



Hands off our Industry Super funds

Anna Pha

Superannuation funds hold a nest egg of over \$1.8 trillion which is larger than the Gross Domestic Product! Around \$380 billion of these funds are held by industry funds which were originally set up by the trade union movement. Super funds play a key role as a source of capital investment for the private sector, giving those who control them a great deal of power in determining the direction of economic development.

During the global financial crisis the constant flow of super contributions played a significant role in keeping the stock market afloat. Not surprisingly, there is a battle for control of these funds with the big four banks, insurance companies and investment houses eyeing this rich bounty.

The retail funds are owned and run by subsidiaries of banks, insurance companies and other financial institutions. Their main purpose is to make profits for their parent companies/shareholders. The management and investment of workers' retirement savings is the vehicle for profit-gouging. They make a killing by charging large fees; through financial advisers who are rewarded for recommending their products; and even using the funds to benefit their own interest.

For example, the superannuation arm of one bank redirected super savings to purchasing its own shares to prop them up during the global financial crisis. This apparently is not illegal.

This is in sharp contrast to the industry funds which emerged in the mid-to-late 1980s following campaigns led by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). By 1992 compulsory super (the superannuation guarantee) had been introduced, requiring all employers to make mandatory contributions for their employees. Although the employers make the contributions, in reality, most of the money has come out of the pockets of workers who received discounted wage rises to cover them.

Industry funds typically:

- are run for the benefit of members
- return any profit made to members
- have lower fees than retail super funds
- are governed by trustee boards specifically representing employees and employers in equal numbers with an independent chairperson. A two-thirds majority is necessary for all decisions
- do not pay sales commissions to financial planners
- are more likely to make long-term investment in Australian infrastructure.

With such differences, it is not surprising,

that figures released in March 2014 by the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA) show industry funds performed about 30 percent better than retail over 10 years.

At present the boards (trustees) of Industry funds have equal numbers of trade union and company representation with an independent chair.

Shutting unions out

The financial institutions are making a concerted effort to shut unions out. The Abbott government is using the Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption and the financial system inquiry to pave the way.

The Commission, the Abbott government's witch hunt into trade unions, is attempting to destroy the reputation of trade unions and by implication portray their representatives on industry fund boards as corrupt.

For example, the Commissioner has accused an employee (not a board member) of the building and construction superannuation fund, Cbus, of leaking personal details of its members to the CFMEU whose members work in that industry. The actions of an employee, if such claims are proven, do not justify punishing the union and its members. Council assisting the Royal Commission Jeremy Stoljar claims there is a "corrupt culture" in Cbus.

The CEO of Westpac-owned BT Financial Group, Brad Cooper, has called for all super funds to have a majority of "independent" directors. This goes further in the weakening trade union voice on boards than Abbott's plans for one third of board membership to be "independent" directors.

"Independent" means people with expertise and experience in the financial sector – in other words it would give financial institutions control of super boards. After all, that is the aim.

At present most of the employer representatives come from the same industry as the members of the fund, not the financial institutions.

Stripping awards and agreements

Stoljar recommends the repeal of provisions in the superannuation legislation that make it compulsory for an employer to pay super contributions into a specified default fund where employees have not chosen a fund. Their repeal would make such clauses illegal. Stoljar claims these provisions deny employees genuine freedom of choice (document* released by Stoljar on 31-10-2014). He ignores the fact that union members vote on the agreement which is negotiated by their elected representatives.



Workers who individually failed to choose a fund, would then be allocated to a default fund of their employer's choice. This could be one of the inferior retail funds linked to a bank or insurance company which could then reward the employer with cheaper loans, fees or cover in return.

This is just one of a number of means aimed at pulling workers out of industry funds into the for-profit, lower returns sector. Howard's legislation for "choice" was an earlier attempt which failed.

Already unions are finding it more difficult to retain superannuation clauses in their agreements. These clauses often specify employer contributions above the minimum superannuation guarantee rate. Their removal also means employers could cut super contributions back to the bare minimum rate as well as choose funds for workers.

