fuming on investors’ behalf that Timor-Leste stood up for a pipeline to allow processing of offshore resources on its territory rather than aboard a floating plant. At the same time, Australia poses as a friend and generous benefactor to our northern neighbour.

Peter Galbraith, head negotiator for Timor-Leste in 2004, is not fooled. His reaction to the spying revelations says it all about Australia’s deteriorating reputation in the region. “You know, it’s hard to imagine that would really be done by a friendly government and especially for what were essentially commercial negotiations. That really seems there wasn’t a national security issue here for Australia. It wasn’t as if, you know, the Timorese were posing some kind of military threat or hatching some kind of plot. This was really bugging for commercial advantage,” he told *Four Corners*. ✪

## Wrong again, Mr Ajaka

**The NSW Nurses and Midwives’ Association (NSWNMA) has called on the Minister for Disability Services, John Ajaka, to apologise to residents and staff of the Stockton Centre in Newcastle for attempting to use them for political mileage and misleading the NSW Parliament.**

During question time last week, Mr Ajaka purported to give an update on the government’s redevelopment of the Stockton Centre, but rather than explain the real reasons behind his decision to privatise all disability services, the Minister deliberately took the opportunity to confuse the position of unions.

The NSWNMA has clearly advocated on behalf of residents at the Stockton Centre, their families, carers and staff to be extended the courtesy of choice. That is, the ability to choose between publicly-run or privately-run disability care services. Mr Ajaka’s decision to privatise all disability services across NSW by 2018 removes that choice for everyone.

Mr Ajaka also told the parliament he had met with NSWNMA representatives to address concerns

held by nursing staff, yet those same representatives are still waiting to hear how the government intends to maintain the level of highly skilled staff required, after all disability services shift to the non-government sector and what accountabilities would be enforced.

The Minister claimed staff had been “briefed comprehensively” on transition arrangements, yet NSWNMA members working at the Stockton Centre remain in the dark on what would happen to their entitlements if they agreed to transition to the privately-operated model.

General secretary of the NSWNMA, Brett Holmes, reiterated that clients and families of the Stockton Centre had a right to choose the care which best met their individual needs.

“We will continue to fight this to ensure all involved are extended the fairness, respect and dignity they deserve,” Mr Holmes said.

“It’s disappointing to see the Minister deliberately misleading the community for his own political point scoring, when in fact he is abdicating from his own duty of care.” ✪

Pete’s Corner



DO YOU HAVE  
SOMETHING TO SAY?  
*Write a letter  
to the Editor*

# Treasury Secretary highlights Public Service job cuts



**Outgoing Treasury Secretary Martin Parkinson is right to highlight the impact deep public service cuts are having on the bureaucracy's ability to do its job, says the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU).**

As the tally for federal public sector job cuts under an Abbott government passes the 5,000 mark the CPSU said Mr Parkinson's warning of a "growing gap between what the community expects from government and what government can sustainably provide" is timely and long overdue.

CPSU national secretary Nadine Flood said: "When Martin Parkinson says public service can no longer 'sustainably provide' services the community expects you have to sit up and take notice. We strongly endorse his comments.

"Our members have been saying for years that the public service is not a magic pudding, that successive cuts are taking their toll on their ability to deliver the policy and services that this country deserves. You can't keep cutting jobs and expect the same level of services."

In its submission to the Senate Committee into the government's National Commission of Audit, the CPSU says:

"Successive cuts to the public service are taking their toll on major agencies like Human Services, Customs, Tax and Agriculture which are all working at full stretch.

"Further cuts of between 14,500 and 26,500 jobs as flagged by government would seriously impact the delivery of services.

"Cuts to the Australian Public Service will have a disproportionate

impact on employment outside the ACT, particularly in rural and regional areas."

Ms Flood said: "If this government is seriously considering cutting anywhere between 14,500 and 26,500 jobs then it needs to lower people's expectations of government. The government can't say it hasn't been warned."

In an address to the Institute of Public Administration of Australia Mr Parkinson said job cuts could no longer be absorbed simply by people working harder, as has been the case. "Needless to say, this is not sustainable, and it also crowds out any attempts to think differently – and smarter – about prioritising our resources," he told the audience.

Ms Flood said government would do well to listen to an experienced voice in Mr Parkinson, one of the country's most senior public servants.

"His warning should prompt a sober and wide-ranging debate over what we as a society expects of government. The community expects high-quality services and it is up to the government to ensure they are fully funded and properly resourced. Delivering tax cuts to big business as well as relying on a public sector running on empty is not the way to do it."

Ms Flood warned that the forthcoming Budget was likely to deliver further cuts to services and jobs, which would only worsen the situation.

"The Budget will of course be informed by the National Commission of Audit which embarked on its quest to examine the scope of government's efficiency and productivity with one outcome in mind – to recommend deep cuts, outsourcing and privatisation." ❖

## Ruling in favour of younger workers

**The Fair Work Commission has recognised the inequity of paying younger workers less than the full adult rate, ruling in favour of paying 20-year-old retail workers 100 per cent pay. The case in the Commission, brought by the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association (SDA) on behalf of younger workers, looked at paying 20-year-olds under the General Retail Industry Award adult rates as the first step towards paying workers 18 and over full pay.**

As it currently stands, 18-year-olds workers get paid 70 percent of the full adult rate, 19-year-olds get 80 percent and 20-year-olds get 90 percent of the adult wage.

The Commission ruled 20-year-olds with more than six months' service will be entitled to 100 percent pay, phased in from July 1,

2014 so they'll receive full pay by July 2015.

SDA national secretary Joe de Bruyn said the Commission's ruling is a big boost for younger workers, thousands of who have shown overwhelming support for the case through the "100% Pay at 18+" campaign.

"The Fair Work Commission has revealed it agrees with what we've been saying for a long time – that paying younger workers less than the full adult rate is an outdated and discriminatory act that needs to be rectified.

"For too long employers have been getting away with paying workers less than what they deserve. It's fantastic that the Fair Work Commission has recognised that. We can now look towards putting this into practice in the industry."

He pointed out that by the time a worker reaches 20, they have often had several years experience in the industry. If you are giving 100 percent at work, you deserve to be paid 100 percent too.

Young witnesses told of their experiences in the workplace and the utter unfairness in paying younger workers less when they contribute equally and perform the same duties as their colleagues.

"This is a real credit to our witnesses and the thousands of workers who have thrown their support behind the '100% Pay at 18+' campaign. There's been overwhelming support from the community for fair pay for our younger workers.

"Despite what some of the business lobby groups will no doubt say, this decision will only have beneficial outcomes for employment in Australia." ❖

## Trying to hoodwink Queenslanders on mining

**Queensland Deputy Premier, Jeff Seeney, is trying to hoodwink Queenslanders into believing he is standing up to the mining industry to protect landholders, says the Lock the Gate Alliance.**

Lock the Gate's national president, Drew Hutton said the Queensland government's proposed Bill does nothing to protect landholders and Queensland's best agricultural land will continue to be overrun by mining.

"Jeff Seeney thinks he can hoodwink Queenslanders into thinking he is trying to protect them and their livelihoods but we all know this is rubbish," Mr Hutton said.

"The reality is the LNP [Liberal

National Party] is continuing to allow open-slasher to mining companies wanting to open-cut some of the best farming country in the state.

"A clear sign that this report favours the mining industry is the fact that Michael Roche of the Queensland Resources Council is singing its praises."

Mr Hutton said if the proposed Bill were passed:

- The Strategic Cropping Land Act which provides the only protection for the best cropping land in the state from open-cut mining would be dropped
- Mining would continue to be allowed near homes and towns

and in environmentally sensitive areas

- Regional interests would be ignored
- Tourist icons could be mined
- Landholders would be isolated from their communities to fight against mining giants.

"In the rush to pass this Bill, the government is ignoring the fact that they haven't finished mapping the 'priority agricultural areas' supposedly protected by it," he said.

"I'd be surprised if Mr Seeney or anyone in his government read any of the landholders' many submissions warning about the ramifications of this Bill." ❖

## Vic police get powers to suppress protests

**Victoria's parliament has passed a bill giving police power to suppress protests, including ordering a rally to move on based on a suspicion that it may turn violent. Opponents call the powers excessive and undemocratic.**

The *Summary Offences and Sentencing Amendment Bill* passed through the Upper House of the Victorian parliament last week. It will give state police the power to order protesters to disperse if they are blocking the entrance to a building, disrupting traffic, or if the police "expect" protesters to turn violent.

A "move on" order may be issued to people suspected of committing an offence within the previous 12 hours who return to the public place that police are trying to clear. Failure to comply may result in arrest and a \$720 fine.

Under the new law police would also be able to obtain exclusion orders banning protesters from certain public places for a period of up to 12 months. Violating such an order carries a maximum jail term of two years.

The bill was opposed in the parliament by Labor and the Greens, with Green MP Sue Pennicuik calling it "an absolute assault on the democratic right of Victorians to protest – whether it be on the streets or on public land – about issues of concern to them."

Similar concerns were raised

by some protest and human rights groups.

"It's just a stab in the heart to free speech," said Garry Muratore, an activist campaigning to stop McDonald's building a fast-food outlet in Tecoma in the Dandenong Ranges.

"This is Joh Bjelke-Petersen stuff," he added in a reference to the former right-wing Premier of Queensland.

