



Abbott beats the war drum

From the Middle East to the Ukraine, Asia Pacific, Indian Ocean

Bob Briton

The Abbott government is straining at the leash, desperate to commit the Australian military further to US war plans. In fact, it appears to have taken on the special role of being the first to threaten grave consequences for the alleged adversaries of the US worldwide in the most prejudicial terms. The rhetoric coming from Obama Administration and US Congress hawks has been exceeded by the Abbott government. Aside from its deep commitment to the US alliance, it is keen to draw attention away from a deteriorating domestic political scene. For its own political reasons, Labor is going along with this dangerous, dishonest agenda.

Abbott, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop and other Coalition heavyweights have kept on plugging with their "tough" line on the situation in the Ukraine. "Let us be clear about what is happening: Russia started it and Russia must take responsibility for this loss of life," Abbott told Parliament recently. Though investigators are still to report on the incident, Abbott insists Russian rebels shot down Malaysian Airlines flight MH17, that swarms of tanks and 1,000 Russian soldiers are operating openly in eastern Ukraine.

The fanciful take on events begins with the idea that "Russia started it." In fact, a violent US and NATO-inspired coup against the democratically elected government of the Ukraine "started it." That reality and the major role played by neo-fascists in the process is completely ignored. The corporate media can be relied on to make the most of Abbott's pot stirring. His latest pronouncement that the remains of passengers may still be strewn on the fields of eastern Ukraine and that, somehow, Russian rebels are preventing their recovery beggars belief.

Tissue thin or not, Australia has entered into tit-for-tat sanctions against the Russian government on the basis of these claims. New travel bans and other measures were announced by the Abbott government last week and Julie Bishop was going to use her visit to the NATO summit in Cardiff last week, in part, to lobby her counterparts for the exclusion of President Putin from the G20 meeting to be held in Brisbane in November.

The Abbott government has been rewarded

for its efforts. While Australia already had a partnership agreement with NATO signed by the previous Labor government that covered intelligence and technology sharing and joint training and personnel swaps, it will now get to sit in on key decision-making meetings. Finland, Georgia, Jordan and Sweden have also been anointed. Key decisions will include the deployment of a new "rapid reaction force" for Eastern Europe clearly directed against the influence and sovereignty of Russia. The Ukraine is only the latest pawn in the grand scheme of encircling and then breaking up economic rival Russia. A ring of dependent, economically crippled former Soviet republics now hosts NATO assets in readiness.

Other grand plans

The Prime Minister was busy last week advancing another grand US imperialist plan. He visited his Indian counterpart, newly-elected right-winger Narendra Modi. Abbott signed off on a deal to supply Australian uranium to India thus freeing up other supplies for use in its nuclear weapons program. The Australian PM's talk about India's supposedly impeccable behaviour as a global citizen since independence was so much hot air. The stubborn facts are that its nuclear power generation industry has an appalling safety record and that it is in a nuclear arms race with northern neighbour Pakistan.

Abbott's trip also saw India agree to closer military ties including joint military exercises with Australia, the US and Japan. This grouping was enthusiastically termed the "Gang of four" before the Pentagon told Howard-era ministers to tone down the language. India is being drawn further into a war-fighting alliance against China, which is claimed to be behaving in an increasingly aggressive manner. Disputes over islands in the South China and East China Sea are said to be evidence of China's "expansionist" mindset in the region, in the words of Prime Minister Modi. Chinese financed port facilities and other projects in the Asia Pacific and Indian Oceans region are said to be the beginnings of a "string of pearls" network of bases for future military aggression.

The reality is that the US and its allies are the ones busily establishing new military bases. The US Marines' base in Darwin is only one of the most recent contributions by the Australian



government. Talk of a "joint" Australia/US base on the Cocos Islands is firming up.

Back to Iraq

The other theatre of war that Abbott and Co is itching to be involved in is the Middle East. Horrifying images of beheadings carried out by Islamic State (IS) executioners have been used to create support for military involvement in Iraq alongside US forces or at least to dampen opposition to it. Abbott claims two thirds of the 60 Australians said to be fighting with IS forces may return to commit blood-curdling terrorist atrocities in Australia.

There's no doubt successive governments' complicity with the US in the Middle East makes Australia a potential terror target. The Abbott government could lessen that possibility by aiding the government of Iraq to rebuild the country after the "shock and awe" invasion and legacy of depleted uranium shells, flattened health and other vital infrastructure and the marauding of US and other oil sector corporations. But that's not the way imperialism works.

The Abbott government will soon follow up air-drops of humanitarian supplies to territory threatened by IS forces with deliveries of rocket-propelled grenades, mortars, small arms and ammunition to Kurdish Peshmerga

fighters. The Iraqi ambassador to Australia has protested the move that bypasses Iraq's national government. The Abbott government has also bypassed the Australian people in all of these war preparations. Labor and the Coalition united to defeat calls from the Greens and independent MP Andrew Wilke for Parliament to debate involvement in the conflict.

US President Barak Obama is set to commit greater numbers of supposedly non-combat military personnel to Iraq. Foreshadowing an expected address to the nation, Obama said he will be calling on a group of "partners" to help with the task of defeating IS. He mentioned Saudi Arabia, Jordan, United Arab Emirates and Turkey in a televised interview. He could have mentioned Syria, which is already battling the forces of the gruesome "Caliphate" on its soil. The problem with helping Syria would be that it upsets the overall US (and Israeli Zionist) agenda of breaking up Middle Eastern countries not to its liking. Syria is a prime example of such independent minded countries.

In all these plans, the US has a willing helper in the Abbott government. The labour and peace movements of Australia must rally strong opposition to these reckless plans so that they no longer serve as a useful distraction to domestic politics but become a millstone around the neck of an untrustworthy government. ✘

3



Landmark People's Bill in Queensland

4



Facing the fallout

5



Stealing workers' retirement

10



Culture & Life
Lies and Russia

Guardian

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Government contempt for Parliament

The contents of the Minerals Resource Rent Tax Repeal and Other Measures Bill 2014 legislation are bad enough (see page 5). But the process by which they were presented, or more accurately not presented, to the House of Representatives also raises serious concerns as to where the Abbott government is headed. Treating elected members of the House of Representatives with total contempt and running roughshod over the democratic processes (as limited as they are) the government refused to make the text of the legislation available to the Opposition and other parties prior to the "debate".

Instead of a minister kicking debate off with the customary second reading speech in which the contents of the bill are explained and defended, the parliamentary secretary to the Treasurer, Steven Ciobo, tabled the second reading speech and told the Parliament nothing! Labor was left to kick off the "debate" on a secret bill with a secret Second Reading Speech.

According to standing orders, parliamentary secretaries cannot move the second reading. But that didn't phase the Speaker Bronwyn Bishop one iota. Standing orders had been suspended to allow the Bill to be proceeded with and after that apparently anything goes!

The Speaker flatly rejected Labor MP Tony Burke's attempts to raise a point of order about proceeding with legislation that they could not see. Burke then had the job of debating a secret bill with a secret second reading speech!

"In the most arrogant fashion, the government expect the parliament to debate a bill that none of us can have a copy of for reasons that none of us can hear." Burke said that this could have serious ramifications as courts often go to what was said during the Second Reading speech when attempting to interpret an Act.

Then making an indirect reference to the government's secrecy on asylum seekers, Burke quipped, "It may well be the case that the contents of the bill are an operational matter."

"We have a situation which has never, in living memory, occurred in this parliament, where in a second reading debate the first speech is given by the opposition. And the reasons to oppose it are being given by someone who has not read [it]."

The government just used its numbers to introduce and force the bill through the Lower House. In the Senate, the government produced the amendments that had been secretly negotiated with Clive Palmer. Palmer United Party Senators and their mates from the Motorists and Family First parties joined the Coalition in blocking attempts for the legislation to be referred to a committee and time given to consider its contents.

On September 2, it returned to the Lower House with the amendments. By this time the bill and details of the amendments had been made available. It didn't take long to ram them through.

By September 4, the Abbott government had got what it wanted: abolition of the mineral resources rent tax, deferral of increases in the compulsory superannuation contributions and the abolition of the School Kids Bonus, the Income Support Bonus and the Low Income Super Contribution in a few years time. In the process, it had shown utter contempt for Parliament, acting in the most arrogant and authoritarian manner.

It is yet another step in the process of turning Parliament into a farce and putting people off politics and politicians. It should serve as a warning as to where this government is headed with its contempt for democratic processes and international law.

PRESS FUND

Shocked residents of the inner-Sydney suburb of Rozelle are receiving special counselling after a suspicious explosion which destroyed a local shop, killed three people and will necessitate the demolition of adjacent buildings. Spare a thought then, for the residents of Gaza, where dozens of homes, workplaces and schools were destroyed without warning in recent Israeli artillery attacks, and where survivors and victims had to be dragged from the wreckage by volunteers because local ambulance and rescue services were totally overwhelmed. The *Guardian* is dedicated to covering these events, but we need your support for the Press Fund, which helps us cover production costs, so please send us something for the next edition if you possibly can. Many thanks to those who contributed this week, as follows:

Steve \$30, Joanne \$5, Mark Mannion \$5, "Round Figure" \$15, Patrick \$5, Gary Spiers \$200

This week's total: \$260 Progressive total: \$5,620

Justice for Hamid

"The death of Hamid Kehazaei, the 24 year-old Iranian asylum seeker whose life support system was turned off on Friday evening, is senseless and inexcusable," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"That a man could die in this way while supposedly in the care of the Immigration Department says everything about the lack of care on Manus Island.

"It is absurd for Scott Morrison to claim that asylum seekers who get ill on Manus Island get 'outstanding care'. Hamid's death speaks for the medical neglect, and to the culture of punishment, and indifference that pervades Manus Island.

"Like Reza Berati, Hamid is a victim of the offshore processing regime being run by the Coalition

government. There are another 1,000 potential Hamids on Manus Island. Infections and skin disease are endemic in the detention centre. It is unhygienic, unsanitary and unsafe.

"All the detainees on Manus must be brought to the mainland. The many ex-Manus detainees already on the mainland for medical treatment must be allowed to stay.

"While we mourn for Hamid, we are determined to fight for justice and to continue to campaign to close Manus Island."