Billions of dollars have been lost in failed schemes based on inappropriate financial planning advice. More than 100,000 Australians have lost their life savings in various types of retail funds.

Apart from being a rich source of profits (management, investment, commission, advisory fees, etc), they give financial institutions the power to protect their own interests by such means as manipulating stock markets and financial markets.

Superannuation savings have an additional

attraction to the private investment houses in that the workers take all the risk. Investment losses, such as during the global financial crisis were carried by the workers. The financial institutions continued to profit from their fees, commissions, etc.

Securing workers' funds

The Communist Party of Australia is calling for the establishment of a national superannuation scheme, one which offers those who join it a guaranteed income on retirement – a certain amount on a fortnightly basis – what is known as a defined benefit scheme.

Workers and retirees should be able to roll some or all of their existing super savings over into the national scheme on a voluntary basis. The national scheme would offer security of income and its funds could be used to benefit society by providing badly needed infrastructure and services, and for job creation. For example, investment in public housing would result in homes for thousands of homeless people and create jobs and stimulate the economy. Likewise the building of schools, hospitals and other public infrastructure would be of benefit to people and the economy.

Meanwhile, the message to the government is "Hands Off Our Industry Funds!"

* www.tradeunionroyalcommission.gov.au/Submissions/Pages/CounselAssistingSubmissions31October2014.aspx#Part6 ★

3  **Abolition of ABC services**

5  **Climate change deniers, polluters run riot**

10  **Culture & Life Food, water & energy**

12  **Decoding Harper's terror game**

Guardian

Issue 1664

November 12, 2014

The ANZAC spirit and the dictates of capitalism

For many years, major political figures – and especially Prime Ministers – have struck their most respectful poses and waxed their most lyrical when talking about Australian service men and women. The willingness, professionalism and bravery of these citizens has been abused time and time again in pursuit of the geo-political objectives of British and then US imperialism but it appeared that the sacrifice was appreciated in the halls of power. Recent events, however, drive home the reality that official reverence for the country's soldiers, sailors and air force crew is nothing compared to that shown to capitalist economics.

The Abbott government is at war with its public servants and is keen to step out of its social responsibilities entirely. The budget has slashed jobs from an already struggling public sector and now wage cuts are being imposed. Workplace agreements for 165,000 public servants in over 100 agencies expired in June and the government is insisting that new agreements must deliver pay increases significantly below any rise in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Workers are after an increase of 12.5 percent over three years in an attempt to keep pace with mounting cost of living pressures.

Public servants rightly argue they deserve productivity increases, as well, given that they have been forced to take on the duties of former colleagues made "redundant" by the Abbott government. The government is not listening. In the Department of Human Services, for example, workers are being offered a take-it-or-leave-it 0.8 percent extra per year – way below growth in the CPI, which makes it a sizeable pay cut in real terms.

Abbott anticipated the anger the wage cutting would generate. Prior to the federal budget, he intervened to postpone a recommendation from the Remuneration Tribunal for a fat increase to parliamentarians' pay packets. This initiative may have prevented the inevitable tabloid headline or two but is unlikely to cause hardship on Capital Hill. Parliamentary salaries and allowances are generous, to put it mildly. Cuts to public servants' pay, on the other hand, are going to hurt.

Despite the institutional intimidation built into current industrial relations, public servants are fighting back. One section of the community that can't fight back is the supposedly respected defence forces. There is nothing they can do about the insulting 1.5 percent per annum pay rise handed down to them. Palmer United Party Senator Jacqui Lambie has suggested that at Remembrance Day ceremonies to be held this week, service men and women should turn their backs on government representatives.

"I have one message to all Australians that will help our ADF receive a fair pay rise – with the spirit of the ANZACs, turn your backs," the Senator (and former soldier) said. It's unlikely to happen. It remains to be seen if Ms Lambie will hold to her promise to vote down government bills until the insulting pay deal is fixed. For the stance she has taken, Lambie has incurred the wrath of "respectable" opinion makers for a lack of "respect" for the ANZAC tradition. The same conservative commentators said nothing about the lack of respect shown via the pay cut or the inadequacy of assistance given to traumatised army personnel returning from Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

"We'd all like to pay our serving Defence personnel more," Abbott said recently, "but there's going to have to be a very tight pay restraint across the public sector, including the defence personnel. I regret that."