Friends of the Earth spokesman Cam Walker also slammed the Bill, saying it would be "irony in the fullest sense" if it were used against farming communities opposed to gas exploration, a cause his group supports.

"We don't know how much discretion will be used by police. It puts fear into average community members who are not activists and feel compelled to protect their communities against gas drilling," he said.

The laws would give Victoria Police the power to issue move-on orders to protesters who "deliberately seek to stop people going about their lawful business," argued Attorney-General Robert Clark.

As the bill was being debated, a group of 20 activists were told to leave the chamber's public gallery after they started chanting and yelling in opposition to it. Four of the protesters were arrested for refusing to move on.

RT ❖

# Fighting to protect reef

Alf Wilson

**Birri Gubba Juru Elder Jim Gaston remembers the humble beginnings of turtle monitoring in the waters of the Great Barrier Reef. "It started with just the two of us – me and the missus – and for 12 years we funded it out of our own pockets," he said.**

"Now we have scientific research, animal ethics and Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority permits and about 30 people helping.

"We've tagged and measured 1,100 turtles and sent the information back to the Queensland Government.

"I just want to make sure our grandchildren and the next generation will have turtles to observe and monitor.

"I am very concerned about the industrialisation of the reef."

Mr Gaston is a board member of the Gudjuda Reference Group, one of five traditional owner organisations representing saltwater people from Bundaberg to Cooktown that met in Townsville this month for talks about the reef.

Two of the organisations – the Gudjuda Reference Group and the Giringun Aboriginal Corporation – have been working in partnership with World Wildlife Fund-Australia (WWF) to protect the reef since signing memorandums of understanding in 2009 and 2010.

They were joined by the Wulgurukaba people, the Yuku Baja Muliku people, and the Gidarjil Aboriginal Corporation.

The gathering was held at Reef HQ Aquarium and brought together saltwater people whose sea country covers nearly three-quarters of the reef to discuss increasing concerns for this natural wonder of the world.

"Saltwater people have a connection to the reef built up over many thousands of years and it's crucial that they are more involved in its protection," WWF national manager for Indigenous partnerships Darren Grover said.

WWF-Australia works with saltwater people to source sponsorship and funding so that traditional owners can patrol their sea country with a particular focus on monitoring water quality, turtles, dugongs and inshore dolphins.

Gudjuda Reference Group chair Eddie Smallwood said much had been achieved since 2009.

"We now have five Indigenous land and sea rangers and we've done a lot of research into the turtle (illness) in partnership with James Cook University and Queensland Government researchers," he said.

"With the increasing industrialisation of the reef we need to make sure we have the resources to monitor seagrass and water quality and check for impacts on turtles, dugongs and inshore dolphins."

WWF conservation on country policy manager Cliff Cobbo said there was no denying that the Reef was in trouble.

"Indigenous people want a stronger role in protecting and

rescuing the reef and its creatures and that's what this meeting is all about," he told the *Koori Mail*.

Mr Cobbo said members of the groups which attended emphasised how important it was for them to be actively involved in looking after their sea country.

"The most important outcome was one of partnership and collaboration," he said.

"All groups recognised that by working together on a united front their aspirations and needs would be heard.

"Sea country rangers was high on the list as was building the capacity of communities and organisations to better equip themselves in sea country management.

"The Indigenous voice needs to be heard in the debate about the protection of the Great Barrier Reef. Many groups want their own sea country plans and the relevant resources to implement them.

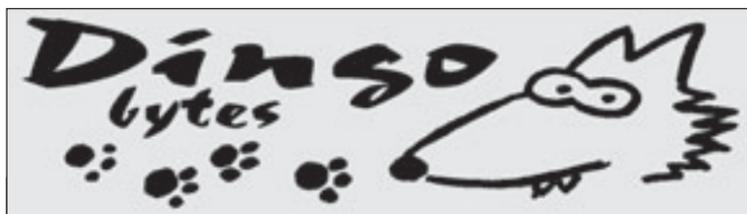
"The groups will now go back to their communities and discuss an appropriate way forward."

Dorothy Savage said protecting the reef was an important issue for everybody.

"It was vital that these groups came together as the marine park is vital for the survival of our people," she said.

"It has been a source of food and we are concerned about oil spills and turtles being hit by propellers."

*Koori Mail* ☘



## WA Senate re-run election campaign

Richard Titelius

**Since the re-run of the Senate election campaign from last year's federal election commenced, the campaign has brought out the very best and worst in our political institutions.**

The worst was Prime Minister Anthony Abbott's visit to Western Australia (WA) as the fate of his government's Senate majority ultimately hangs in the balance on April 5.

Abbott spoke at a number of events for the Liberal Party's faithful and performed at a photo op on the South Perth foreshore with the Perth skyline in the background as proof that he had been here.

Meanwhile Federal ALP leader Bill Shorten was also in town meeting with a few party officials and lamenting that he could not get hold of WA ALP Senate lead candidate Joe Bullock.

On March 4 at 10.09 pm, Greens Senator Scott gave an adjournment speech to a near empty chamber. The speech was addressed to the Prime Minister Tony Abbott inviting him, "to visit the beautiful state of Western Australia" but to "think carefully about the baggage you pack when you make your next campaign stopover."

Ludlam invited Abbott to leave at home his "excruciatingly boring three-word slogans" his "homophobia which he waves in people's faces" and his ever-more insidious attacks on the trade union movement and all working people.

Ludlam also gave prominence to a number of important issues affecting all Australians including renewable energy, uranium mining and the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement – the latter which Ludlam referenced as, "the opportunity to choose between predator capitalism and the public interest."

The video of the speech from an almost empty chamber however, received much wider interest in cyberspace where it went viral and within two weeks had notched up over 700,000 views.

While Abbott and Shorten took part in carefully stage-managed events with their party faithful, Ludlam could be seen at fundraiser events in his name such as a speech night in Subiaco with fellow Victorian MHR Adam Bandt and at a heavy metal band spectacular at the Rosemount Hotel where lead singer of Chaos Divine gave him a ringing endorsement.

Earlier the same day, the Australian Electoral Commission announced that a record 77

candidates had put up their hand to run the re-run. The order of the 1.2 metre-long ballot paper was also decided that day with the Wikileaks Party receiving the No 1 spot, the ALP No 6, the Liberals No18 and the Greens No 27. There are 15 more candidates than last September's poll and it is open to speculation as to what meaning one can ascribe to this large number of candidates or if this signals a flourishing of democracy or pluralism.

Elsewhere the performance of state Liberal Party Treasurer Troy Buswell made the headlines when he had to resign from cabinet after a drunken driving incident involving his government vehicle.

Since the election was announced there has been an unrelenting media attack on the Greens, in particular, in the corporate clarions of the *West*, *Sunday Times* and *The Australian*.

A measure of the corporate media's role was seen in their reporting of the Perth March in March Rally against the unrepresentative political agenda of Tony Abbott. The commercial and public media failed to report on the more than 3,000 people who attended the rally on Sunday March 16.

The Communist Party of Australia urges West Australians to vote for the Greens in the Senate re-run election on April 5, as the party has many progressive policies which seek to ease the burden of working class people and bring accountability and transparency to government policy and action. ☘

Every time those in power want to whip up public hysteria and divert attention from real social issues a couple of topics work wonders: "illegal" boat people, "law and order" and everybody's favourite "welfare bludgers". Demonising single parents and the unemployed has become almost a national sport, with certain politicians and "captains of industry and business" trying to outdo each other. Not so quick to attack when it comes to one of their own, though. Take Arthur Sinodinos, for instance. Described by Mr Abbott as providing "long and faithful service" to the country, he received \$200,000 for 100 hours of work. \$2,000 an hour is not bad! Let us not forget this figure when workers' wages are deemed to be "too high" and welfare support "too generous" and pensions "exorbitant".

March 20 was Close the Gap Day and around 200,000 Australians joined in events which promote Indigenous health and work towards closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians when it comes to health issues. There is slight progress in the delivery of some health services to the Indigenous population but the gap is still there. One of the most disturbing reports released on this day was about Indigenous children who are 36 per cent more likely to die within five years of a cancer diagnosis than non-Indigenous children. While researches found no significant difference in urban areas, the findings suggest remoteness is a major factor, whereby Indigenous children in remote or very remote areas of Australia have a significantly increased risk of death compared to other children in the same region. "While there are only minor differences in survival for leukaemia and brain tumours, Indigenous children are nearly twice as likely as other children to die within five years from other solid tumours such as lymphomas or neuroblastoma", the report says.

Mr Abbott has "liberated" forests for loggers and keeps on "liberating" workers from their jobs in the public and private sector. Last week Qantas workers and their union representatives had a meeting with Mr Abbott hoping to prevent local jobs going overseas. "What Qantas workers want from their government is for them to stand up for their jobs", said ACTU secretary Dave Oliver. Mr Oliver said there was "some room to move" on the levels of foreign ownership, providing Qantas was still majority owned by Australia and the bulk of their engineering and maintenance work was conducted within the country. However Qantas workers got no guarantees from Mr Abbott that their jobs would be secure. Time to liberate Mr Abbott from his job.