Only hours before Hamid's death, in Wickham Point detention centre, an Iranian asylum seeker reportedly swallowed razor blades and attempted to hang himself when threatened with being returned to Manus Island. This was the second time in three months that the Department of

Immigration has tried to return him to Manus Island.

He is presently in a Darwin hospital.

He too was a victim of delayed medical treatment on Manus Island after suffering a stroke in December 2013 that resulted in the loss of sight in one eye. He also waited over four months for an appointment with a neurologist after being transferred to Darwin.

The tragic news of Hamid's plight has fuelled growing opposition to off-shore processing. A petition calling for the closure of Manus Island has been growing at the rate of almost 1,000 signatures an hour in the 24 hours leading to Hamid's death, and now has over 86,200 signatories. ✪

Political Prisoner Liliyany Obando House arrest after six days on a hunger strike

Vinnie Molina

On Wednesday August 13 Liliyany Obando took the radical decision to go on a hunger strike. This was in protest of yet another injustice in this six-year ordeal that started with her initial illegal and unfair arrest on August 8, 2008. At that time Liliyany was held without charge for 43 months at the notorious El Buen Pastor women's prison in Bogota.

The injustice was heightened by a denial of her right to be held in home detention to be able to care for her young children. International pressure exposed the illegality of her detention without charge and forced an end of legal terms. Liliyany was then granted bail and placed on Provisional release on March 1, 2012.

While on Provisional release she was sentenced to 70 months in detention and 707 million Colombian Pesos (around \$400,000), a fine that would be impossible to

repay for any worker or activist let alone a single mother of two young children.

On August 5, 2014 the Colombian trade unionist and political prisoner was again taken from her home where she had been serving out the remainder of her sentence under house arrest.

Immediately international networks went into action and the call was made for solidarity with Liliyany Obando to local and international human rights organisations to demand her unconditional release. The International Network in Solidarity with Colombia's Political Prisoners (INSPP) mobilised and sent a Canadian activist to shield Liliyany and her family.

On August 19, six days into her hunger strike Liliyany Obando was transferred to her family home and is now under house arrest. Reports indicate she suffered a fall and sustained injuries to her right arm and her head when she hit the ground. She did not receive any kind of

medical attention and family and friends feared for her health.

Since she was transferred to her family home a number of international delegations have been visiting Liliyany. Among the high profile visitors are Justice for Colombia UK (JFC) sponsored lawyers and Parliamentarians such as SF MP Conor Murphy and German MPs Heinz Bierbaum and Dietmar Schultz.

All this is proof of the power of international solidarity that in this case has kept Liliyany alive. Over the six-year ordeal several unions have sent delegations and other support to Liliyany and her family.

The Communist Party of Australia, CPA expresses its solidarity with Liliyany Obando and her family who are also victims of Colombia's state terrorism: we will continue campaigning for her unconditional release and the freedom of more than 9,500 Colombian Political Prisoners.

For updates on her case visit: www.inspp.org ✪



Landmark People's Bill in Queensland

The landmark "People's Bill" was officially launched in Brisbane last week with Queenslanders saying they've had enough of corruption and cronyism and taking a stand for a fair go for all.

About 150 Queenslanders from all walks of life attended the official launch of the People's Common Rights and Provisions Bill 2014 (People's Bill) at the Fox Hotel in South Brisbane.

Kym Garrick, of Wynnum West, gave a very personal account of why such a Bill is urgently needed in Queensland: she was sacked from her job for having a Clean Air Qld sign in her car. Other speakers included prominent barrister, Stephen Keim SC, director of the Centre for Environmental Excellence for Environmental Decisions (CEED), Professor Hugh Possingham, Lock the Gate Alliance's president, Drew Hutton and representatives from community groups.

Community members last month tabled the People's Bill in an historic event at State Parliament. The Bill aims to restore our common rights eroded by the mining industry and dodgy governments. It sets a new 'clean agenda' for the state. Key-note speaker Stephen Keim, said such a Bill was long overdue in Queensland.

"When one reads the People's Bill for the first time, one is struck with two conflicting emotional responses. On the one hand, one thinks that this is basic common sense that no one could oppose but, at the same time, one feels that the ideas are in the realm of fairy tale and pie in the sky," he said.

"It is an indictment of the state of our polity that one does feel that achieving the basic values laid down in the Bill might be unrealistic. Indeed, that emotion underlines how much a strong people's movement is needed to renew the Queensland democracy."

Drew Hutton said: "Unfortunately the current Newman government is even worse than the Joh Bjelke-Petersen regime at stripping away Queenslanders rights and that's why we need this Bill."

"Around 150 Queenslanders [at the launch] cheered and applauded



this vision for a cleaner and fairer state. When we hold our people's parliamentary debate on this Bill next month, we will be squarely telling Queensland mining politics that the people are coming for you like a hurricane this coming state election, and will clean this place up whether you like it or not."

The event, live-streamed to viewers across Australia, also featured the Queensland Sadies, a travelling troupe of "political cleaners" who offer their services to help make politicians' offices and dealings more transparent.

They performed their theme song, *Clean Up the Political Pigsty*, sung to the tune of John Farnham's classic, *Sadie the Cleaning Lady*.

Meanwhile, in NSW, the hearing on the Maules Creek Coal Mine has been adjourned following dramatic news that Whitehaven Coal have approached the State government to have their contested management plan varied and thus render the legal proceedings redundant.

This means that the Secretary of the Department of Planning and Environment must soon make a decision on whether to let Whitehaven change the rules and clear Leard Forest in spring when young native animals are likely to be killed in their nests.

"The adjournment follows news that instead of waiting for a court decision on the legality of the Biodiversity Management Plan, Whitehaven have decided to amend their plan entirely so that they can bulldoze Leard forest in spring and early summer" said Phil Laird for the Maules Creek Community Council.

"This places the welfare of the threatened animals of Leard State Forest squarely in the hands of the new Secretary of the Department of Planning and Environment, and the relevant Ministers – Pru Goward and Rob Stokes.

"It's a massive test for the NSW government – are they capable of standing up for the environment against the shifting demands and

production timetable of a mining giant?"

"Or will they approve a new Biodiversity Management Plan, allow the slaughter of young native animals in their nests, and prevent our case from ever being heard in court?"

"If approved, this new plan would be yet another example of how coal mining has corrupted due process in NSW – the miner breaks the rules, the community pings them for it, and then the government changes the rules to suit the miners.

"The NSW government needs

to finally find the courage to enforce basic regulations on coal mining and stop moving the goal posts to suit the mining industry," Laird said.

The Maules Creek Community Council sought an interim injunction in the NSW Land & Environment Court in June, challenging the Biodiversity Management Plan under which Whitehaven had commenced clearing in winter.

The injunction proceedings resulted in Whitehaven being forced to stop clearing until a full hearing on the case. ☼

Rally for rights

Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) deputy national secretary Mick Doleman took to the podium in Devonport as Tasmanians gathered to protest the federal and state Liberal Party's moves to encroach on rights, wages and equality.

Just last week the Tasmanian Liberal Will Hodgman government tabled a Bill that leaves the setting of all wages and conditions (penalty rates, overtime, sick leave, holiday pay etc) for every public sector employee entirely to the discretion of the Treasurer.

"The Treasurer by regulation, with the mere flick of a pen, will have the power to set the wages of any individual employee, any group of employees or the entire public sector, every year, year on year, forever," Unions Tasmania President Roz Madsen said.

The Treasurer will dictate wages and working conditions, abolishing collective bargaining and trade union representation.

"This Bill will form the blueprint for the Abbott government's overhaul of the Federal Workplace Relations system. Everything about this smacks of Eric Abetz. Thinly veiled as a budget savings measure it is a shameless attempt to drive a stake into the heart of every

workplace right we take for granted in this country – bargaining for wages, penalty rates, allowances, overtime, sick leave, holiday pay, everything."

Mick Doleman said union members were particularly susceptible from attacks by conservative governments.

"We're seeing the attempted dismantling of universal healthcare and unfair meddling with superannuation which will affect all workers," Doleman said.

"On top of that unionised and working class people are facing a whole host of other assaults on wages, conditions and penalty rates.

"I've never encountered such a nasty, ideological-driven government in my lifetime and I hope I won't ever have to suffer another period like it."

Tasmania branch secretary Jason Campbell said the state was in a disarray with local governments trying to disallow protests, at the same time the federal government are taking away ingrained workplace conditions.

"It seems Hodgman and Abbott only want to take, take, take, but not from the miners, and not from high income earners, they only take from those who have the least to give." ☼

Pete's Corner



Facing the fallout

Renewable energy in a post Fukushima world

Richard Titelius

Naoto Kan was the Prime Minister of Japan from June 2010 to August 2011. He led the country at the time of the devastating earthquake and tsunami which hit Japan on March 11, 2011 and the subsequent meltdown at the Fukushima Nuclear Facility.

As the momentum was building in Western Australia to bring into operation a number of uranium mines, the Conservation Council of WA helped to organise a public meeting in Perth for Naoto Kan to speak about the hazards of nuclear energy and Japan's progress in moving towards renewable energy.

Following the Fukushima disaster, Kan became an outspoken critic of nuclear energy and advocate for renewable energy. Kan also visited other uranium mining state capitals such as Brisbane and Darwin.

On Sunday evening, August 24, he spoke at the Perth Town Hall before an enthusiastic crowd of 330 people.

One of the first speakers was 11-year-old Parkwood Primary School student Ashwin Creswell who recalled as an eight-year-old that he had written a letter to Prime Minister Kan via the then Australian PM Julia Gillard to say that a Japanese boy who was orphaned by the Fukushima disaster could stay with him and play with his toys. Ashwin was given the opportunity to finally meet with Mr Kan and presented him with a book.

Well known Aboriginal activist Della Rae Morrison spoke about her



tour to Japan in January 2011, shortly before the Fukushima disaster, to talk about the hazards facing her people and their country from uranium mining.

Naoto Kan began his presentation by recalling the events of that day on March 11, 2011, when the large chandelier in the Japanese Diet or parliament building in Tokyo began to shake.

As the details of the meltdown and hydrogen explosion at the Fukushima nuclear facility, following the earthquake and tsunami, became known he became aware of the need to respond to the growing nuclear crisis confronting Japan.

The Fukushima disaster was the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in Ukraine in 1986. At Fukushima the nation faced the possibility of an incident that could potentially have seen tens if not hundreds times more radioactive material being released than at Chernobyl.