Abbott proceeded to blame the parlous situation on the need to wipe out billions of dollars-worth of debt racked up by the previous government. Once that is achieved, the story goes, better pay deals could be back on the table. Workers should never be sucked in by this sort of cynical line. When and if the debt is turned around and when and if the Australian economy gets back to health, restraint will be demanded to "safeguard the recovery" or to prevent "overheating" the economy, a hike in interest rates, and so on. In reality, big business and the parliamentarians who serve its interests are as respectful and considerate of the welfare of workers as they are of Australia's service men and women – not at all.

PRESS FUND

The ABC is one of our most important public institutions. Without it we'd be dependent on the self-serving commercial mass media for our news and current affairs, and many news stories of major importance would be suppressed or distorted. Rupert Murdoch's newspaper *The Australian* has a particular hatred for ABC current affairs programs which are dedicated to shining light into the darker corners of capitalism. The *Guardian* shares this ambition, but it also has an iron-clad commitment to serving the interests of the working class, and that's why we're asking you to send the Press Fund a contribution for the next issue. Many thanks to the following for their support this week:

Mark Mannion \$5, K Manski \$16, KM \$50, "Round Figure" \$14, June Ayres \$20, D Forbes \$20, Gary Speirs (Press Fund tin) \$100, Iranian Comrades \$30, Donna McLaren \$20, Giqnni Dillura \$5.

This week's total: \$280 Progressive total: \$7,830

No private health insurance in primary care

Brett Holmes, general secretary the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association, has written to Peter Dutton, federal Minister for Health, putting on record the NSWNMA's opposition to letting the private health insurance industry into primary health care.

The Hon Peter Dutton MP
Minister for Health
PO Box 6022
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,
Re: Private Health Insurance in the primary care sector

I wish to place on the record my Association's opposition to the introduction of private health insurance into primary health care.

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) seeks to protect and advance the interests of nurses and midwives and the nursing and midwifery professions. We are also dedicated to improving standards of patient care and the quality of health and aged care services.

We are committed to the notion of health as a public good with shared benefits and shared responsibilities. We believe that access to adequate healthcare is the right of every

Australian and a crucial element of the Australian social compact. We are committed to publicly-funded universal health insurance as the most efficient and effective mechanism to distribute resources in a manner that generally ensures timely and equitable access to affordable healthcare on the basis of clinical need rather than capacity to pay.

It is well understood that the prohibition on private health insurance coverage in the primary care sector has been an important lever that has contained costs and supported equity in access for GP care. As we confront the challenges of the aging population, particularly growth in demand for management of chronic illness, this cost-containment is vital to ensure timely access to care and manageable costs overall.

While there will be clear benefits for fund members, what are the benefits for the uninsured? Providing preferential access to privately

insured patients (what point would there be in purchasing insurance otherwise?) will further entrench a two-tier system and stands in stark contrast to the principles of equity and universal access which underpin the Australian healthcare system.

It will also exacerbate the gap between health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-indigenous Australians as the rates of private insurance uptake in that community are very low. Those without private health insurance will experience reduced or delayed access, worsening health status and will increasingly burden public hospitals with avoidable complications and admissions.

The notion that an insurance entity should have a role in dictating when and how a patient can access primary care is completely rejected by my membership. Access to that care must be on the basis of need; it must not be determined by private health membership status.

Yours sincerely

Brett Holmes
General Secretary

End campaign of repression in Sudan

Statement from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Australia regarding the persecution of Communists in Sudan

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Australia condemns in the strongest possible terms the attacks on the Sudanese Communist Party and joins international calls for an immediate end to the anti-Communist campaign waged across the Blue Nile Region. The CPA demands the immediate release of Comrade Suliman Ali, the Political Secretary of the Party district, who is

charged with crimes that carry the death penalty, and all other comrades detained in recent days. The capture of Comrade Suliman Ali, who is 68 years old and in fragile health, is a politically motivated outrage that cannot be allowed to stand.