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# Notes from a Brigadista in Cuba

Maria Hilario\*

**Arriving in Havana city from the airport there is a big billboard announcing “The Cuban blockade the longest genocide” and this year is the 56th year of the inhumane blockade against Cuba. Only one country in the UN assembly – the USA – is using its the power to veto the rest of the world on the blockade. This means the Cuban people are living with constant shortages of materials for construction, cars, medical equipment and medicines to save lives. Surely this is one of the cruellest things that a country can impose on another.**

The 22 members of the Australian brigade, ranging in age from 19 to 88, came from Canberra, Victoria, NSW, SA, WA, Queensland and Ireland. They were from a wide range of professions with many different experiences: teachers, nurses, students, welfare workers, publicans, engine drivers and union members.

ICAP (Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples) organised, supported and guided us during the trip. ICAP was founded in 1960 to promote friendship and solidarity links with people of the world, respecting people’s right to self-determination. At present there are 2,100 solidarity organisations in 150 countries.

We attended the 53rd anniversary celebration of the foundation of ICAP with a great performance by over 20 young performers singing songs of the revolution. I met there the first president of ICAP, Giraldo Masola, who told me how he remembered coming to Australia many years ago to sign the agreement of cooperation with Cuba. It was Bill Hayden he had met and he remembered that the politician later became Governor General.

We were given a special treat when on New Year’s Day we were taken to the National Theatre for the performance by one of the world’s best companies – the Cuban National Ballet – with a gala representation of the Nutcracker with excellent choreography and direction by Alicia Alonso. Certainly it was art at its very best, an unforgettable event as I only had previously seen ballet on TV.

At the camp we had the opportunity to work alongside camp workers in the agricultural fields collecting tomatoes, cutting yucca, weeding lettuces, chopping banana leaves. I also learned that some of the field workers had a number of degrees like accounting, history, philosophy and different roles in their communities such as when there are cyclones. One of the workers was responsible for allocating safe shelters and he had to visit every family in the village and assess their situation.

## Cooperatives

We visited a cooperative near Julio Antonio Mella camp and learned about the different types of cooperatives. This one was CPA – a cooperative of agricultural production. We were told how they are important to the economy and their efficiency in creating local employment and utilising the land for food production. The food is either consumed by members or is sold in the markets around the area and exported.

This cooperative invests 50 percent of its product surplus in new cultivation. Everyone gets the basic salary and food, plus extra if a worker has worked overtime. All the workers are members of the cooperative and the decisions are made in the assembly. They try to mediate before any problems escalate.

They do not use transgenic seeds and the reason why the cooperatives are going so strongly is because the government has given them a guarantee to purchase their products for local consumption and the surplus for export. Promotion of the local product rather than imports is a key to the survival of local economies and since 2000 they have been working harder for their agricultural products to be organic.

We also visited an organic farm cooperative in Havana with 170 members living in the community nearby. They had 230 different types of vegetables and legumes: everything is organic including pest control by microorganisms and soil diversity.

They told us they were connected with 17 research centres and some universities organised courses, study groups on agro-ecological protection. They receive about 8,000 visitors per year and they have not used chemicals since 2000. Their message is “united we multiply our results” and their motto is “to live with the land not off the land”.

Professor Julio Torres Martínez talked about Cuba and the Renewable Energies. The non-government organisation was founded in 1994 and today it has more than 500 medical centres in remote areas powered by photovoltaic and 2,364 schools and 1,864 Community Television rooms.

Another afternoon we had a presentation about Cuba and the process of integration in ALBA (Bolivian Alliance for the Peoples of the Americas), CELAC (Community of Latin America and Caribbean States) and the TCP (Tratado de Comercio de los Pueblos – a trade treaty for the people).

Their aim is to end poverty and social exclusion, end illiteracy and support human rights, to improve the working conditions of women, to care for the environment, and promote economic integration and the formation of grand-national enterprises to create a front against the transnationals.

## Cuban 5

The relatives of the Cuban 5 came to the camp to meet the Brigadistas:

- Antonio Guerrero’s mother Mirta, whose son won’t be released until 2017;
- Gerardo Hernández’s niece;
- Rene González’s mother. He was released last year and now he is living in Cuba. René is very much involved in the return of his fellow compatriots; and
- Ramon Labañino’s wife: Elizabeth Palmeiro

Fernando González was released on February 28.

We learned about the hypocrisy of the US system and why this is a political case. In the United States the Cuban 5 uncovered terrorist

groups in operations supported by the United States and they saw the likes of Posada Carrilles boasting about “criminal” activities on US TV and freely walking the streets while the Cuban 5 with charges and spurious allegations against them damaging their defence and a fair trial.

The Cuban 5 have been in jail for over 15 years. During our Brigade trip I met – on beaches and in hotels – tourists from Canada and the USA; and I spoke with them. Many did not know of the Cuban 5; the mainstream media is remarkably silent on this important news!

There are three important actions this year in support of the Cuban 5 such as: on the fifth day of each month tweeting Obama, or writing a letter demanding their release.

Other activities this year include:

- June 4-11 – “5 days for the 5” in Washington
- October 27-31 – the third solidarity conference in Havana.

We visited Santa Clara in Villa Clara province and saw the Ché Guevara Mausoleum with the impressive six metres high statue on a 25-metre pedestal on a hill in the big square looking south to his beloved Argentina. We laid flowers and saw the museum and the mausoleum where his remains rest with 32 of his comrades including a woman, Tania.

All have the same niches – no grandeur, just simple and very moving, reflecting on the way Ché was tortured, killed with his fingers and hands cut off. A child though is asking why did they want his hands cut – such hands that had helped heal the sick and wounded.

Later we met four guerrilla men and one woman who fought and struggled with Ché and listened to their stories. These included: Anaís, a member of the first women’s guerrilla group. She told how it took Fidel seven hours of talk with the other guerrilla leaders to convince them to accept women as equal and not in the supportive role that they were doing like cooking or washing for the men. Eventually the first women’s guerrilla group, the Marianas, was formed.

At night we visited the school of medicine in Santa Clara where some students from Pakistan were doing the final exams for Medicine in Year 6. They had been doing the course since the earthquake in Pakistan when Cuban doctors were there to help in remote areas and the governments agreed on the scholarships. There were other students from Argentina, Vietnam and South Africa.

We had many questions for the students, as some Brigadistas were nurses and wanted to know about the impact for terminally ill persons not being able to access medications because of the embargo. We were told they often have to pay three times the price as they may need to get it through third countries.

The blockade has made them more determined and they have created their own research in treatments for illnesses. Their laboratories produce their own medicines; they have improved some treatments for, example, diseases of the feet.

Another aspect the students told us is the focus on prevention and education so that they



Mario Brigadista from the first literacy campaign.

often deal with the problem at a much earlier stage and because doctors provide home visits, they also have a greater understanding of the whole family. They are able to make referrals for other services and, importantly, the patients do not have to worry about the purchase of medicines as the service is free.

## Visits

At Varadero beach we were able to swim in 25°C winter water and much enjoyed the free bar service; we also visited a protected fauna and flora area with the oldest cactus tree in Cuba that has survived more than 20 cyclones: over 500 years old with an impressive root system.

We visited Matanzas with 17 bridges over three rivers known as the “Venice of Cuba”. The local authorities met us and explained the meaning of their city’s name. The Indigenous people in the area massacred a group of 30 Spaniards who had treated them ruthlessly. The Indigenous people lured them to a boat and drowned them. We also learned about their industry and that in that province of 700,000 they have one doctor for every 197 persons, and four sugar mills.

We went to a publishing house, Editions Vigia; all the books are done by hand, up to 200



Anais Quesada from the first Marianas (left) with Maria Hilario.



Cuba



copies of every title. The books are crafted with beautiful hand paintings and illustrations and unique collections. We also visited an old Pharmacist Museum and El Morrillo museum, the site of the graves of Antonio Guiteras Holmes and Carlos Ponte Hernández. They were socialist revolutionaries in the 1930s and Guiteras founded the Union Revolucionaria. Upstairs, in the same fortress, there is a museum about the Indigenous people from the area.

After dinner we attended a street fiesta organised by the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution, created in the 1960s to counteract the attacks and infiltrations from the terrorist activities from the US. Children were dancing and moving their bodies with what looked a very natural rhythm for them but hard for the Brigadistas to copy!

Young couples performed a ballet piece with pirouettes and dancers flew through the air landing in bare feet on the uneven dirt ground. It ended with a display of rap dancing. We talked with many locals; some looked like my relations back home in my village in Spain. \*Maria was a member of the 31st Brigade to Cuba from Australia, January 2014 Part 2, women, literacy campaign and unions, next week ✪



The authorities of Matanza province with the ICAP representatives presenting to the Australian brigade a picture of their Town Hall with Jose Marti statue. (L-R) President Juanita Ortiz and Vice President Mileidy Denis Perez from the Popular Power Assembly in Matanzas and ICAP delegate Teresita Rubio.

# Crisis in Ukraine: Russia extends its control over the Black Sea and strategic waterways

Michel Chossudovsky

**The decision of the people of Crimea to join the Russian Federation has strategic and geopolitical implications.**

The union of Crimea with Russia redefines the geopolitical chessboard in the Black Sea Basin.

It constitutes a major setback for US-NATO, whose longstanding objective was to integrate Ukraine into NATO with a view to undermining Russia and extending their military presence in the Black Sea basin.