Kan spoke of having to face the possibility of evacuating up to 50 million people from a 250 kilometres radius of the Fukushima reactor which included Tokyo and how terrifying this was as there were losses of life incurred through the displacement – and speculated how this would have multiplied if the disaster had escalated.

Today 100,000 people are forced to continue living in evacuation centres as their homes and communities are still too dangerous to inhabit. As a consequence, Kan said, he changed his view 180 degrees that nuclear energy was a safe and viable energy option for Japan. Japan could have lost its ability to function as a country.

Kan said it was not always possible to prevent the impact of natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis or typhoons. In the case of a nuclear power plant disaster, however, Kan said it was relatively simple to stop such an event from happening. To rapturous applause he said

the way to achieve this, as nuclear reactors are man made, is to get rid of all nuclear power plants.

Prime Minister Kan announced a policy of moving away from nuclear energy and moving towards increasing the use of renewable energy. One way to achieve this was through the introduction of tariffs which his government did and in the two and a half years since their introduction Japan has been able to lift the use of renewable energy three fold.

At this rate said Kan, Japan would be able within 10 years to meet the needs through renewable energy that were previously met by nuclear energy.

He added that in regard to renewable energy Australia has one of the greatest potentials for solar energy in the world and could follow countries like Germany which has set a target to achieve complete renewable energy use by 2050.

In regard to uranium, Kan noted that it was Australian uranium that was bought by plant operator TEPCO for use in the Fukushima reactor when it had started its meltdown.

Japan now has 54 nuclear power plants that have been shut down since the time of the Fukushima disaster – the last was shut down 10 months ago – due to stricter regulatory controls

and community support for their closure.

However, the current Liberal Democratic government of Shinzo Abe is trying to put pressure on regulatory authorities to restart the nuclear reactors.

Kan said that Japan and Western Australia can work together in the dual project of decreasing the use of nuclear energy.

Greens Senator Scott Ludlam has been a tireless campaigner in Australia against uranium mining and nuclear energy and promoter of renewable energy.

Ludlam paid tribute to the political and community volunteer activism – including among Aboriginal people – which to date, in Western Australia, had ensured that there is still not one uranium mine operating.

The Communist Party of Australia joins the call by former Japanese PM Naoto Kan to shut down the nuclear power generating business and Scott Ludlam's call to ban uranium mining in Australia.

The CPA also calls for urgent introduction of timely and significant renewable energy targets in Australia as it is only through the use of renewable energy (and energy conservation) that sustainable energy use can be achieved. ☼

New fears for future of FVPLS

New Commonwealth funding guidelines have sparked fresh concern for the future of the Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS) program nationally. Under changes released last month, the services are no longer recognised as stand-alone programs or as a core service model that provides frontline legal assistance. Instead, they may apply for funding as one of many potential activities under a broad "safety and wellbeing program" alongside health, welfare and other service providers.

National FVPLS Forum convenor Antoinette Braybrook says it's not even certain that legal services can apply.

"By abolishing our direct allocation of funding, the Abbott government is essentially de-funding the FVPLS program which has been in existence for 16 years," said Braybrook, who runs the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria.

"The FVPLS program is already reeling from funding cuts and now vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children are being put at greater risk."

Last December, the federal government announced a cut of \$3.6 million over three years to the national FVPLS program which costs \$20 million a year. Braybrook

says the economic cost of domestic violence has been estimated at \$14.4 billion a year, or 1.1 % of Australia's gross domestic product (total annual production nationally).

Aboriginal Family Law Services WA chief executive Mary Cowley says cuts to services "will inevitably mean fewer victims of family violence will have access to legal and support services to keep them safe."

Indigenous women are 31 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of violence and 15 times more likely to seek support from homelessness services to escape family violence. Despite this, those affected have limited access to legal advice and representation.

The FVPLS program provides frontline legal and other support to those affected, in areas including intervention orders, victims of crime assistance, child protection and family law.

"We were created because Aboriginal victims – mostly women – were falling through the cracks," Braybrook said.

"The reasons we were established have not changed – Aboriginal women are not accessing mainstream services and continue to be conflicted out of Aboriginal legal services. Without this program, many women and children escaping violence will have nowhere to go." **Koori Mail** ☼

Victorious Austreo workers thank comrades

Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) members at Ausreo, locked out for 10 weeks, walked back through the gates with their heads held high after successfully securing a new deal.

The 25 AMWU members were vindicated after Ausreo management agreed to guaranteed real wage rises in talks involving delegates and senior AMWU officials. It was a satisfying outcome for members, who kept a vigil outside the company's Wetherill Park site in western Sydney after management locked them out and initially refused to negotiate.

Ausreo was forced back to the table as community support for the workers snowballed nationally, with massive backing from AMWU

comrades, Unions NSW, other unions and Labor MPs both federal and state.

Delegate Dennis Ngo said the 25 wanted to thank the thousands of unionists who had given moral and financial support to help them and their families in braving a wet, bitter industrial winter.

"We walked back in smiling with our heads up, some who stayed had their heads down and congratulated us but our fight wasn't with them," Mr Ngo said.

"We were fighting for them too, we were fighting for respect and now we've got a lot of that."

The company, which makes concrete reinforcing structures, had locked out the workers, mainly Level 4 machine operators, for

seeking pay parity with interstate Ausreo colleagues doing exactly the same work.

NSW AMWU state secretary Tim Ayres paid tribute to the workers for defying industrial bullying.

"These workers stood up and said extreme industrial tactics from employers have no place in modern Australia," he said. The courage of these workers, combined with the huge support we received from the union movement, means we were able to fight for, and win, a great outcome.

"This dispute has shown us that we have a movement that is capable of mobilising to take on injustice and fight for fairness." ☼

Stealing workers' retirement and robbing the vulnerable

Anna Pha

The *Minerals Resource Rent Tax Repeal and Other Measures Bill 2014* was rammed through both Houses of Parliament last week. The abolition of the mining tax will save mining companies billions of dollars. The anticipated loss of revenue will be paid for (several times over) by families and those on the lowest incomes through changes to the superannuation system. The bill passed through the Senate with some amendments negotiated in secret by the government and billionaire, mining magnate MP, Clive Palmer (see Editorial). The support of the *Motoring Enthusiasts and Family First* along with the Palmer United Party (PUP) Senators gave the government the majority it needed.

The government claimed the mining tax was flawed and didn't raise any income. But the popping of champagne corks in mining company board rooms told another story. Nor from the tens of billions of dollars being ripped out of the pockets and savings of those on low incomes to ostensibly compensate for the loss of this non-existent income.

The mining tax was drafted by the major mining companies and not surprisingly it had so far failed to deliver the promised billions. That is not a reason to abolish it. It is a reason to strengthen the tax so that mining companies return more of the wealth to the people of Australia, including Indigenous Australians, who own the resources that they are plundering. Some of them don't even pay company tax.

"We could be raising billions more in revenue from mining companies, but instead the Palmer United Party has joined with Tony Abbott to abolish the mining tax altogether," Greens leader Christine Milne said.

"Clive Palmer can no longer pretend to be an amusing sideshow who has an interest in helping families or working Australians. He has used the federal parliament to help abolish the tax which was about getting Austral-



ians a fair share from our mineral wealth." Palmer looked after Palmer.

Once again, Abbott, this time with the assistance of Palmer, is robbing the most disadvantaged and vulnerable.

He is keeping quiet about how much his mining companies stand to gain. The deal he did essentially leaves Abbott's original measures intact, delaying them until after the next elections, rather than throwing them out.

Labor had legislated for the compulsory superannuation guarantee payment of nine percent (of a basic worker's wage) to be increased in

the Low Income Super Contribution (LISC) until July 1, 2017. Palmer has supported their repeal.

The Income Support Bonus is a fortnightly payment of \$107.80 (singles) or \$89.90 (if partnered) for recipients of certain allowances including parenting, Newstart, Youth, and Austudy. It was introduced in 2013 by Labor, under considerable pressure over the extremely low payments (eg \$36 a day for unemployed) that recipients were attempting to live on. It was recognised that such

low payments hinder their capacity to gain employment. It was one of a number of measures to be funded by the mining tax.

Its loss will have devastating consequences for those receiving it. Once again, Abbott, this time with the assistance of Palmer, is robbing the most disadvantaged and vulnerable.

The LISC is a government contribution (maximum \$500) to the superannuation accounts of workers who earn \$37,000 per annum or less. At present almost 3.7 million workers receive it – 2.2 million of them are women. They pay the flat 15 per-

cent tax on their super contributions and on investment income in their fund. This is a higher rate than they pay on their wages. This payment is a form of compensation for this higher tax rate.

Those on higher incomes benefit from generous tax concessions on contributions and on income from investments in their fund. For those on more than \$180,000 pa the highest marginal income tax rate is 45 percent, whereas in a super fund they pay 15 percent or less on investment

income. The super system is one big rort for the rich.

"By supporting Tony Abbott to abolish the LISC in 2017, Clive Palmer is helping cut the retirement savings of half of Australia's female workforce," ACTU president Ged Kearney said.

The government should be abolishing the super rorts not robbing the savings of the most disadvantaged – the majority of them women who are already disadvantaged by lower wages and breaks from the workforce for family or carer responsibilities.

Workers cheated

Treasurer Joe Hockey claims that the deferral of the increase in super payments will see workers with more money in their pockets! What a load of hogwash!

Employers make the actual payments. The rate of payment will be frozen at 9.5 percent for the next six years instead of annual increases to 12 percent. They are celebrating over the savings while Abbott would have us believe that they would, out of the kindness of their hearts give these savings to their employees!

Well, Abbott, the government is an employer. Where's its offer to pay its employees? The government is freezing and slashing wages, sacking workers and contracting out work on inferior non-union contracts. Capitalist employers, seeking to maximise profits, will continue to do the same.

At best some unions might be able to negotiate (or have already done so) a clause in an enterprise agreement for annual increases in super contributions.

Workers are being cheated on all fronts. Especially those who rely on the minimum wage. They have seen wage increases adjusted downwards to compensate employers for future increases in compulsory super

payments. Now they are being denied those increases which they have paid for.

So their wages are lower and now they are missing out on their super increases. Many face the possibility of not having enough to live on but too much to be eligible for a shrinking age pension, if there is still one in 20 or 30 years time.