We note that the violations of the rights of the members of the Sudanese Communist Party take place at the same time as military action

against the people the Southern Kordofan and other war zones of the country. It is another example of acts of anti-Communist repression that have taken place in Ukraine, Venezuela, Greece, Serbia and elsewhere in recent times. The CPA calls on the progressive people of the world to unite against this escalating campaign against the defenders of the rights and interests of the people. ☘

Childcare, a key vote decider: new poll

One week after the Treasurer received the Productivity Commission report into childcare a new poll has revealed childcare is a vote decider for an overwhelming majority of voters in Treasurer Joe Hockey's and Shadow Treasurer Chris Bowen's Sydney electorates.

The poll was conducted for United Voice, the early childhood union, by ReachTEL in the electorates of North Sydney (Joe Hockey) and McMahon (Chris Bowen).

David O'Byrne, United Voice national secretary, says, "This sends a strong message to the Treasurer and Shadow Treasurer that increased investment in young children and better wages for educators are important to Australian voters.

"Childcare is a vote decider for 70 percent of voters in these electorates. This reflects the reality faced by families across the country: our childcare and early learning system

desperately needs government to invest adequately in this essential service."

Key poll results:

- Childcare and early years education are important vote deciders: 70.6% North Sydney; 72.7% McMahon
- A majority want government to invest more into childcare and early years education: 54.1% North Sydney; 57.7% McMahon
- A majority believe childcare educators should be paid more: 57% North Sydney; 53.5% McMahon
- A majority support means-testing of childcare benefits: 57.2% North Sydney; 59.8% McMahon
- The poll shows that in the last year the Liberal Party vote has dropped from 61% to 45% in their heartland of North Sydney

"At just 0.45% of GDP Australia's early childcare sector is chronically underfunded. New Zealand

manages more than double this. In Sweden funding is 1.9% of GDP," points out O'Byrne.

"It is the responsibility of all parties, in government and in opposition, to ensure children benefit from any changes. No child should be worse off and, to do this, educators' wages must be lifted from current levels.

"Educators are dedicated professionals and the back-bone of our childcare system. But with 180 people leaving the sector every week there is a crisis.

"This is a challenge for Australia: if we don't address educators' wages, the country cannot deliver the additional 24,000 employees who will be needed over the next five years.

"This will have inevitable consequences for women's ability to return to the workforce. Neither government nor the opposition can allow this to happen." ☘

Conservatives campaign for abolition of ABC services

Peter Mac

Last year federal MPs Cory Bernardi and Bronwyn Bishop were applauded by fellow-Liberals when they declared that the ABC should only provide news and current affairs broadcasts for rural and regional areas, and should abandon digital programming.

Earlier this year a government review team led by a former Seven West broadcasting executive claimed the ABC could eliminate many “non-core” expenditure areas. Accordingly, the May budget slashed ABC funding by \$35.5 million over four years.

The report concluded ominously, albeit inaccurately, that media convergence, (the availability of news, audio and video programs on the internet) “is increasingly eliminating the traditional arguments for public broadcasting”.

The view from the right

An independent review committee recently concluded that “[ABC] material broadcast was well-balanced”, but conservative politicians and media corporations, particularly *The Australian*, have made unceasing allegations of ABC bias.

This year *The Australian* also accused the ABC of mediocre news and current affairs coverage, “product placement” appearances, unjust treatment of Attorney-General George Brandis, unethical exploitation of a military tragedy, domination of digital media services, unforgivable bias against coal mining, and failure to cover important news!

In a recent editorial it described ABC news and current affairs coverage as “... a world where [federal Greens MP] Sarah Hanson-Young is the go-to voice on refugees, Tim Flannery is the oracle on climate, Wayne Swan is the world’s greatest treasurer, middle class western jihadists are victims of social injustice and Pauline Hansen speaks for suburbia. This is not reality and it is not a sensible place for the ABC to inhabit.”