With the March 18, 2014 Treaty signed between Russia and Crimea, the Russian Federation will extend its control over the Black Sea as well over the Sea of Azov, the West coastline of which borders on Eastern Ukraine and the Donesk region.

Under the agreement between Russia and Crimea announced by president Putin, two "constituent regions" of Crimea will join the Russian Federation: the "Republic of Crimea" and the "City of Sevastopol". Both will have the status of "autonomous regions".

The status of Sevastopol as an autonomous entity separate from Crimea is related to the location of Russia's Naval base in Sevastopol.

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, Russia retained its naval base in Sevastopol under a bilateral agreement with Ukraine. With the signing of the March 18th Treaty, that agreement is null and void. Sevastopol including the naval base becomes an autonomous region within the Russian federation

## Strategic Waterway: The Kerch Straits

Russia now formally controls a much larger portion of the Black Sea, which includes the entire Crimean peninsula.

The Eastern part of Crimea – including the Kerch straits – are now under Russian control. On the Eastern side of the Kerch straits is Russia's Krasnodar region and extending southwards are the port cities of Novorossiysk and Sochi.

Novorossiysk is also strategic. It is at the cross-roads of major oil and gas pipelines between the Black Sea and Caspian sea.

Historically, the Kerch straits have played a strategic role. They constitute a gateway to Russia's major waterways.

During World War II, the Kerch peninsula occupied by Nazi Germany (taken back by the Red Army) was an important point of transit by land and water. In the coldest months of winter, it became an ice bridge linking Crimea to the Krasnodar region.

The Kerch straits are about 5 km in length and 4.5 km wide at the narrowest point between the tip of Eastern Crimea and the peninsula of Taman, Kerch is a major commercial port linked to railway, ferry and river routes.

## The Sea of Azov: New Geopolitical Hub

Of significance, the integration of Crimea into the Russian Federation means that Moscow

is now in full control of the Kerch Straits linking the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov. The Ukrainian authorities are no longer in control of the port of Kerch. The bilateral agreement between Russia and Ukraine governing the maritime route through the Kerch straits has been scrapped.

The straits constitute an entry point into Russia's major river waterways. The Sea of Azov connects with the Don River and the Volga, through the Volga Don Canal. In turn, the Volga flows in the Caspian sea.

The Kerch straits are strategic. The Kerch-Yenikalskiy Canal allows large vessels (215 meters long) to transit from the Black sea to the Sea of Azov.

Moreover, the Kerch Straits link the Black Sea to the Volga which in turn connects to the Moscow river through the Volga-Moskva canal.

Full control of the narrow Kerch straits by Russia ensures unimpeded maritime transit from the Black Sea to Russia's capital as well as the maritime route to the Caspian Sea. (Black Sea - Sea of Azov - Don - Volga Don Canal - Volga - Caspian sea)

In December 2013 Moscow signed a bilateral agreement with the Yanukovich government in Kiev pertaining to the construction of a bridge across the Kerch Straits, connecting Eastern Crimea (which was part of Ukraine) with Russia's Krasnodar region.

That agreement has also been scrapped. Crimea's union to Russia was already in the pipeline: Less than two weeks before the March 16 Referendum, at the height of the crisis in Ukraine, Russia's Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev ordered the state-road building corporation Avtodor, or "Russian Highways" "to create a subsidiary company that will oversee the building of a bridge across the Kerch Strait".

Needless to say, the project will now be fully under Russian ownership and control.

## The Sea of Azov, Eastern Ukraine and the Donbas Region

The Eastern Ukraine and the densely populated Donetsk basin (Donbas region) of Ukraine – in which the Russian population constitutes a majority – borders on the Western coastline of the Sea of Azov, which is now in large part under Russian control.

## "Ripple Effect" of the Crimean Referendum

How will the Crisis Evolve?

Will the referendum in Crimea set the stage for the integration of part of Eastern and Southern Ukraine into the Russian Federation?

The geographic and geopolitical changes discussed above have a direct bearing on unfolding events in Eastern Ukraine.

Throughout Eastern Ukraine as well as in Odessa in southern Ukraine, the legitimacy of the interim neo-Nazi government in Kiev has been questioned. Municipal and local levels citizens' committees are challenging the authority of Kiev appointed officials.

In the port city of Odessa on the Black Sea, a protest movement demanding a referendum has unfolded.

Thousands held a pro-Russian rally in support of Crimea's referendum in Odessa, despite calls from the city's authorities not to participate in meetings. Organizers claim more than 5,000 people joined the demonstration.

"Odessa is against the coup in Kiev, paid for by the West and Ukrainian oligarchs who remained in power with the help of deceitful extremists and militants. We are tired of living in poverty and we are no longer going to tolerate the tyranny of oligarchs and officials, ..."

The people were chanting "Ukraine and Russia – one country," and "Odessa, be bold, drive the fascists out," as they gathered in the center of the city. (*Russia Today* – rt.com, March 16, 2014)

Reported by RT, protests have developed in Kharkov and Donetsk demanding the holding of a referendum similar to that of Crimea.

Protesters, on behalf of Kharkov's assembly, asked Putin to "guarantee their rights and freedoms" and pass to the United Nations their demands regarding a referendum on the federalisation, which they plan for April 27, reported *Ukrainian National News (UNN)* website. Additionally, activists asked to deploy Russian peacekeepers to Kharkov region, adding that they fear for their lives and property.

The demonstrators then marched to the nearby consulate of Poland, protesting against Western interference into Ukrainian affairs.

Kharkov protesters also looted the building housing offices of radical-nationalist organisations, including the Right Sector group, reported *Interfax-Ukraine*. The activists broke into the building, took out books and nationalist symbols and burnt them.

In Donetsk, pro-Russian protesters questioned the legitimacy of the interim coalition government.

Meanwhile, Kiev sent heavy military hardware to the borders with Russia. Activists in eastern Ukraine regions, including Donetsk and Lugansk were reportedly blocking trains delivering military equipment from the central and western parts of Ukraine.

Similar rallies were held in Dnepropetrovsk and Lugansk. In Lugansk the campaign focused on a 'people's referendum' directed against the Kiev interim government:

In Lugansk, several thousand anti-coup activists were conducting a public poll by handing out "ballot papers" of "people's referendum" of Lugansk region. The poll raised questions of trust in the authorities in Kiev, the possibility of joining the Customs Union following the federalization of Ukraine.

One of the questions was about the international bailout: "Do you support reduction of social benefits and cancellation of benefits at the request of the IMF?"

"This is for all an opportunity to officially announce their choice. Now we have run out of 5,000 forms, we are rushing to print more," organizer Irina Gotman told UNIAN. (*RT*, op cit)

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# US Foreign Policy, Israel and collective responsibility

Timothy Bancroft-Hinchey

**Are the citizens of the United States of America aware of their country's external policy-making? Not the lies and tales peddled as the truth in their biased media but the truth, the whole truth and nothing but? Does the average American agree with a policy of bulldozing homes or with vetoing a Resolution which condemns it?**

The list of US vetoes of UN Security Council Resolutions condemning Israel for excesses is long and on the list are vetoes of Resolutions which guaranteed human rights, which condemned Israel for abuses, for aggression, for wanton destruction of property.

The United States of America has also vetoed condemnation of policy which included seizing land and building settlements on it, displacing the residents, desecrating their farms and cemeteries.

It is inconceivable that the average citizen in the USA would condone such behaviour or would agree to the veto which their country has exercised countless times condemning such policies. So why do the vetoes go ahead? If President Barack Obama has stated he is against the building of illegal settlements on land which Israel has stolen from Palestinians, why then does the USA give the nod for such settlements to be built?

The situation today in East Jerusalem is so serious that the United Nations Organisation has asked the UN Security Council to address developments in this city which are described as "alarming" – namely, incursions by Israeli citizens onto the holy site of al-Haram al-Sharif (Temple Mount) where the al-Aqsa Mosque is situated. Not only has the Israeli Parliament begun proceedings to impose Israeli sovereignty over the entire area but groups of Israeli extremists have

begun to stage increasingly violent incursions against Palestinians in the vicinity of the Mosque.

The incursions are aimed to provoke the Palestinians, and if they react, the Israeli police attack them with tear gas, detain them or beat them with batons.

Such attacks are an outrage and a clear flouting of the human rights of Palestinians in East Jerusalem enshrined in the law. Worse, the outrages do not only include attacks and provocations but something far more permanent, as we see in this complaint from the Bureau of the UN General Assembly's Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: "Such actions are clearly prohibited under international law. House demolitions, evictions, land expropriation and the revocation of residency rights of Palestinian Jerusalemites are also on the increase".

In 2013, 298 Palestinian citizens were forced from their homes in 565 demolitions of residences. Many dozens of women and children were thrown out onto the streets. Since 1967, one third of Palestinian lands in East Jerusalem have been stolen by Israel and 14,000 Palestinians have had their rights to residence in their ancestral properties, in many cases, taken away.

In clear violation of international law, Israel continues to build structures on stolen land in east Jerusalem and elsewhere. How many more hundreds of children is Israel going to throw onto the streets, from their own homes, before the United States of America leashes in its spoil brat? And when are the citizens of the USA going to take some responsibility for the external policy of their government?