The whole superannuation system is a minefield for workers and retirees. Workers are shouldering all the risks with their savings – at times taking a big hit when stock markets crash or investments go wrong.

There is no shortage of money to fund a decent age pension for all retirees. It is a question of priorities. At present the government is on the side of the rich, the big mining corporations, private hospitals, developers and big banks. It throws them billions of dollars through such means as the fossil fuel rebate; massive tax concessions; it refuses to close company and personal tax loopholes; is pumping billions into military spending; propping up an otherwise unviable private hospital system through the private health insurance rebate; and much more.

A government on the side of the people would redirect this corporate welfare to age pensions, unemployment benefits, public health system, etc. This government and its hangers-on should be thrown out and replaced by a pro-people government that is prepared to stand up to the big corporates and act in the interests of the people.

As a step towards such a government, there is an urgent need to restore and build trade union/community organisations, build the broadest movement possible against the neo-liberal policies (not just Abbott and Co), and offer the electorate genuine alternative policies. ✪

Full spectrum dominance, from Asia to Africa

Bruce Caqnon

The Pentagon has become the primary resource extraction service for corporate capital. Whether it is Caspian Sea oil and natural gas, rare earth minerals found in Africa, Libya's oil deposits, or Venezuelan oil, the US's increasingly high-tech military is on the case.

President Obama's former National Security Adviser, General James Jones had previously served as the Supreme Allied Commander of NATO. In 2006, General Jones told the media:

"NATO is developing a special plan to safeguard oil and gas fields in the [Caspian Sea] region. ... Our strategic goal is to expand to Eastern Europe and Africa."

In a past quadrennial National Intelligence Strategy report, former US Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair claimed that Russia "may continue to seek avenues for reasserting power and influence in ways that complicate US interests ... [and] China competes for the same resources the United States needs, and is in the process of rapidly modernising its military."

Using NATO as a military tool, the US is now surrounding Russia and easily dragged the supposedly European-based alliance into the Afghanistan war and Libya attack. The US is turning NATO into a global military alliance, even to be used in the Asian-Pacific region.

Energy and missile offence

In mid-March of 2009 the Pentagon's Missile Defence Agency (MDA) held a conference in Washington. At that meeting Democratic Senator Carl Levin stated, "Missile defence is an important element of our nation's defence. For example, it is a high priority to field effective defences for our forward-deployed forces against the many hundreds of existing short- and medium-range missiles."

The Obama administration is currently deploying "missile defence" (MD) systems in Turkey, Romania, Poland and on Navy destroyers entering the Black Sea. The NATO military noose is tightening around Russia.

Russia has the world's largest deposits of natural gas and significant supplies of oil. The US has recently built military bases in Romania and Bulgaria and will soon be adding more in Albania. NATO has expanded eastward into Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, right on Russia's border. Georgia, Ukraine, Sweden and Finland are also on the list to become members of the cancerous NATO.

An Indian journalist observes:

"The arc of encirclement of

Russia gets strengthened. NATO ties facilitate the [eventual] deployment of the US missile defence system in Georgia. The US aims to have a chain of countries tied to 'partnerships' with NATO brought into its missile defence system – stretching from its allies in the Baltic to those in Central Europe. The ultimate objective of this is to neutralise the strategic capability of Russia and China and to establish its nuclear superiority. The National Defence Strategy document, issued by the Pentagon on July 31, 2008, portrays Washington's perception of a resurgent Russia and a rising China as potential adversaries."

Balkanisation

Just as we have seen the balkanisation of Yugoslavia, Libya, and Iraq by US-NATO it appears that the same strategy has been developed for Russia. With NATO's continuing military encirclement of Russia the plan appears to be to draw Moscow into a military quagmire in Ukraine that will weaken that nation. The Rand Corporation has studies that call for the break-up of Russia into many smaller pieces thus giving western corporations better access to the vast resource base available there.

The recent announcement by BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) that they have created a US\$100 billion international development bank to rival the IMF and World Bank has angered western corporate controlled governments who don't want any challenge to their management of the global economy. Directly after the BRICS announcement we witnessed an escalation of the US-NATO funded and directed civil war in Ukraine.

The Harper government is now recommending that Canada join the US missile defence program. Canadian military corporations are itching to open the flood gates to the national treasury – the profits from a junior partnership with the US in an arms race in space are too much to pass up. But first more cuts must be made to the Canadian national health care program and other valuable social welfare programs. In the US the military industrial complex has targeted the "entitlement programs" – Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and what is left of "welfare" for defunding to help pay for the expensive military space technology agenda.

Canada has also undertaken the construction of "armed combat vessels" at the Irving Shipyard in Halifax. This US\$25 billion program, the largest military appropriation in Canadian history, was supported by every political party in the country. Why does Canada need such a monumental war ship building program?

Navy's expanding role

As ice melts in the Arctic, the US Navy anticipates that it will have to

increase its presence in the region to "protect shipping". Over the past 25 years, the Arctic has seen a 40 percent reduction in ice as a result of global warming. Maine's Independent Senator Angus King recently wrote "gas and oil reserves that were previously inaccessible" will soon be available for extraction. Last spring Senator King took a ride on a US nuclear submarine under the Arctic ice. Also along for the ride was Admiral Jonathan Greenert, the chief of naval operations, who told the *New York Times*: "We need to be sure that our sensors, weapons and people are proficient in this part of the world," so that we can "own the undersea domain and get anywhere there."

A new Navy report called "US Navy Arctic Roadmap: 2014-2030" states: "Ice in the Arctic has been receding faster than we previously thought...and offers an increase in activity." The Arctic region holds a plethora of undiscovered fossil fuels and natural resources, including an estimated 90 billion barrels of oil, 1,669 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 44 billion barrels of natural gas liquids, the roadmap says.

The report warns that the Navy will face serious logistical challenges and will need to examine ways to distribute fuel in the region to "air and surface platforms". Operating bases will be needed to host deployed military personnel. Partnerships with nations that border the Arctic and more warships will be needed to ensure that the undersea resources are kept in the hands of US-NATO and away from competitors like Russia.

US Secretary of War Chuck Hagel stated in late 2013 that, "By taking advantage of multilateral training opportunities with partners in the region, we will enhance our cold-weather operational experience, and strengthen our military-to-military ties with other Arctic nations."

President Obama has in the past called for the abolition of nuclear weapons. The Russians, watching an advancing NATO and MD deployments near their borders, are telling the world that any real hopes for serious nuclear weapons reductions are in jeopardy.

The entire US military empire is tied together using space technology. With military satellites in space the US can see virtually everything on the Earth, can intercept all communications on the planet, and can target virtually any place at any time. Russia and China understand that the US military goal is to achieve "full spectrum dominance" on behalf of corporate capital.

Using new space technologies to coordinate and direct modern warfare also enables the military industrial complex to reap massive profits as it constructs the architecture for what the aerospace industry claims will



Long Beach, USA.

be the "largest industrial project" in Earth history.

Target Asia

The deployment of Navy Aegis destroyers in the Asian-Pacific region, with MD interceptors onboard, ostensibly to protect against North Korean missile launches, gives the US greater ability to launch preemptive first-strike attacks on China.

The US now has 30 ground-based MD interceptors deployed in South Korea. Many peace activists there maintain that the ultimate target of these systems is not North Korea, but China and Russia.

The current US military expansion underway in Hawaii, South Korea, Japan, Guam, Okinawa, Taiwan, Australia, Philippines and other Pacific nations is indeed a key strategy in this offensive "pivot" to control China.

An additional US goal is to have the "host" countries make significant contributions toward helping the Pentagon cover the cost of this massively expensive escalation.

For many years the US Space Command has been annually war gaming a first-strike attack on China. Set in the year 2017 the Pentagon first launches the military space plan that flies through the heavens and unleashes a devastating first-strike attack on China's nuclear forces – part of the new "Global Strike" program.

In the war game China then attempts to launch a retaliatory strike with its tens of nuclear missiles capable of hitting the west coast of the continental US. But US "missile defence" systems, currently deployed in Japan, South Korea, Australia, Guam and Taiwan, help take out China's disabled nuclear response.

Obama's former Secretary of Defence Robert Gates' comments

were quite revealing in 2009 when he said, "We're converting more Navy Aegis ships to have ballistic missile defence that would help against China."

Missile defence, sold to the public as a purely defensive system, is really designed by the Pentagon to be the shield after the first-strike sword has lunged into the heart of a particular nation's nuclear arsenal.

Living in Bath, Maine, I have a special perspective on this US-China military competition. In my town, the Navy builds the Aegis destroyers that are outfitted with MD systems. Congressional leaders from my state maintain that more Pentagon funds for Aegis shipbuilding are needed to "contain" China.

Renowned author Noam Chomsky says US foreign and military policy is now all about controlling most of the world's oil supply as a "lever of world domination." One way to keep Europe, China, India and other emerging markets dependent on the US and in sync with its policies is to maintain control of the fossil fuel supply they're reliant on. Even as the US economy is collapsing, the Pentagon appears to be saying, whoever controls the keys to the world's economic engine still remains in charge.

China, for example, imports up to 80 percent of its oil on ships through the Yellow Sea. If any competitor nation was able to militarily control that transit route and choke off China's oil supply, its economy could be held hostage.

One is able to see how the Pentagon will use the South Korean Navy base on Jeju Island, now being constructed despite a seven-year determined non-violent campaign opposing the base, to support the potential coastal blockade of China.

Conclusions

For many years Russia and China have introduced resolutions at the UN calling for negotiations on a new treaty that would ban weapons in space.

Since the mid-'80s every UN member nation has supported the "Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space" (PAROS) resolution, with the exception of the US, Israel, and Micronesia.

This was true during the Clinton presidency as well as during the reign of George W Bush and now under Obama as well.

The Rand Corporation has studies that call for the break-up of Russia into many smaller pieces thus giving western corporations better access to the vast resource base available there.

Israel demolishes Bedouin homes

Patrick Strickland

Israeli authorities demolished several Palestinian homes in the Naqab (Negev) region last week. During the early hours of the morning, Israeli bulldozers razed three buildings in Um Beten and additional structures on the outskirts of Hura, villages located in the northern part of the Naqab region, the *Arabs48* website reported later that day.

The southern Naqab region is home to approximately 160,000 Palestinian Bedouins, according to the Association for Civil Rights in Israel's estimates. As part of the estimated 1.7 million Palestinian citizens of Israel, they face more than 50 discriminatory laws that limit their access to state resources and stifle political expression, the Haifa-based Adalah Legal Centre reports.