In fact, it’s not a place the ABC “inhabits” at all. However, the editorial does clearly define areas of ABC news coverage with which *The Australian* most bitterly disagrees,

especially the Abbott government’s vicious treatment of asylum seekers, and above all its climate change policies.

The Australian has fiercely defended the fossil fuel industries, and as the ABC’s powerful mini program *MediaWatch* has pointed out, it has consistently scorned the very idea that the climate is undergoing significant change.

Two weeks ago commentator Nick Cater reflected *The Australian*’s viewpoint when he argued that a recent ABC *Catalyst* program proved “the planet hasn’t warmed since 1998”.

Cater observed triumphantly: “Perhaps we can carry on mining coal after all and help bring electricity to the 300 million Indians squatting in the darkness. Plastic bags could be restored to South Australian supermarket checkouts and the ugly word sustainability could be removed from the lexicon.”

But surface temperatures are still rising. The *Catalyst* program certainly stated this isn’t happening as fast as predicted, but this is because the extra solar energy is now being absorbed by the oceans.

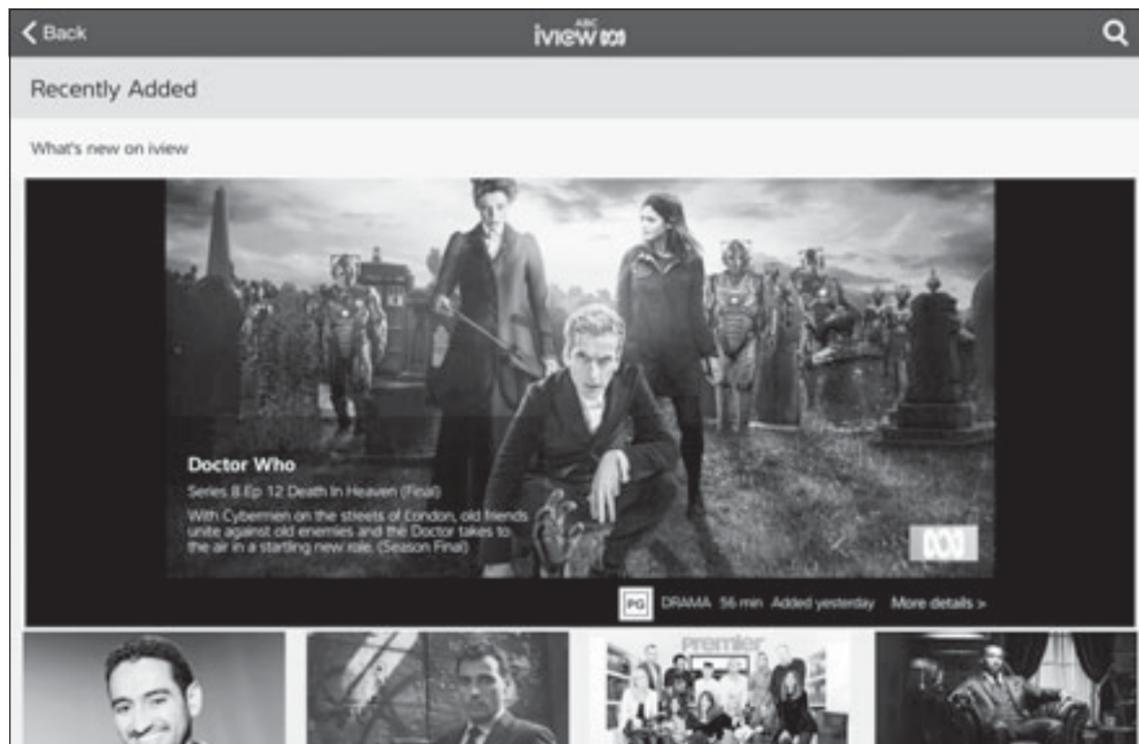
Cater cynically dismissed this as irrelevant and claimed that “greenhouse forecasts had been vastly exaggerated”.