Or is the United States of America not a democracy after all?  
*Pravda.Ru* ☛



Israeli occupation forces use a Caterpillar bulldozer to destroy a Palestinian home in the al-Tur neighbourhood in Jerusalem, May 2013.

## The US and Britain's paedophile colony

Felicity Arbuthnot

**Less than a month before the 11th anniversary of the illegal US-led invasion of Iraq, the near destruction of much of the country, heritage, culture, secularism, education, health services and all state institutions, the country is poised to revert "two thousand years" say campaigners.**

On February 25, Iraq's Cabinet approved a draft law lowering the age of legal marriage for females to nine years old.

Iraq was, prior to the invasion, a fiercely secular country, with a broadly equal male-female workforce and with women benefiting from a National Personal Status Law, introduced in 1959, which remained "one of the most liberal in the Arab world, with respect to women's rights."

The legal age for marriage was set at 18, forced marriages were banned and polygamy restricted. Cohesion between communities was enhanced and fostered by: "eliminating the differential treatment of Sunnis and Shiites under the law (and erasing differentiation) between the various religious communities ..." Women's rights in divorce, child custody and inheritance were an integral part of the Law, with Article 14 stating that all Iraqis are equal under the law. Equality was swept away from

the first day of the invasion when George W Bush and his Administration started to talk of Sunni, Shiite, Kurds, Christians and other religions and ethnicities and also effectively selecting the overseers of the "New Iraq", not by ability but by religion and ethnicity, effectively pitching Iraqi against Iraqi in what, for all the complexities had been a very cohesive society. "Divide and rule" pervaded all.

So far, however, the Personal Status Law still stands, if largely ignored by the US-backed Parliament and a largely – with honourable and courageous exceptions – woefully wanting judiciary. The draft law if ratified, as it is aimed to be after the April elections, would sweep its admirable provisions aside and turn Iraq in to a paedophiles' paradise.

This outrageous plan was first mooted as early as December 2003, just eight months after the invasion, by Abdel Aziz al Hakim, who heads the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, who cancelled the Personal Status Law when President of the Interim Governing Council. Due to opposition by women and others within the Council and from many civil and women's organisations, the decision was revoked by Paul Bremer, arguably the only thing he got right during his woeful, ill-informed tenure. Then, as now, the change: "would have transferred

civil actions concerning family and personal law, including marriage, divorce, and inheritance, to the jurisdiction of clerics", not civil Courts.

Incredibly: "The proposal has been based on the Shiite Ja'fari school, called after an eighth century Shiite Imam. A Supreme Shiite Judicial Council in the holy city of Najaf will supervise nationwide religious tribunals that will settle family matters."

Women's groups and activists are vociferous in their outrage and condemnation and in spite of 21 of the 29 present at the Cabinet decision voting in favour of the change, some clerics in Najaf are distancing themselves from the proposal, which would also include women not being allowed to leave their home without the permission of their husband – and ironically a father's permission being mandatory for a woman over 18 to marry. Muslims will not be allowed to marry non-Muslims.

Hanaa Edwar, who heads the Al-Amal Association which fights for the socio-economic improvement of Iraqis points out that among the poor – which since the invasion has spiralled, children as young as ten are already marrying and further, that most of the religious: "illiterate people hear it's based on Ja'fari (law) and think it must be good."

Yanar Mohammed, President of the Organisation for Women's Freedom in Iraq is convinced that: "Iraqi people will not agree to the legalisation of paedophilia ... the objections come from all sides, and the number of women who raise their voices is high ... It is an abuse of children's rights and their bodily integrity."

Edwar and Mohammed are lobbying in and out of the parliament, but "pressure from outside Iraq is essential."

As Iraq has ratified Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the UN has already asked for the withdrawal of the draft law. CEDAW "provides that the betrothal and marriage of a child shall have no legal effect."

At the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna from June 14-25, 1993, states were: "urged to repeal existing laws and regulations and to remove customs and practices which discriminate against and cause harm to the girl child. Article 16(2) and the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child preclude States parties from permitting or giving validity to a marriage between persons who have not attained their majority. In the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,

'a child' means every human being below the age of 18 years ..."

Human Rights Watch in a less than robust statement on the marriage of nine-year-olds, who, in the West would still be in primary school, never the less state: "This draft personal status law (change) flies in the faces of the Iraqi government's legal commitments to protect women's and girls' rights ... Passage of this law by parliament may lead to further discriminatory laws."

Silent is Ann Clwyd, MP, formerly Tony Blair's Human Rights Envoy to Iraq and currently Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group and of the All Party Parliamentary Iraq Group, as is Middle East "Peace Envoy" Tony "I'd do it again" Blair, as are the US and British Ambassadors in Iraq and the self-appointed "Vicar of Baghdad" Canon Andrew White.

The US and UK could put an end to this disgrace instantly by simply withdrawing trade, arms sales, and diplomatic presence. But Iraq is still a destroyed country, courtesy the same US and UK and there are also all those multi-million rebuilding, security, and military training contracts. As with the majority of those in their Iraq puppet Parliament, morality and integrity are long dead and buried.  
*Pravda.ru* ☛

# Ukraine, then Venezuela, Ecuador, Brazil ...

Dr Paul Craig Roberts

**The Washington orchestrated coup in Ukraine has kept Venezuela out of the headlines. A confrontation with nuclear armed Russia is more dangerous than with Venezuela. But the violence that Washington has unleashed on Venezuela almost simultaneously with Ukraine is testimony to Washington's stark criminality.**

South America has for centuries consisted of a tiny Spanish elite with all the money and power ruling over large majority populations of Indigenous peoples who have not had political representation. In Venezuela, Chávez broke this pattern. An Indigenous president was elected who represented the people and worked in their behalf instead of looting the country. Chávez became a role model, and Indigenous presidents were elected in Ecuador and Bolivia.

Chávez was hated by Washington and demonised by American pressstitutes. When Chávez died of cancer, Washington celebrated.

Evo Morales, President of Bolivia, was inclined in favour of granting asylum to NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden. Consequently, Washington ordered its European puppet states to deny overflight permission to President Morales' plane on its return to Bolivia from Russia. Morales' plane, in violation of every diplomatic protocol, was forced down and searched. Morales has since suffered other indignities at the hands of the Washington criminals.

Rafael Correa, President of Ecuador, made himself a target of Washington by granting political asylum to Julian Assange. On Washington's orders, Washington's British puppet state has refused to grant free passage to Assange, and Assange is spending his life in the London Embassy of Ecuador.

With Chávez's death, Indigenous Venezuelan Nicolas Maduro became president. Maduro does not have Chávez's charisma, which makes him an easier target for the tiny Spanish elite that owns the media.

Washington began the attack on Maduro by attacking the Venezuelan currency and driving down its value in currency markets. Then university students, many of whom are the children of the rich Spanish elites, were sent out to protest. The falling Venezuelan currency raised prices and spread dissatisfaction among Maduro's poor Indigenous base. To put down the rioting, property damage, and unrest that Washington is using to launch a coup, Maduro had to turn to the police. Secretary of State John Kerry has labelled the government's effort to re-establish public order and forestall a coup a "terror campaign against its own citizens."

Having orchestrated the protests and plotted a coup, Kerry blamed Maduro for the violence that Kerry unleashed and called on Maduro "to respect human rights."

For Washington, it is always the same script. Commit a crime and blame the victim.

If Washington can overthrow

Maduro, the next target will be Correa. If Washington can get rid of Correa and re-empower a puppet government of rich elites, Washington can have the Ecuadoran government revoke the political asylum that Correa granted to Julian Assange. The Ecuadoran Embassy in London will be ordered to kick Assange out into the waiting arms of the British police who will send him to Sweden who will send him to Washington to be tortured until he confesses to whatever Washington demands.

The poor gullible dupes demonstrating in Venezuelan streets have no more idea of the damage they are doing to themselves and others than their counterparts in Ukraine had. Venezuelans have already forgotten what life for them was like under the rule of the elites. It appears that Venezuelans are determined to help Washington to return them to their servitude.

If Washington reconquers Venezuela and Ecuador, Bolivia will be next. Then Brazil.

Washington has its sights on Brazil, because the country is a member of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), and Washington intends to destroy this organisation before the countries can establish a trading bloc that does not use the US dollar.

Not long ago a US official said that as soon as we (Washington) get Russia in a bind, we will deal with the upstarts in South America.

The program is on schedule.

[globalresearch.ca](http://globalresearch.ca) ✪



Opposition demonstrators throw stones at police during a protest against Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro's government in Caracas.



## Region Briefs

On March 9, in the Oshu City Assembly election, the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) increased its seats to five, another three seats were also won in the Sumoto City Assembly election on the same day. These five candidates composed the largest JCP assembly-persons' group in the district. The JCP now comprises 17.86% out of this 28 member assembly. The JCP candidates called for cuts in national health insurance premiums and free medical services for children under age 15. The chair of the JCP local district committee, Segawa Sadakiyo, said that the JCP will continue to present counter-proposals to confront the Abe government and city authorities.

On March 14, according to the State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence, after its third dormancy, China's moon rover Yutu woke up again at 6:42 am Beijing time. Yutu landed on the moon surface on December 15 last year. It has now survived its planned life of three months. This rover was designed to roam the lunar surface while surveying its geological structure and substrate. China has become the second socialist country (after the Soviet Union) and the third in the world to soft land a rover on the moon.