Demolitions continue

Yet in addition to these hardships, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel also notes that around 80,000 Palestinians in the Naqab live in communities that Israel refers to as "unrecognised villages," where they "are denied basic services and infrastructure, such as electricity and running water." Many of these communities predate the Nakba, the 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

Israeli policy aims to push Bedouins off their land and into ghetto-like planned communities. The Praver Plan, a program approved by Israel's parliament, the Knesset, intended to displace tens of thousands of Palestinians in the Naqab, according to Adalah's estimates.

After sparking outrage and widespread protests among Palestinians, Israel announced the cancellation of the Praver Plan in December last year.

Arabs48 reports that "demolitions are still continuing" unabated

in Hura and Um Beten, among other villages. Such demolitions have also continued without pause across the entire region and, to a lesser extent, have also occurred in Palestinian communities in the northern part of present-day Israel.

"No improvements"

Though Israel claims "unrecognised villages" must seek state recognition in order to receive better treatment and services, a 2013 Adalah briefing paper found that more than a dozen villages that were retroactively recognised by Israel in 2003 were still being denied basic services a decade later.

The 13 villages – known as the "Abu Basma" villages – "have seen little-to-no improvements" and "are still no better off than unrecognised villages a decade after receiving recognition," according to the briefing paper.

Eleven of the villages were still being denied water services, 12 had no paved roads, and only one was connected to the national electricity grid and received sewage treatment services.

Meanwhile, neighbouring Jewish Israeli communities in the Naqab enjoy heavy state subsidisation.

The Adalah briefing paper added that "the infant mortality rate among the Bedouin in the Naqab was 150 percent higher than the overall rate among Arab citizens of Israel, and 375 percent higher than the rate among Jewish citizens of Israel" between 2007 and 2009.

Learning in the dark

When children in present-day Israel began the school year on September 1, many elementary schools in Bedouin villages of the Naqab were still not hooked up to the national electricity grid.

An Adalah press release published on September 1 explained Israel's continuing denial of basic



services for Bedouin students in the Naqab:

The electricity company and the education ministry have repeatedly refused to connect the schools to the national grid. In July 2013, Adalah filed a petition to the supreme court [Israel's high court] to demand their connection, representing parents of students from seven Arab Bedouin schools (with a combined total of over 3,000 students) that still operate on private generators. These generators provide limited electricity that can be disrupted for several hours, therefore hindering the use and operation of computers, Internet services, air conditioners, and other necessities.

Israel justified its denial of basic services to these areas by pointing to their lack of bomb shelters and protected areas to shield them from rockets fired by Palestinian resistance groups in the besieged Gaza Strip.

"The [electricity] company claimed that its work required additional construction work due to new plans to build roads in those areas, and that this would take many months," the Adalah press release states. "The company also stated that it received orders from the Israeli military to refrain from conducting construction work in

open areas that do not have shelters and safe places to protect them from bombing."

No protection

Palestinian villages across the Naqab have sought bomb shelters for years, but the government has systematically denied their requests, as Rania Khalek reported in July for *The Electronic Intifada*.

Talab Abu Arar, a Palestinian parliamentarian in Israel's Knesset, said Israel's policy of demolishing homes can be observed in both the occupied West Bank and Gaza and in present-day Israel.

"After the ceasefire that ended the war of demolishing homes in Gaza, Israeli authorities renewed the demolition of Arab homes in the Naqab and Arab villages and placed signs on the property of residents in Wadi al-Naam claiming that they are on state property," Abu Arar told *Arabs48*.

Abu Arar, a member of the Islamic Movement, said Israel also denied locals "support and help during the war [on Gaza in July and August], and while rockets landed on Arab villages in the Naqab families were not given shelter and didn't have roofs over their heads."

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A full-blown arms race between the US, Russia and China will be a disaster for the world and would make life on Earth less secure. At the very time that global resources are urgently needed to deal with the coming harsh realities of climate change and growing poverty, we can hardly afford to see more money wasted on the further militarisation of space and greater superpower conflict.

The Pentagon actually has the largest carbon boot print on the planet. The US insisted that the Pentagon be excluded from the Kyoto climate change protocols and refused to sign the agreements unless the Pentagon was exempted.

As the US undertakes arming the world to the benefit of corporate globalisation our local communities have become addicted to military spending. As we oppose the aggressive US military empire overseas we must also talk about the job issue back at home. Calling for conversion of the military industrial complex, demanding that our industrial base be transformed to create a renewable energy infrastructure for the 21st century, helps us come into coalition with weapons production workers who must now support the killing machine if they hope to feed their families.

Studies have long shown that conversion from military production to creating needed systems like rail, solar or wind turbines not only help deal with the challenges of climate change but also create many more jobs.

It's ultimately a question about the soul of the nation – what does it say about us as a people when we continue to build weapons to kill people around the world so workers can put food on the table back home?

What is needed now more than ever is unified global campaigning across issue lines. Peace, social justice, environment, labour and other movements must work harder to link our issues and build integrated grassroots movements against the destructive power of the corporate oligarchies that run most of our western governments. The rush to privatise social welfare and the privatisation of foreign and military policy must be challenged if we are to successfully protect the future generations.

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Free the Cuban 5

Letter to Obama

Felix Kury specialises in mental health policy issues facing Latinos in the US. He has taught at San Francisco State University (SFSU) since 1988. Mr Kury teaches *Latino Health Care Perspectives*, *Latino Family Narratives*, *Latino Mental Health*, *Cuba: Health, Education & Culture*, *Community Organising*, and other courses. Professor Kury established the SFSU Cuba Educational Project in 1996, the first such academic exchange between Cuba and SFSU, taking over 350 students to Cuba on the study-tour. Felix Kury is Program Director and Founding Faculty Adviser for the Clínica Martín-Baró SFSU-UCSF in the Mission District of San Francisco. Clínica Martín-Baró serves uninsured, low-income persons who would otherwise have limited or no access to healthcare on a regular basis.

September 5, 2014
President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

I am writing as a Professor in the Latino Studies Department San Francisco State University (SFSU). This September will mark 16 years of unwarranted imprisonment of

the Cuban Five, whose only crime was to prevent terrorist acts in Cuba from right wing paramilitary Cubans in Florida who have operated with impunity for the last 50 years. During these years, hundreds of my students at SFSU who have learned about the Cuban Five have also joined the call for their release.

The Cuban Five have never posed a threat to national security of

the US. When they first were arrested, they spent time in solitary confinement, isolated from family and friends – a clear violation of their human rights, cruel and unusual punishment, and no doubt a form of torture. Two of the five, Fernando Gonzalez and Rene Gonzalez, have both returned to Cuba, having served their sentences.

Mr Obama, I urge you to use the power of your pen to commute the sentences of Gerardo Hernandez, serving double life sentences in USP Victorville, California, Antonio Guerrero, serving 22 years in FCI Marianna, Florida, and Ramon Labañino (known as Luis Medina), serving 30 years in FCI Ashland, Kentucky.

As President, you are dealing with many challenges and controversies, such as the humanitarian crisis of Central American children, and the police brutality of the citizens of Ferguson. You promised change when

you were elected. I have not seen any change in the foreign policy towards Cuba. Making such a humanitarian gesture by granting clemency will enhance the credibility and moral authority of your administration that has deteriorated as a result of listening to the wrong advisers.

As I write this letter to you I reflect on the words of Martin Luther King, Jr: "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

Sincerely,

Félix Salvador Kury
Program Director & Faculty
Advisor
Clínica Martín-Baró,
SFSU-UCSF
1600 Holloway Avenue
San Francisco
International Committee for the
Freedom of the Cuban 5 ✪

Sanctions and weapons deals, follow the money

Victor Grossman

BERLIN: In Germany today, current references to Vladimir Putin evoke all too sharply recollections of German language used against every Russian leader since the start of World War I a hundred years ago. Indeed, in today's Russia and its leader the mass media have found subjects of attack as welcome as all their varied predecessors.

BILD newspaper, with its millions of readers, led the charge: "Putin ... wants to complete what the Tsar and Stalin could not achieve. He wants to create a Russia to which the rest of the world bows down. In the long run he will not succeed! ... But the fear which he instils in others isolates Russia ... For a moment Putin may be the mightiest in the world. But he is Russia's evil spirit."

The slightly more respected *Der Spiegel* magazine, though evasive about ascribing full blame for the Malaysian plane tragedy, nevertheless featured photos of its victims on its cover with the words in big print "Stop Putin Now" and editorialised: "Putin's true nature has shown itself. The Russian president has been revealed not as a statesman but as a pariah of the world community ... The shooting down may have been a tragic mistake. Whoever fired the missile probably did not want to hit a passenger plane ... But it is the direct result of Russian military armament of the separatists in recent weeks. It is a symbol of Putin's nefariousness – and of the failure of Western policies thus far. The wreckage of MH17 is also the wreckage of diplomacy."

Despite renewed doubts about the MH17, and disregarding evidence that Putin was basically interested in protecting Russia from total encirclement by an unceasingly expansive NATO, with the growing threat of military weaponry at its doorstep and to its southern seacoast defences, the weapons makers stepped up pressure and readied the first six German Typhoon planes to join Portuguese F-16s in flying reconnaissance flights over Estonia – the closest German



Vladimir Putin was basically interested in protecting Russia from total encirclement by an unceasingly expansive NATO.

warriors have come to Russian borders since World War II.

But such operations were high in the clouds; Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen and her supporters wanted ground action. Then, too, other business interests, not to be scoffed at – like oil and gas importers and machine exporters – were not happy about increased sanctions against Russia. A majority of the population was also decidedly against dangerous advances in this direction.

Then, while the Ukraine crisis escalated ever more tensely and dangerously, the more bellicose faction in Berlin's political scene found a new crisis, which offered quicker perspectives.

This was the ISIS in Iraq – and

soon in Syria as well. The misery and bitter tragedy of many thousands were involved, the aggressors' clothes and beards made them even more easily distinguishable as evildoers than those of the traditional Russian menace. And action was demanded.

One problem soon arose. Early in August, vice-chancellor Sigmar Gabriel had aborted a long-standing deal of the huge Rheinmetall Corporation for delivery of a modern military training installation to Russia. "I cannot take responsibility for this," the Social Democrat stated. It would mean risking "military expansion, that military conflicts could be enlarged ... It is not a matter of money but of human lives."