But that’s nonsense. The absorbed heat will cause sea levels to rise and increase the polar ice melting rate. If climate change isn’t mitigated, population centres in low-lying islands and countries like Bangladesh, as well as parts of many Australian state capitals and coastal towns, will almost certainly disappear beneath the rising sea within 80 years.

The conservatives’ ABC “program”

The conservative parties and the commercial mass media want the ABC to cease criticising and competing with them – especially in digital media, to which increasing numbers of Australians are now turning for news and entertainment.

But why would a viewer pay for digital commercial news broadcasts when they can get it free from the ABC? The ABC’s own cost-cutting



ABC's iView.

measures have allowed it to introduce on-line news and program websites, the iView catch up service, two new digital TV channels, new digital radio channels and new podcast and vodcast Radio National broadcasts.

But all of that is now threatened by the funding cuts, and ABC management has hinted it may have to axe the TV current affairs programs *Lateline* and *7.30 Friday*. The government wants the funding reductions to force the ABC to quit digital media, leaving the field free for commercial operators, and it claims that savings could be made immediately by trimming “back room” expenditure, rather than axing programs.

However, ABC management says that many of the review committee’s recommendations are impractical, and those that are viable would take years to implement, whereas the funding cuts are immediate.

Moreover, for each new iView service the ABC has to pay commercial firms for increased server capacity. The previous Labor government provided extra funds for this, but the Abbott government won’t.

The ABC has entered into cooperative agreements with the British based *Guardian Australia* and the Fairfax press. But cooperation with the ABC certainly wouldn’t suit *The Australian*.

Its incessant attacks on the ABC have had some effect on public opinion, but not enough for the government. Since 2008/2009 the proportion of respondents who thought the ABC provides a valuable service has fallen, but only by 4 points to 85 percent, while those who thought the ABC provides a balanced and even-handed news coverage has also fallen, but only by 5 points to 78 percent.

The government therefore decided to cut ABC funding by \$35.5 million over four years. Several weeks ago it also terminated the ABC’s Australia Network, which broadcast to dozens of countries in the Asia/Pacific region.

Rupert Murdoch’s Sky News Australia immediately announced it was organising an overseas broadcasting service, the Australia Channel, which *The Australian* declared

would “champion Australia’s business, trade and investment interests.”

The government may now deliver an annual “statement of expectations” to the ABC, and issue budget directions to the ABC and SBS, requiring them to stipulate further expenditure cuts. This would in effect violate the national broadcaster’s independence, and diminish its annual funding level.

Glenys Stradijot from the community group Friends of the ABC described the situation as alarming and said: “[The ABC’s] affairs must be managed by an independent board, and its accountability must remain to the Parliament, not to the government of the day”.

The Friends and other concerned organisations and individuals are campaigning to defeat the government’s plans for the ABC. They must succeed, because if they don’t the government will split the national broadcaster into a few small, isolated and impotent broadcasting units, and that will in effect bring to an end a crucial Australian public institution. ☘

Pete's Corner



**More Money for
More Public Housing
Join the Rally
Wednesday November 19
12 noon
Parliament House
Macquarie Street, Sydney**



Poverty on rise: report

A new report by the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) has found that poverty is on the rise and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are significantly more likely than other Australians to fall below the poverty line.

ACOSS chief executive Dr Cassandra Goldie said it was unacceptable that after 20 years of economic growth, "our wealthy nation is going backwards in the numbers of people falling into poverty."

"As this report shows, most of this poverty is concentrated among the groups of people facing the most disadvantage and major barriers to fully participating in our community," she said. "These include people who are locked out of the jobs market, single parents, women and children, people with disabilities, the old, the young, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and migrants."

The report "Poverty in Australia" found that the rate of poverty for Indigenous people was 19.3% compared to 12.4% for the rest of the population. And the results are

backed up by "Falling Through the Cracks: poverty and disadvantage in Australia", released last week by the Curtin Economics Centre.

"Across the array of potential metrics relating to poverty and disadvantage, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples invariably rank among the demographic groups within Australian society experiencing the worst outcomes," the report found.