On March 16, agreement was reached permitting the US to establish military facilities in Philippine bases, in return the Philippine army will be able to access the US bases. This agreement had been under negotiation since August 2013 and is expected to be signed during Barack Obama's visit in April. Historically, the US had military bases in Philippines, but since 1991, the Philippines has not allowed US military bases in its territory. However, in the light of heightening tensions over its territorial claims in the South China Sea, the Philippines welcomed the US's "coming back to Asia-Pacific policy" which was aimed to isolate China and contain its peaceful development.

On March 16, the Indian Airports Authority Employees Union (AAEU) warned it would take action, if the Indian government decided to privatise the six major airports on a 30-year lease in Kolkata, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Guwahati, Lichnow, and Jaipur. The Airports Authority of India has spent over RS 5,000 crore (\$900 million) recently to develop Chennai and Kolkata airports. The AAEU general secretary BS Ahlawat said, "the prime airports with prime land, are planned to be served to private entities at a throw away price, thus amounting to open squandering of public money".

On March 18, the Thailand caretaker government announced an end to the state of emergency decree which had been imposed in Bangkok for the last two months. This decision was made at a cabinet meeting by caretaker Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra. This decree was removed, because she believed that her government was able to control the present situation. However, the decree will be replaced by the Internal Security Act which will be enforced from March 19 to April 30. The decree and current political crisis have resulted in significant economic losses to Thailand's tourism sector and the withdrawal of foreign investment.

## Uruguay negotiations with US

**President José Mujica of Uruguay revealed on Friday (March 21) that, in exchange for granting shelter to detainees from the US Navy base at Guantánamo, Cuba, he has asked the Obama administration to release the three Cuban intelligence agents who have been in US prisons since their arrest in 1998 and conviction in 2001.**

The negotiations between Uruguay and the US "today are far from being closed," President Mujica said.

The men are Gerardo Hernández, Antonio Guerrero, and Ramón Labañino. Two others, Fernando González and René González, served their terms, were released and returned to Cuba.

Hernández is serving two life terms plus 15 years; Guerrero, 21

years 10 months, and Labañino, 30 years.

"We said that we would ask for something," Mujica said in his radio program "The President Speaks."

"We don't do this for money or material things, but we have no compunction in saying that we asked the North American government to please do everything possible to find the way to release those two or three Cuban prisoners who have been there for many years, because that, too, is a shame."

The negotiations between Uruguay and the US "today are far from being closed," Mujica said. "They depend, among other things, of various decisions out of our reach."

According to Mujica, the men released from Guantánamo "will be free men in our reality" and "that

business about not leaving [Uruguay] for two years would be just a voluntary gesture on their part to leave their shame behind, never an imposition of ours. We would never accept being anybody's jailers."

According to the ANSA news agency, the first group of released detainees would consist of five Syrians and one Pakistani, who would be accepted by Uruguay as ordinary – not political – refugees.

The president said that "18 countries have already offered similar cooperation to help finish this shameful situation and 89 prisoners have already left or are leaving Guantánamo."

In terms of Uruguay's standing in the community of nations, Mujica said that "we won a bit of moral authority to tell the most powerful to be a little less arrogant, less peremptory. That is why I think that, if these negotiations are successful, Uruguay and other countries should feel as servants in a cause that will close a shameful aspect of mankind."

[Progreso Weekly](http://Progreso Weekly) ✪

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The Guardian  
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Surry Hills NSW 2010



email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

### Time to speak up

I am writing about the sad and distressing reports of widespread human rights abuses in West Papua. Some recent little bits of publicity in the media have again brought up the issue of West Papua and shed a small light on the dire situation of the native people under brutal Indonesian rule. One of the great tragic injustices of our time is the brutal injustice being inflicted on the poor indigenous people of West Papua by the Indonesian occupation army and police forces.

The wretched West Papuans are being subjected to a reign of gross terror, of merciless repression, imprisonment, torture, callous and indiscriminate killings of people and

the assassinations and arrests of their leaders.

The plight of these people and their nation goes largely forgotten and unreported in the outside world. On the occasions when news leaks of some new carnage or other violent event, Indonesia's allies issue gentle statements asking Indonesia's government to examine the role of its army in West Papua. And so the Indonesian army "investigates" the army again and again after each incident.

The fact is the most of the international community remain mainly silent about these terrible atrocities and human rights abuses. And for those countries with political, strategic and economic interests in Indonesia, it's often in their national interest to not make a fuss and gloss over the oppressive conditions in West Papua.

It is time for Australians to speak up about this dreadful situation and ask our leaders and organisations to do more to expose and condemn Indonesia for its ongoing oppression of the suffering West Papuan people. These crimes against humanity and human rights abuses are happening right on Australia's doorstep and we must not remain silent. We have a moral duty to speak up for the

voiceless and publicise the deplorable state of affairs in West Papua and to act to remedy this.

Steven Katsineris,  
Hurstbridge, Vic

### Lower than low

**There are the lowest of the low and then there is a Victorian Liberal Upper House Member Bernie Finn who recently suggested that rapists and paedophiles used abortion to dispose of evidence of their crime.**

Mr Finn is a well-known anti-abortionist and is the organiser of yearly anti-abortion marches in Melbourne which he sickly calls "March for the Babies".

He states openly and proudly that rape is not an acceptable circumstance to justify an abortion. His views on abortion are not the only ones that raise questions about his suitability as a MLC.

Just listen to this one: "Once these professors, scientists and all sorts of shonks like Al Gore and others accept the reality that there is no global warming – that man-made climate change is just a figment of our imagination – guess what will happen? The grants will dry up, and

once the money dries up they will have to work for a living."

They say the whole is as good as its parts. Judging by this particular part of the Liberal Party establishment, the whole thing is sick, terminally sick.

A Green  
NSW

### Trams the way to go

**Re Peter Mac's article on Sydney trains ("Privatisation and appalling transport decisions", *Guardian* March 19). Sydney once had one of the most extensive tram systems in the world, with approximately 300 kilometres of track. The system was ideally suited to the city's difficult topography and narrow streets. It could deliver thousands of visitors to Bondi Beach on a hot summer day, at a rate that buses and private vehicles would still have no hope of matching.**

The removal of trams in the 1950s was an appalling decision. It was prompted by governments that were aligned with the oil and vehicle industries, and which therefore favoured buses over more efficient forms of public transport. The reinstatement of the trams is therefore an

excellent idea, which promises the public a far more efficient, clean and comfortable means of travel.

Mind you, the best solution of all would be for the Bondi Junction rail line to be extended across the eastern suburbs to connect with a station on the southern line, with a tram system radiating from the city throughout the eastern suburbs, and a supplementary bus system feeding the rail line.

That combination of services operated very successfully in Sydney's inner western suburbs in the first half of the 20th century.

But none of that is going to happen under the Abbott and O'Farrell regimes.

Lynne Fox  
Sydney

### The truth

**To get to the truth relating to events in the Crimea and Ukraine, it's worth looking at President Putin's speech to the Russian Duma.**

It can be seen on RT.news on Youtube. He gives the events a historical perspective from the Russian viewpoint that is lacking in Western mainstream media.

R H

## Culture & Life

by  
Rob Gowland

# Ukrainian fascists and US incidents



"Some 675,000 Ukrainians have fled to Russia following the fascist coup in Kiev and the banning of pro-Russian parties and the use of the Russian language for official purposes." – *The New Worker*. I don't remember seeing anything about that in our local media. Funny, that.

Did you see where Dmitry Yarosh, the leader of the Ukrainian neo-Nazi outfit the Right Sector militia, called on the Chechen warlord Doku Umarov to join his movement in fighting Russia? This open incitement of the Chechen terrorists to carry out more deadly attacks on Russian civilians has prompted the Russian government to issue an international arrest warrant for Yarosh.

However, I suspect the US and the EU will be most unlikely to take any action against him. After all, the US is the country that gave shelter to a Cuban emigré terrorist who was known to have blown up an airliner killing all on board. The airliner was Cuban, so the Yanks saw no problem in treating him as a respected citizen.

As I write this, I have just seen a TV news "report" showing Ukrainian troops in their bases, accompanied by commentary claiming that all their bases in Crimea have been surrounded by Russian soldiers. What the commentary failed to mention was that most of the Ukrainian forces on the Crimean peninsula have sworn allegiance to the pro-Russian Crimean government including the navy, the three anti-aircraft missile regiments and the air force with its squadron of 50 combat aircraft. Altogether, around 22,000 servicemen in the Ukrainian armed forces have switched sides.

At a media conference in Moscow earlier

this month, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that, although he personally was not in favour of months-long street protests as a means to pressure the government, the Maidan protesters had legitimate reasons for protesting against Yanukovich's power, "considering the overwhelming corruption and other faults of his presidency". But that did not legitimise the removal of the elected head of state by means of a *putsch*.

Putin warned that what seems to be happening now is the replacement of one set of crooks by another, citing the appointment by the "Interim Ukrainian Government" of certain wealthy oligarchs "of dubious reputation" to positions of power and influence in it.

The overthrow of socialism in the USSR and Eastern Europe brought all sorts of reactionaries and anti-Soviet/anti-Communist types out from under cover to strut their stuff. Neo-Nazi groups were suddenly game to appear in public, attacking immigrants and Jews, in some countries sacking Communist Party buildings and assaulting Communist Party members.