Actually it was also a matter of German law, which expressly forbids the delivery of arms to areas of conflict. Nearly everyone approved Gabriel's decision, even though this law had somehow lost its force in past years when Germany, the world's third biggest weapons exporter – delivered everything from Heckler & Koch revolvers and rifles to "Leopard" tanks and Thyssen-Krupp submarines with atomic weapon potential to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Algeria, Indonesia, Israel, Greece and Turkey, South Korea and many others.

But since Gabriel had so publicly revived this seemingly moribund restriction in the case of Russia, how could one disregard it in Iraq? Defence Minister von der Leyen defiantly urged military intervention – without interrupting her efforts to obtain military drones for future years. Others of various parties were quick to back her up. The mass media obliged with heart-breaking pictures of human tragedy (nor did they have to lie or exaggerate in this case). There were increasing calls – at first – for humanitarian help per helicopter – food, water, clothing, even toys.

But this did not suffice; military

assistance was required, it seemed – of a non-lethal kind, of course, only bullet-proof vests, night goggles and the like.

Yet the ISIS remained as dangerous as ever. Soon enough, politicians like the Social Democrat Christoph Strässer, national Human Rights Commissioner, were insisting that in the case of the hard-fighting Iraqi Kurds a fight against terrorism was involved, those stuffy old rules and regulations should (again) be overlooked and military hardware sent in. And that is just what is happening.

The editor of the state-owned radio station in Bavaria (the state where most weapons are produced) triumphed: "It was high time to break this taboo. That basic tenet of German foreign and security policy is no longer worth the paper it is written on: 'No weapons into conflict areas' is now passé. The historical decision is risky but it has no alternative ... The matter is now earnest."

But Volker Kauder, top parliamentary leader of Merkel's CDU, indeed, her right-hand man (the stress on "right" perfectly fits this notorious homophobe and Muslimophobe), still stated clearly after a very safe visit to Iraq: "A deployment of German or European troops to fight the terror militia of the Islamic State is not necessary. True, this would provide a possibility to maintain control over weapons sent to Iraq. But at the moment I see no necessity for that."

Only a few days later the same Volker Kauder informed us that Germany had after all sent six Bundeswehr soldiers to Iraq "to coordinate the delivery of German assistance and train Kurdish troops ... As quickly as possible they need anti-tank weapons, anti-mine equipment as well as rifles and ammunition ... Otherwise the terrorists from the IS will probably invade Kurdistan as well."

Sympathy for beleaguered Christians was not surprising; the plight of the hitherto hardly-known Yazidis

and other victims was also frightening and truly demanded assistance. But somehow the odour of hypocrisy clung to such official German sympathy for Kurdistan. Such sympathy had been remarkably absent during tragedies for civilians in Gaza, the Eastern Ukraine and many other areas.

Were there hopes for an oil-rich, independent Kurdistan, with no interference, regulations or participation from Bagdad? What hidden secrets existed? And did no one recall how after 1990 the newly-united Germany sent tanks and other weapons of the disbanded East German armed forces to Turkey – for the brutal, bloody suppression of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Some estimate fighter and civilian deaths at over 30,000. But then, unlike today's Iraqi Peshmergas, the men and women in the PKK, who demanded autonomic and cultural rights, were left-wing Kurds. And their homes were in Turkey, a NATO ally. In Germany the PKK is still verboten.

This week the Bundestag is debating military aid to Iraq, although its vote will be an impotent one; in such matters a secret Cabinet group makes the relevant decisions. But once again the debate will almost certainly show that it is the LEFT party, usually almost alone, which will, in accord with public opinion, vote No.

After a brief early dispute in its own ranks it quickly renewed its basic position that while humanitarian assistance is necessary and urgent, and that better Near East policies are long overdue, too many past disasters, old and new, have proven that German weapons and especially German troops should never again be sent outside German borders. Despite the most assertive humanitarian justifications of such exploits – from Kosovo to Kabul – not one has ever meant less bloodshed or suffering.

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Struggle continues nine years after Katrina

Mark Gruenberg

NEW ORLEANS: It's taken nine years, but some 7,000 former New Orleans school workers – teachers, principals, secretaries, social workers, para-professionals and others – may be headed for a multimillion-dollar win of back wages and penalties this fall.

Whether they will get the money depends on the Louisiana Supreme Court, which heard the case on September 4. It set no date for its final decision.

The teachers and the others, all members of the United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO) and most of them minority group members, were all fired after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans on August 29, 2005. State officials seized the opportunity to trash the Orleans school district and the union, an AFT affiliate and then the South's largest union local.

A state-established Recovery School District now runs most New Orleans schools, almost all of which are charter schools. UTNO recently won union recognition balloting in a second charter New Orleans high school. Meanwhile, the fired teachers, the other workers, the union and their attorneys have pursued justice, winning in the lower courts.

If the state's high court sides with the workers, they could win up to US\$750 million in their class-action suit. That's based on at least three years of lost wages and benefits per worker, plus damages.

The suit claims the board for the Recovery School District did not follow proper procedure in firing UTNO members and did not give them priority in hiring for jobs opening at its schools, all of which are charters. State law requires that when a district is reorganised, past workers get rehiring priority.

In January, the Louisiana appeals court unanimously ruled for the workers, after a lower court did so in 2012. Both said the Recovery District board and the state broke the law.

In his ruling, appellate judge Roland Belsome wrote that the UTNO teachers and other workers were "deprived of their constitutionally protected property right to be recalled to employment." They

suffered from lack of "due process of law," he said.

"This violation of due process was committed by the Orleans Parish School Board in failing to adhere to its policies in implementing the reduction in force and by the state through the Louisiana Department of Education by failing to follow the mandates" of state law.

"This case has been a difficult and extremely stressful experience for 7,000 employees and their families who suffered after Hurricane Katrina," Willie M. Zanders Sr, lead attorney for the workers, said after the appeals court ruling earlier this year.

"We pause to pay respect to all former employees who did not live to see this important victory, like class representative Gwendolyn Ridgley, who passed in October 2012. Other class representatives and thousands of employees continue to suffer physically, emotionally, and financially. I am thankful for the patience and prayers of former employees and their families, and encourage them to stay strong."

"These employees suffered a dual tragedy: Once when the levees broke and another when their livelihoods were taken from them," UTNO attorney Larry Samuels told the New Orleans Times-Picayune.

"The RSD refused to allow even tenured public school employees to transfer to the state-run schools, which is the basis for the lawsuit's claim they had been denied a property right—a job-guaranteed them under the state constitution and various state laws," the non-partisan non-profit Institute for Southern Studies says.

"The teachers hired to staff these charters tended to be younger, whiter, and from elsewhere. Many came through the Teach for America program, which places recent college graduates in low-income schools and has been criticised even by insiders for its pro-corporate, union-busting agenda. Charter schools have also drawn criticism from teachers unhappy with having to work as at-will employees with few if any job protections and with disparities in pay and little say in how schools are run," the Institute said.

The fired New Orleans teachers



Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans on August 29, 2005.

aren't the only teacher group headed for Louisiana's Supreme Court. On September 5, the justices will hear a Louisiana Federation of Teachers challenge to right wing Republican Governor Bobby Jindal's 2012 rewrite of state education law. Jindal's term expires next year. He is considering seeking the 2016 Republican presidential nod.

The Louisiana union said Jindal's prior education package violated the state constitution's ban on too many unrelated provisions in one law. The education package changed at least nine state laws, and enacted two more. It tied teacher salaries, tenure, promotions and termination to a new evaluation system, changed the powers of local school boards, gave principals and local superintendents more power and changed the reduction-in-force policies – the policies the state and the New Orleans board violated after Katrina.

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Region Briefs

On August 23, 3,600 Japanese protesters held a rally near a US military base in Cape Henoko, demanding that the construction of a new US military base be halted. The rally was organised on short notice, but the number of actual participants were far larger than the rally organisers' expectation. One of the organisers, Japanese Communist Party member in the Parliament, Akamine Seiken, told protesters "with our unity, things cannot go as the government plans, let us make our own history".

On August 28, Vietnam's cabinet called for more effort to be put in achieving this year's targeted economic growth of 5.8 percent at a meeting in Hanoi. Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung said that the economic growth barriers in the service sector, industry and agriculture must be cleared, and he added that the government would give priority in economic restructure, including restructuring the state-owned enterprises and agriculture. The government would push harder to provide better social welfare services to all people and reduce poverty in minority-living regions.

On August 30, thousands of protesters marched to Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's house, demanding the PM's resignation. Pakistani police dispersed the crowd by firing at the protesters. The protesters had staged a peaceful sit-in protest in Pakistan's capital Islamabad for two weeks. One of the leaders of the protest, Tahir ul Qadri, stated that "the current (Pakistani) political system has failed to ensure justice for the common people".

On September 3, members of the Communist Party of China's Politburo Standing Committee attended a ceremony at the Museum of the War of the Chinese People's Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, to celebrate the 69th anniversary of the victory day over the anti-Japanese invasion.

On September 3, Cambodia's Phnom Penh Municipal Court charged seven people (including the country's five leading unionists) with intentionally using violence to cause problems during the period when garment workers protested from December last year to January this year. The nationwide protest demanded a minimum wage of AU\$160 for garment workers, and it ended after the police fired at the demonstrators, killing five people and injuring more than a dozen. The five union leaders were charged with the same crime and could face up to 14 years in jail.

UNICEF: 1 girl in 10 suffers sexual assault

United Nations child welfare agency UNICEF warned last week that about 120 million girls around the world, close to one in 10, have been raped or sexually assaulted by the time they turn 20 years of age.

Drawing on data from 190 countries, the global report is billed as the largest-ever study of violence against children.

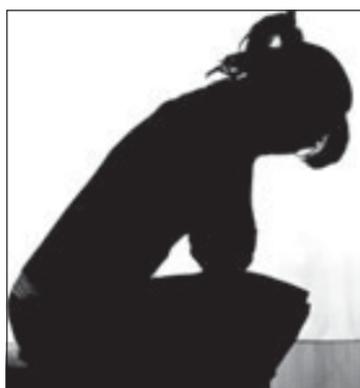
Entitled "Hidden in Plain Sight", it also revealed that one fifth of all murder victims are children and teens, with homicide the

leading cause of death among male youths in Latin American countries.