In the Baltic Republics, fascist groups were openly courted. Soviet war memorials were destroyed, while new ones were erected in "honour" of the traitorous scum who joined the Waffen-SS, fought on behalf of Hitler against the partisans, murdered anti-fascists among their own people and provided enthusiastic guards for Nazi concentration camps.

In Ukraine, besides providing muscle to fight the police in Maidan Square, the fascists have embarrassed their EU and US backers by their outspoken anti-Semitism. This must

have peeved some of their fellow "freedom fighters" in Maidan Square, who turned out to be Israeli soldiers! Ukraine, at least the Western part of it, is following the same anti-Soviet pattern. As reported in the US paper *Workers' World*: "The toppling of a Soviet war memorial in the Western Ukrainian town of Stryi spits upon everyone who died fighting the Nazis. It's an attack on the millions of Ukrainians who fought heroically in the Red Army and the many thousands who were anti-Nazi partisans."

"At least 25 statues of Lenin – the leader of the 1917 October Socialist Revolution – have been toppled. Meanwhile, wreaths have been placed upon statues of the [Ukrainian] fascist Stepan Bandera, whose followers massacred Jews and Poles."

The supporters of the coup regime in Kiev were so keen to show their allegiance to their new masters in the US, that they hung an American flag inside Kiev's main municipal building. But not the Stars & Stripes. No, they hung up a Confederate flag. *Workers' World* points out that in the early 20th century, immigrants from Ukraine were among the strongest supporters of the Communist and workers' movements in Canada and the USA. Commented the paper: "Hanging the Confederate flag of the US slave masters inside Kiev's City Hall ... dirties the revolutionary traditions of Ukrainian workers and peasants."

Mind you, the neo-Nazis and other reactionaries in Maidan Square would no doubt regard the revolutionary traditions of workers and peasants everywhere with contempt and loathing.

Leaving Ukraine for the moment, did you see the thoughtful way US oil giant Chevron reacted to an explosion in a natural gas well in Pennsylvania? When fracking operations went wrong in a coal seam gas well in Bobtown, Pennsylvania, the resulting explosion left one dead and another missing. It took five days for emergency crews to safely extinguish the fire that followed.

Sensing a PR crisis, the company acted with what they probably thought was the perfect way to deal with people in a coal mining community (of which there are lots in Pennsylvania). The *Philadelphia Daily News* broke the story of what Chevron was doing to regain the trust and support of the people of Bobtown. Chevron distributed to town residents coupons entitling them to one free pizza and a two-litre soda from the local Bobtown pizza shop. Yep, no expense spared, as you can see.

On its website, in referring to the explosion, Chevron said: "Chevron recognises the effect this has had on the community. We value being a responsible member of this community and will continue to strive to achieve incident-free operations." Don't you just love it? "Responsible" members of a community don't usually try to blow it up. Or poison the groundwater or any of the other unpleasant side-effects of the fracking process.

And how can they say they will "continue" to strive for incident-free operations when their operations have just killed someone? But to a company like Chevron, the death of a worker (or two) really is just an "incident". After all, they can always get more of them. ☘



Sunday March 30 –  
Saturday April 5

Last week's episode of *Ice Age Giants* dealt with the mega-fauna that flourished on (and around) the continent of North America during the last great Ice Age, around 80,000 to 40,000 years ago. In this week's episode, *Land of the Cave Bear* (ABC1 Sunday March 30 at 7.30pm), Professor Alice Roberts turns this short series' attention from the New World to the Old, to Asia and Europe. Since the lower sea levels meant Siberia and North America were not separated by sea at that time, mammoths roamed across Eurasia too in vast migrations.

They were joined by other Ice Age giants, such as the Woolly Rhinoceros and the Cave Bear, which would dwarf a modern-day grizzly, and of course Ice Age predators like the formidable Cave Lion.

For woolly rhinos and woolly mammoths, and other cold-adapted animals, the Ice Age created a bounty. The so-called Mammoth Steppe, a vast tract of land which went half way round the world, provided them with food all year round. But the Ice Age also saw the appearance of Europe's most dangerous predators

– Neanderthal man, physically adapted for living on the edge of the ice sheet, and ingenious enough to hunt down game as large as mammoths.

As before in this series, thanks to splendid computer generated imagery, the past really does come alive.

This week's episode of *Ross Kemp Extreme World* (ABC2 Mondays at 9.20pm) travels to Papua New Guinea (Monday, March 31) and reveals Australia's sorry colonial legacy. Barely one hundred miles off the coast of Australia, for as long as anyone in Papua New Guinea can remember, life has been lived on a war footing. Its population of seven million is divided between hundreds of often warring tribes, the vast majority of whom live in rural areas virtually untouched by the modern world, where superstition and the belief in witchcraft is deeply entrenched and tribal disputes flare into deadly violence and tit-for-tat killings.

Gangs called *Raskols* control the streets of the capital, Port Moresby. Armed robbery, car-jacking and rape are commonplace. To understand the tribal customs better Ross leaves Port Moresby behind to travel deep into the highlands where an estimated 400 people are murdered or killed in tribal fighting every year. Travelling along one of the most dangerous roads in the world, Ross is held-up at gunpoint by would-be carjackers, but by acting tough he convinces their leader to do an interview on camera.

As always with Kemp, his sympathies are with the victims and he has an astute eye, but he does not have a class analysis of his subjects and never tries to uncover the economic reasons underlying any situation.

The television industry is nothing if not commercial. If you



Ross Kemp with The General in PNG Highlands – *Ross Kemp Extreme World* (ABC2 Mondays at 9.20pm) travels to Papua New Guinea (Monday, March 31).

can't sell your quiz show to non-English-speaking countries because of the language barrier, sell them the format of the show instead. This has been going on for years, and foreign-made versions of *The Price Is Right* and similar interchangeable quiz shows are made from Germany to Brazil. As for English-speaking programs, if they are popular in Britain they will probably be remade in the US for their local market and also remade in Australia for our local market.

*The Agony of Modern Manners* (ABC1 Wednesdays from April 2 at 9.00pm) is a six-part series in which assorted "personalities" (including John Elliott and his son Tom) make frank – and hence, apparently, comic – statements to camera on aspects of modern life. The British did it first, in *Grumpy Old Men* and *Grumpy Old Women*, and did it much better. Their talking heads were less cynical and

more charming. Jess Harris, Steve Vizard, Ella Hooper, Dave O'Neil, Julia Zemiro and Tim Ross are not people whose opinions particularly interest or amuse me.

When approaching a program like *Diary of a Teenage Virgin* (ABC2 Friday April 4 at 9.30pm), one is moved to wonder where the makers of such TV documentaries find the people who appear in them. Do they go round the local schools asking to talk to virgins? Do they advertise for teenage virgins who want to tell all on television? How would you go about finding a group of teenage virgins?

However they found them, the makers of this British program have a group of mixed-sex teenagers who have yet to lose their cherry and are seemingly happy to talk about it. In a couple of cases their mothers are also willing (if not exactly happy) to talk about it. Their comments are among

the most interesting. Not that any of the comments are very profound.

Chiefly one is left with a feeling of pity as these teenagers try to deal with a normal part of growing up complicated by peer pressure, nervousness, ignorance and downright fear. Education all too often is porn downloaded from the Internet.

I dipped into this week's *Death In Paradise* (ABC1 Saturdays at 7.30pm) to see what effect the new actor (Kris Marshall playing DI Humphrey Goodman) has had on the show. The answer appears to be virtually none. He is bumbling and untidy, but apart from superficial traits of the kind, his investigations still require his assistant to gather all the suspects together where he brilliantly exposes the killer.

I must say I preferred his predecessor, but since the show is otherwise unchanged, I daresay DI Goodman will grow on me. ☺



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March 27  
**DEBT, FRAGILITY & STAGNATION: CAPITALISM'S MISSING ENGINE**  
Frank Stilwell, Political Economy, Sydney University;  
Jim Stanford, Economist, Canadian Auto Workers Union;

April 3  
**THE MURDOCH PRESS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON AUSTRALIAN, BRITISH & AMERICAN POLITICS**  
Paul Barry, presenter, ABC MediaWatch, author of new book *Sex, Lies & the Murdoch Succession*;  
Rod Tiffin, Professor, Dept of Government, Sydney University, author of *Murdoch – a Reassessment*;

April 10  
**WHAT'S IN STORE FOR THE WORKPLACE UNDER ABBOTT AND WHAT CAN BE DONE TO FIGHT BACK?**  
Sally McManus, Secretary Australian Services Union (NSW & ACT);  
Tim Ayres, State Secretary, AMWU;

April 17  
**NO MEETING: EASTER**  
Public holiday;

April 24  
**NO MEETING: ANZAC DAY**  
Public holiday ;

May 1  
**REPEALING THE CARBON TAX – WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES?**  
Ben Pearson, Head of Programs, Greenpeace Australia-Pacific;  
John Connor, Director Climate Change Institute;

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74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010  
Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833  
Email: guardian@cpa.org.au

Editor: Tom Pearson

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# Crimeans choose Russia

Stephen Lendman

**March 16 was historic. It was important. Crimean authorities showed how real democracy works. They shamed America's sham process. Monied interests control things. People have no say. Both major parties control a rigged process. They're two sides of the same coin.**

Not a dime's worth of difference separates them. Independent candidates are virtually shut out. Americans get the best democracy money can buy.