"These are uncomfortable facts. No government or parent will want to see them," said UNICEF executive director Anthony Lake.

"But unless we confront the reality each infuriating statistic represents ... the life of a child whose right to a safe, protected childhood has been violated ... we will never change the mind-set that violence against children is normal and permissible. It is neither."

Morning Star ✪



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



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Containing an epidemic of fear

The idea of a deadly and contagious virus with no cure is terrifying. So imagine the courage it would take to nurse a neighbour who is sick from the Ebola virus, or bury your highly infectious wife, husband, child, sister or brother.

That is exactly what 1,800 Red Cross volunteers are doing right now in West Africa. They are going door-to-door to help their communities survive an Ebola outbreak that has claimed over 1,400 lives and infected more than 2,600 people in four countries. The number of deaths is growing by the day and each death is entirely preventable.

Red Cross is educating millions of people to prevent further infections. Volunteers are helping their neighbours to bury their loved ones safely. Emergency hospitals are being set up in towns where clinics are overflowing with people sick from Ebola. This is fast becoming more than a major health emergency. Due to the health crisis, many communities are having difficulty accessing essential services, such as food and water. We can all lend a hand to control this terrible virus. I ask all Australians to please consider donating to the Ebola Outbreak 2014 Appeal at redcross.org.au.

Peter Walton
Head of International Program
Australian Red Cross

Palestinian narrative needed

While it is interesting to read the different Israeli perspectives on the conflict in Gaza and the rest of Palestine there is an almost total neglect in Australia of the Palestinian side of the story. I would have thought that it important to encourage a diversity of opinion on this question in our newspapers

and present readers with different views of the issues involved.

Instead, we have had a steady stream of different opinion pieces from Israeli, Zionist and Jewish writers; as if no Palestinian narrative or voice existed on the question.

Indeed it is as if the outlook of one of the central participants in the conflict that has gone on for over 60 years is almost completely missing from the dialogue. There are in fact in Australia and elsewhere many articulate and eloquent Palestinian voices that exist and are worthy of space in our media. And it would be very valuable to our society, if we could hear these.

The resolution of such conflicts begins with an understanding of the viewpoint of both parties, not by ignoring one side. Palestinians deserve to be listened to, as there can be no peace or just resolution to this tragic situation without attention to their point of view and recognising that Palestinians do have rights. In fact history shows this is really the key to settling such disputes. We need to read a better balance of views on this vital matter.

Steven Katsineris
Vic

Sydney

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Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland

Lies and Russia



"The Endgame means encircling Russia and China with more NATO bases."

Anyone who watches the news on TV knows that the coverage never gives you perspective. It invariably presents the latest outbreak of war or violence or civil unrest as an isolated event, unrelated to events in the rest of the world or to history. In other words, the coverage on TV ignores the big picture. And yet, seeing the big picture is vital to understanding what is going on.

That, of course, is the point. The movers and shakers of capitalism don't want the ordinary people – the despised 99% – to achieve an understanding of what is happening around them (and to them). So they give them "all the facts", but disconnected, so their significance is obscured and their real meaning hidden.

This makes it a lot easier too to include amongst those "facts" whatever lies are deemed most useful to corporate interests, particularly US corporate interests. US strategic interests are presently bound up with its attempt to achieve what its policy-planners call, "full spectrum dominance", a fancy term for "rule the world".

In pursuit of that strategic aim, the tried and true technique of "the big lie" has been not just revived but enhanced. That's the technique of spreading a bare-faced lie and then repeating it so many times that it achieves credibility by sheer force of repetition. Especially if no one in the mass media contradicts it.

Peter Koenig, a US economist and former World Bank staffer, says that it doesn't matter whether a lie is based on a "translation error" or whether it is just "a conventional lie

continuously repeated until it becomes the truth à la Goebbels. The Western-bought propaganda machine takes full advantage of this hundreds-of-years-old simple strategy of deception."

Also revived and similarly enhanced has been the Cold War, which never actually ended. It just went quiescent for a while, but now it is back with a vengeance. And Russia is once again its chief target. Hence we have seen an explosion of anti-Russian lies over events in Ukraine.

Koenig again: "The interesting part, however, is that hardly anyone [amongst Western commentators] is presenting the counter-weight, so to speak, namely to what extent Kiev is assisted by US paid mercenaries, CIA military and strategic advisers and their equipment, all paid for in one way or another by the State Department, CIA, or NATO. And these are facts. Not inventions for deception."

When, after weeks of riots and violent demonstrations by fascists and US agents in Maidan Square, and innumerable visits in support by British and US politicians, it still looked as though the government of Ukraine would sensibly accept Russia's generous trade deal instead of the EU's mean austerity package, one of US Secretary of State Kerry's aides was recorded on the phone to the US Ambassador in Kiev declaring that the USA's "\$5 billion investment in Ukraine's regime change cannot be let go down the drain because of the f...ing Europeans". So they resorted to the February 22, 2014 coup.

"Ever since that infamous coup," writes

Koenig, "the US/NATO and the EU have had their dirty hands in Kiev's Nazi killer junta – otherwise the Kiev thugs would have never had either the courage or the military knowledge to advance to the Donbas area of Ukraine, where they were literally ordered to kill their brothers. Some of them with some conscience defected early on; then they were accompanied under threats of life by CIA 'advisers'. Eventually they defected by the thousands because of lack of food and ammunition and the resulting low-low morale.

"It is actually irrelevant whether Russia has troops and armoury in East Ukraine. In fact it would be well justified for Russia to defend her countrymen from savage slaughter, as many Donbas citizens are originally Russians. But – they don't, as Putin is too smart to spoil his diplomatic assets on a war that is already lost by Kiev.

"The Endgame means encircling Russia and China with more NATO bases, including in Ukraine and Moldova, as close as possible to Moscow's doorsteps; and, foreseen by 2015, with 60 percent of the US naval fleet in the South China Sea.

"We should not be detracted by the day-to-day details and lies, by the fires that flare up here and there, though all horrible, killing thousands of people; we should not be confused by 'who is doing what?' – But rather focus on the Big Picture, the intentions behind the US/NATO killing machine, not so much by denying the obvious lies, but rather by describing actual facts and the long-term strategy behind them."

Koenig points out the use made of ISIS, "created and funded in 2007 by Washington under successively different names to further confuse the public at large. At that time they came out of Turkey as Syrian Freedom Fighters, later they converted into the Al-Nusra Front of rebels, and now they are the ISIS, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, also called the Islamic State of the Levant. ... This will do until the public needs to be again confused with a new group of Islamic terrorists to justify continuous wars on terror – to feed continuously the fat profit accounts of the eternal war-lords. But only if we the people let them confuse and deceive and divide us."

The truth of what Koenig calls "the US-NATO killing machine, its vassal EU states and its paid mercenaries" are up to in Ukraine and the Middle East is there to be found. It has just been deliberately hidden.

In the meantime, Obama was encouraging his EU puppets to intervene and send their troops into Ukraine, before Kiev was obliged to agree to a cease-fire, while the US imposed still more sanctions on Russia. Comments Koenig on US thinking: "Let Europe take the hit if there is war."

The former World Bank staffer summed up the position: "We the 99.99% have all the powers to stop these US-instigated murderous aggressions, by rejecting the continuously lying and deceiving propaganda machine, by rejecting and refusing to listen to the corporate prostitute media." ☺



Sunday September 14 –
Saturday September 20

Perhaps the most interesting thing to emerge from this week's episode of *Catalyst* (ABC1 Thursday September 18, at 8.00pm) is that testosterone, which has long been considered the hormone that makes men, well, men, is also of vital significance in the physiology of women. From the womb to old age, testosterone not only moulds the male body and mind but is a hormone of good health during the life of a man. And this is true of women too.

In the course of an interesting program, Dr Graham Phillips delves into the latest research across Australia to find out just how does testosterone affect our abilities, behaviour and health? And what happens when you lose it and how do you get it back? And what (if anything) has it got to do with so-called man flu?

Who would have thought that a hairdressing competition could make really engrossing television? Certainly not me, but that's just what *Hair* (ABC1 Thursdays from September 18 at 8.35pm) does. Some of its success has to do with the intimate approach of the filmmakers who allow us to share the contestants' plans, hopes and doubts.

These are amateur hairdressers who are being challenged to go well outside their comfort zones and create hairstyles ranging from the functional and everyday to the theatrical and utterly extravagant. I don't know whether my interest will

be sustained over the course of the series, but I certainly enjoyed the first episode.

In what SBS is calling their "WW1 movie season", the channel is screening Francis Ford Coppola's extended version of *Apocalypse Now*, Steven Spielberg's *Empire of the Sun*, Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*, and the Italian film *Life is Beautiful*. Astute viewers will notice immediately that none of these films are concerned with WW1. The centenary of the outbreak of that phenomenally bloody attempt to rearrange the division of the world's colonies and markets has been used simply as the pretext for screening a bunch of films about later wars.

Apocalypse Now Redux (SBS ONE Saturday September 20 at 8.30pm) is the extended version of Coppola's 1979 film *Apocalypse Now* that he released in 2001. The extended version contains no less than an extra 49 minutes (equal to half an average feature film). This restored footage has been completely re-edited, as though for the first time. New music has also been composed for it too.

A film that tried to depict "the madness of war", *Apocalypse Now* followed a US Army special operations officer on a mission to kill a renegade and presumed insane US Army Special Forces Colonel. Some of its scenes, like the one of the helicopter gunships going into action while blaring *The Ride of the Valkyries* from loudspeakers to apparently "spook the gooks", have become dear to the hearts of all American war-hawks.

The original film was a production mess. It took two years to edit and, due to the off-screen noises during the shoot, most of the dialogue was impossible to hear. So the actors had to be brought back to re-record their lines. This was done for the scenes that made it into the original cut, but not for the deleted scenes. For the *Redux* version, Martin Sheen, Robert Duvall, Sam Bottoms, Albert Hall, Frederic Forrest, and Aureore Clément were brought back to record their dialogue afresh for the new scenes.



Its technical complexity and mastery could not save it from its "delusions of grandeur" – *Apocalypse Now Redux* (SBS ONE Saturday September 20 at 8.30pm)

Apocalypse Now Redux premiered at the 2001 Cannes Film Festival. The response from the critics was largely positive, the consensus being "The additional footage slows down the movie somewhat (some say the new cut is inferior to the original), but *Apocalypse Now Redux* is still a great piece of cinema." Some critics thought otherwise, however: Owen Gleiberman wrote "*Apocalypse Now Redux* is the meandering, indulgent art project that [Coppola] was still enough of a craftsman, in 1979, to avoid."

The iconic Vietnam War movie was far from universally acclaimed when it was first released 30 years ago. With a total budget of US\$31 million – unheard of for movies at the time – and notorious production problems, critics had plenty of reasons to hate it. Reviewers took issue with Coppola as well as his film, pedalling his numerous, now legendary, comments on the filming process.

"This isn't a film about Vietnam, this film is Vietnam," he said at the time. "It struck me like a diamond bullet in my head that I wasn't making the film, the jungle was."

Writing in *Time* magazine when it first came out, Frank Rich derided the film as "not so much an epic account of a gruelling war as an incongruous, extravagant monument to artistic self-defeat". He went on: "The Vietnam War was a tragedy. *Apocalypse Now* is but this decade's most extraordinary Hollywood folly."

Vincent Canby in *The New York Times* probably hit the nail on the head, acknowledging that it was a "stunning work" while noting that even its technical complexity and mastery could not save it from its "delusions of grandeur", which ultimately resulted in a "profoundly antimimetic intellectual muddle".

The critics derided the film's laboured parallels with Joseph

Conrad's masterpiece *The Heart of Darkness* and the quotes from TS Eliot's poetry. Richard Roud, writing in the British *Guardian*, dismissed this "literary luggage" as "cultural overkill."

Coppola was completely unable to decide on an ending, and wound up showing two different versions around the world to gauge people's reactions. If he doesn't even know how it ends, people complained, how are we supposed to know what to take from it?

Derek Malcolm, the former *Guardian* film critic, said that the film "hasn't got much to do with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* ... nor with the Vietnam War", although he suggested "it says a lot about America and Americans".

And, of course, it has precious little to do with WW1, or with the USA's costly attempt to turn Vietnam back into a pre-war (even pre-WW1) imperial colony. ☘

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Sydney

POLITICS IN THE PUB

September 11

THE ABBOTT GOVT'S REFUGEE POLICY REACHING UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS OF BARBARISM – WHAT IS THE STAND THE LABOR OPPOSITION & THE HIGH COURT SHOULD TAKE?

Lucy Fiske, Dr, Chancellor's Post Doctoral Fellow, UTS, Sydney;
Joyce Chia, Dr, Andrew & Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, Uni of NSW;

September 18

MEDICARE: AUSTRALIA'S KEY PLANK FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE NOW UNDER THREAT BY THE ABBOTT GOVT

John Dwyer, Prof, Emeritus Prof of Medicine, Uni of NSW;
Con Costa, Dr, National President, Doctors Reform Society;

September 25

SYRIA & IRAQ – AN UPDATE

Noah Bassil, Dr, Dept of Modern History, Politics and International Relations, Macquarie Uni;
Ahmed Shboul, Prof, Dept of Arabic & Semitic Studies, Sydney Uni;

October 2

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US use of sanctions could spur dollar's decline

Conn Hallinan

The recent round of sanctions aimed at Moscow over the crisis in the Ukraine could backfire on Washington by accelerating a move away from the dollar as the world's reserve currency. While in the short run American actions against Russia's oil and gas industry will inflict economic pain on Moscow, in the long run the US may lose some of its control over international finance.

Proposals to move away from using the dollar as the international currency reserve are by no means new. Back in 2009, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) proposed doing exactly that. SCO members are Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Afghanistan, Iran, India, Pakistan and Mongolia have SCO observer status, and the organisation has close ties with Turkey and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Ever since the 1944 Bretton Woods Agreement, the world's finances have been dominated by the US dollar, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank. But, according to economist Jeffrey Sachs, that world is vanishing and the dollar cannot continue to hold the high ground, because "the role of the United States in the global economy is diminishing."

While it may be diminishing, the US and its European allies still control the levers of international finance. For example, the US' slice of the global GDP is 19.2 percent, and its share of IMF voting rights is 16.8 percent. In contrast, China, with 16.1 percent of the global GDP, has only 3.8 percent voting rights in the IMF. The presidency of the organisation is reserved for a European.

In 2010, the World Bank "reformed" its voting rights to increase low and middle-income countries from 34.67 percent to 38.38 percent, although even this modest adjustment has been sidelined because the US Senate refuses to accept it. The wealthier countries still control more than 60 percent of the vote. The presidency of the Bank normally goes to an American.

In early August of this year, the BRICS countries – Brazil, China, India, Russia and South Africa – launched a series of initiatives aimed at altering the current structure of international finance. Besides pushing to dethrone the dollar as the world's reserve currency, the organisation created a development bank and a Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA). The former would allow countries to by-pass the IMF and the World Bank, with their tightfisted austerity fixation, and the latter would give countries emergency access to foreign currency.

The development bank will start off with US\$50 billion in the kitty, but that will soon double. The BRICS will also be able to draw on US\$100 billion from the CRA. While by international standards those are modest sums – the IMF has close to US\$800 billion in its coffers – the BRICS bank and CRA has just five members, while the IMF serves hundreds of countries. Eventually the BRICS observer members may be able to tap into those funds.

At the jugular

Last month's sanctions went straight for Russia's jugular vein: the development of its massive oil and gas reserves and Moscow's construction of the South Stream pipeline. When completed, South Stream will supply Europe with 15 percent of its natural gas and



There is suspicion that the real goal of the sanctions is to derail South Stream and replace it with US shale-based American oil and gas.

generate over US\$20 billion in annual profits. Indeed, there is suspicion among some Europeans that the real goal of the sanctions is to derail South Stream and replace it with US shale-based American oil and gas.

Sanctions can do enormous damage.

The United Nations estimates that the sanctions against Iraq were responsible for the deaths of some 500,000 Iraqi children from 1991 to 1998.

The sanctions aimed at Iran's oil and gas industry have cut deeply into government revenues – 80 percent of the country's foreign reserves are generated by hydrocarbons – resulting in widespread inflation, unemployment and a serious national health crisis. While humanitarian goods are not embargoed, their cost has put medical care beyond the reach of many Iranians.

Associated Press reporter Nasser Karimi wrote last year that some medicine and medical equipment costs have risen 200 percent: "radiology film up 240 percent; helium for MRIs up 667 percent; filters for kidney dialysis up 325 percent." The cost of chemotherapy has almost tripled.

Iran's exclusion from the Society for World Wide Banking (SWIFT) makes it impossible to transfer funds electronically. That, in turn, makes buying the raw materials to manufacture generic medicines expensive and difficult.

The recent crash of an Iranian passenger plane that killed 39 people was, in part, the result of sanctions. Because Iran cannot purchase spare parts for its Boeing and Airbus planes, it is forced to use alternatives, like the trouble-prone Ukrainian-made A-140 aircraft that went down August 10. Another A-140 crashed in 2002, killing 46 passengers.

Growing opposition

In short, opposing the US and its allies can be dangerous to one's health.

There is growing opposition to the widespread use of sanctions, as well as to the ability to isolate countries from international finance by excluding them from things like SWIFT. Coupled with this is a suspicion that the US uses its currency to support its economy at the expense of others.

After the 2007-08 economic meltdown, the US lowered its interest rates and increased its money supply, thus making its exports cheaper and other countries imports more expensive. Developing countries have blamed these policies for artificially driving up the value of their currencies and, thus, damaging other countries economies. Brazilian Finance Minister Guido Mantega calls it waging "currency war."

With the US now pushing higher interest rates and throttling back on buying foreign bonds, many developing countries fear that international capital will flow back to the US, leaving countries like Brazil high and dry.

But as long as the world's reserve currency is in dollars, the US will be able to manipulate global finance and block countries like Iran from any transactions using dollars. Like that may be coming to an end. With China set to replace the US as the world's largest economy, it is only a matter of time before some agreed upon international method of exchange replaces the dollar.

China is already moving toward bypassing New York as the world's financial centre, instead routing finances through Hong Kong and London. "There can be little doubt from these actions that China is preparing for the demise of the dollar, at least as the world's reserve currency," says Alastair Macleod of GoldMoney, a leading dealer in precious metals.

A number of countries are already dealing in other currencies. Australian mining companies have recently shifted to using China's renminbi (official currency of the People's Republic of China). How dumping the dollar will affect the US is not clear, and predictions range from minor to catastrophic. What will almost certainly happen is that the US will lose some of its clout in international finance, making it easier for developing countries to move away from the American economic model: wide-open markets, fiscal austerity, and hostility to any government role in the economy.

Diminishing the role of the dollar may make it harder to apply sanctions as well, particularly in those areas where Washington's policies are increasingly alienated from much

of the world, as in Iran, Cuba, and Russia. The European Union (EU) has sanctioned Russia over Ukraine, but not to the extent that the US has. The EU's trade with Russia is a major part of the Europe's economy, while Russian trade with the US is minor. And the BRICS – who represent almost a quarter of the world's GNP and 40 percent of its population – did not join those sanctions.

Addressing the BRICS delegates in Fortaleza, Brazil, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that "together we should think about a system of measures that would help prevent the harassment of countries that do not agree with some foreign policy decision made by the US and their allies."

In the long run, the EU may come to regret that it went along with Washington. German industry has taken a big hit – trade with Russia fell 20 percent from January through May – and Russia's ban on EU agricultural products has badly hurt Poland, Lithuania, Germany, Denmark, Latvia, Finland and the Netherlands. Indeed, European Bank President, Mario Draghi, warned that the current EU recovery is extremely fragile and that sanctions could push it back into recession.

The Germans are especially worried that Russia will turn to Asia, permanently cutting Berlin out of Moscow's economic sphere.

There are enormous changes ahead as a result of climate change and population growth. While there has been a reduction in the number of people living in extreme poverty – making less than \$1.25 a day – almost all that reduction was in China. Things have actually gotten worse in parts of Asia and Africa. By 2050 the world's population will grow to nine billion, and 85 percent of that growth will be in developing nations, the very countries that most need help to confront the consequences of that future.

Unless the institutions of international finance are wrested from the control of a few wealthy nations, and unless there are checks on the ability of the US and its allies to devastate a country's economy over a disagreement on foreign policy, those figures bode for some serious trouble ahead.

People's World ✪



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