Crimeans got the real thing. International observers praised the process. Voting went peacefully and smoothly. It was scrupulously open, free, and fair. No irregularities occurred. None were seen. No pressure. No intimidation.

Not a single Russian soldier in sight. None invaded. None occupy Crimea. Claims otherwise are false. They're Western propaganda. They're malicious lies.

Turnout was impressive. It was unprecedented. It exceeded 83%. In Sevastopol, it was 89.5%. Over 1.274 million Crimeans voted. Plus Sevastopol residents excluded from this total.

An astonishing 96.77% chose Russia – 95.6% of Sevastopol voters. A previous article said Russians comprise about 60% of Crimea's population. Ukrainians around 25%. Tatars 12%.

Results show Crimeans overwhelmingly reject Kiev putschists. Russians, Ukrainians and Tatars agree. Claims otherwise are false.

Referendum Commission chairman Mikhail Malyshev said: "We were receiving protocols from the 27 district commissions all night long. The last one came at around 6:00am. After that, our commission compiled the final protocol." Commission members signed the official document. It certified election results.

A scant 0.72% of ballots were declared invalid.

Crimean Prime Minister Sergei Aksionov addressed a Simferopol rally, saying:

"No one can take away our victory. We are going to Russia." His speech was accompanied by the Russian national anthem.

"We are going home," he added. "Crimea within Russia. Hooray, comrades."

Parliament Speaker Vladimir Konstantinov added: "We have done it! You have done it! This is our victory, and nobody can take it away from us."

Crimeans celebrated their landslide victory.

Ludmila Balatskaya is a 72-year-old former Sevastopol city government deputy. "Today is the greatest day of my life," she said. "We are returning to mother Russia. I was just a little girl when they just informed us that Crimea was now Ukraine. Everything fell down around me.

"We are Russia. We have always been Russian people in our souls here in Crimea, but today that becomes a practical reality again."

She spoke with tears in her eyes. Most other Crimeans share her joy.

Gennady Basov chairs the Sevastopol Russian Block party. He said choosing Russia gives Crimea "protection from the neo-Nazis and fascists in Kiev."

Russian State Duma Speaker Sergey Naryshkin highlighted Western hypocrisy. On the one hand, its officials reject Crimean self-determination rights. On the other, they call Kiev putschists legitimate. They ignored their brazen *coup d'état*.

On March 17, Crimea asked UN authorities and international community countries to recognise their self-determination. A resolution was adopted doing so. "The Republic of Crimea seeks equality, peace, and good-neighbourliness as well as political, economic and



cultural cooperation," with all other nations, it said.

Russian State Duma Vice Speaker Sergei Neverov said parliamentarians will complete all necessary legislative procedures on accommodating Crimeans at the earliest possible time.

"The results of the Crimean referendum have clearly indicated that the residents of Crimea see their future only as part of Russia," he said.

"They voted for reunification of the people who always lived together." The number of people who came to polling stations and supported Crimea's re-unification with Russia speaks for itself.

"It's a reply to all those who attempted, throughout the past weeks, to prevent the residents of Crimea from determining their own destiny, their own future and the future of their children."

Russian upper house Federation Council Foreign Policy Committee deputy chairman Andrei Klimov praised Crimea's democratic process, saying:

"What we saw in Crimea was a direct expression of citizens' will – a system that the Americans might stand to benefit from. The people of any territory on the globe should have the right to determine its destiny independently.

"Whatever the situation, the people of Crimea didn't give the right to choose destiny-making options for themselves either to Washington or to Brussels.

"A statement by White House press secretary that the referendum in Crimea stands at variance with the Ukrainian Constitution and hence the US rejects it is all too obvious.

"The thing is the White House is playing on the side of the new coalition in Kiev, and the US always supports only the 'democracy' that serves its national interests."

On March 21, Federation Council and State Duma members will vote up or down on letting Crimea join the Russian Federation. Sentiment in both houses suggests overwhelming approval.

Days earlier, Federation Council chairwoman Valentina Matviyenko said so. Russian State Duma Speaker Sergey Naryshkin echoed her sentiment.

Russia has been losing people for years, he said. "At last, we're getting our compatriots back. So that's a historic moment for Russia." Putin has the final say.

Crimean Parliament Speaker Konstantinov said Crimea can join Russia in weeks. Perhaps by end of March, he added. Crimea will draft a new constitution. "We will send it for approval to the Russian parliament," he explained.

Steps are underway to shift from Ukraine's hryvnia to Russia's ruble. Next week, the ruble will be introduced as a second official currency. Dual currencies will continue for about six months. Thereafter, Ukraine's hryvnia will be discontinued.

According to Crimea's Prime Minister Aksionov, integrating Crimea fully into Russia may take up to a year. Perhaps sooner, he added. At the same time, Crimea wants good relations with all nations, he stressed.

Reuters said an initial list of up to 130 senior Russian officials would be reduced to perhaps "tens or scores" for final consideration. Washington readied its own list. White House senior adviser Dan Pfeiffer said, "You can expect sanctions designations in the coming days." Perhaps sooner.

Similar asset freezes and travel bans on Russian officials were announced. Putin was excluded.

Washington imposed sanctions on 11 Russian and former Viktor Yanukovich government officials. Moscow's Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin was named.

A White House statement said sanctions target officials who "undermine democratic processes and institutions in Ukraine." None exist except in Crimea.

On March 6, Obama's Executive Order authorised "Blocking Property of Certain Persons Contributing to the Situation in Ukraine." It applies to foreign nationals and Americans. Property belonging to Russian nationals can be seized.

The same applies to "any United States citizen, permanent resident alien, entity organised under the laws of the United States or any jurisdiction within the United States (including foreign branches), or any person in the United States."

Ahead of Crimea's referendum, Obama

declared a national emergency. He considers Crimean self-determination a "threat to US national security."

For sure it's a threat of a good example. It runs counter to Washington's imperial ambitions.

Obama usurped the right to seize (*read steal*) assets belonging to anyone (including US citizens) "determined by the Secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the Secretary of State":

(i) to be responsible for or complicit in, or to have engaged in, directly or indirectly, any of the following:

(A) actions or policies that undermine democratic processes or institutions in Ukraine;

(B) actions or policies that threaten the peace, security, stability, sovereignty, or territorial integrity of Ukraine; or

(C) misappropriation of state assets of Ukraine or of an economically significant entity in Ukraine.

Wiggle room language permits circumventing fundamental rule of law principles. So-called "direct or indirect ... actions or policies that threaten the peace, security, stability, sovereignty, or territorial integrity of Ukraine" aren't defined.

Nor is how Crimean self-determination threatens US national security. The claim is absurd on its face. It's outrageous. It's offensive. It turns logic on its head. It reveals lawless US governance.

Obama can act any way he wishes. He can do so by diktat. He can act lawlessly. He can enforce Washington rules. He's playing with fire. British MP George Galloway is right saying Western leaders created a Frankenstein monster in Ukraine.

It's "a very serious threat," he said. The damn fools in Washington and Brussels perhaps didn't "read the novel Frankenstein to the end," said Galloway.

"If they had, they'd have known that the monster Dr Frankenstein created quickly got out of control. That's why it's called a monster."

"And this monstrous" Kiev neo-Nazi threat poses potential grave problems for Europe. Perhaps for humanity if war erupts.

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**Communist Party of Australia**

**Guardian**

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

Email: [guardian@cpa.org.au](mailto:guardian@cpa.org.au)

**Central Committee:**

**General Secretary:** Bob Briton  
**Party President:** Vinnie Molina  
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010  
P: 02 9699 8844 F: 02 9699 9833

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

Email: [cpa@cpa.org.au](mailto:cpa@cpa.org.au)

**Sydney District Committee:**  
Wayne Sonter  
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010  
P: 02 9699 8844 F: 02 9699 9833

**Newcastle Branch:**  
[newcastle@cpa.org.au](mailto:newcastle@cpa.org.au)

**Riverina Branch:**  
Allan Hamilton  
2/57 Cooper St Cootamundra 2590

**Melbourne Branch:**  
Andrew Irving  
[viccpa@netspace.net.au](mailto:viccpa@netspace.net.au)  
Box 3 Room 0 Trades Hall  
Lygon St Carlton Sth 3053  
P: 03 9639 1550 F: 03 9639 4199

**SA State Committee:**  
Bob Briton,  
PO Box 612, Port Adelaide BC,  
SA 5015 Ph: 0418 894 366  
[www.adelaidecommunists.org](http://www.adelaidecommunists.org)  
Email: [sa@cpa.org.au](mailto:sa@cpa.org.au)

**West Australian Branch:**  
Vinnie Molina [perth@cpa.org.au](mailto:perth@cpa.org.au)  
PO Box 98 North Perth WA 6906  
P: 0419 812 872

**Brisbane Branch:**  
PO Box 33, Camp Hill, Qld 4152  
P: 0449 202 189  
[cpabris@live.com.au](mailto:cpabris@live.com.au)

**Tasmania Branch:**  
Bob Briton [tas@cpa.org.au](mailto:tas@cpa.org.au)  
P: 0418 894 366