"Disadvantage"

"Stark disadvantage exists with respect to physical and mental health, income, education, employment status, incarceration rates and the incidence of other adverse life events."

The Curtin Economics Centre found that Indigenous people were almost four times more likely to live in overcrowded housing and that median incomes (the statistical middle) are "vastly lower for Indigenous persons."

"Information makes it clear that income and labour market disadvantage are just some elements of a

broader picture of deprivation suffered by Indigenous Australians, and that extends to physical and mental wellbeing, victimisation, incarceration and suicide," the Curtin report said.

"On the positive side, recent data suggest a marginal narrowing in the gap in life expectancy for Indigenous Australians, to 10.6 years lower life expectancy for Indigenous men and 9.5 fewer years for Indigenous women, when compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts."

"However, such glimpses of any positive change in the relative deprivation experienced by Indigenous Australians are all too rare ... thus the profound disadvantage faced by Indigenous peoples today can be expected to be perpetuated in the form of entrenched poverty and deprivation for generations to come."

A separate report into homelessness in Brisbane found that nearly a quarter of the surveyed young families (24.3%) who were homeless or "vulnerably housed" identified as Indigenous.

Koori Mail ☘



Hospital staff morale goes south up north

Cairns health workers say hospital standards have declined, staff morale has fallen and the Newman government's management of the Queensland public health system is "poor to very poor."

A damning new survey of more than 500 nurses, doctors, administration staff and health professionals has found the majority believe health service and hospital standards and quality of care levels have fallen considerably since 2012.

The Queensland Nurses' Union (QNU) and Together union survey of Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service staff found more than 90 percent of those questioned believed staff morale was on the decline. More than 80 percent rated the government's performance as poor to very poor while a further 65.5 percent believed the quality of services had rapidly declined in the last two years.

QNU state secretary Beth Mohle said the region's health standards and staff morale were waning – and the concerted push by employer groups to strip penalty rates for casual weekend workers would only make the situation worse.

"There is growing unrest and deep dissatisfaction among Cairns and Hinterland workers about ongoing staff and budget cuts and the level of care they can provide for patients," Ms Mohle said.

"These concerns are causing a steep decline in staff morale and its public health services and hospitals – and the public – that will suffer as a result."

"Sadly, in addition, we are seeing a concerted push by employer groups who are lobbying the

federal government to cut weekend penalty rates. The Queensland Council of Unions (QCU) is currently running a determined campaign to block this push."

Together secretary Mr Alex Scott said the survey was damning.

"The Newman government has cut staff numbers and health budgets to a point where staff are routinely forced to work double shifts and perform regular, unpaid overtime," Mr Scott said.

"Health workers in Cairns and the surrounding regions are being forced to do more with less and there's only so much they can take. The move to reduce penalty rates is a bridge too far."

The QCU this week unveiled static and mobile billboards to highlight the importance of penalty rates in the region.

The QNU and Together survey findings released include:

- 91.4% believe staff morale is worse due to the changes to the public health system over the last two years.
- 85.8% say changes to the public health system over the last two years has had a negative impact on job security.
- 84.8% of respondents said changes to the public health system over the last two years made it harder to provide quality health services for Queenslanders.
- 82.4% rate the current government's performance when it comes to managing Queensland's public health system as poor to very poor.
- 65.5% said the quality of services is worse compared to the quality of services they were able to provide in March 2012. ☘

Australia lags in Ebola response

The Doctors Reform Society has joined the calls from the AMA and the NSW Nurses Association for Australia to increase its role in the Global response to the increasing Ebola epidemic. The aid agency Oxfam has warned Ebola could become the "definitive humanitarian disaster of our generation" if more is not done to halt the spread of the virus.

Oxfam, which works in the two worst-hit countries – Liberia and Sierra Leone – last week called for more troops, funding and medical staff to be sent to tackle the west African epicentre of the epidemic and chief executive Mark Goldring warned that the world was "in the eye of a storm".

The Doctors Reform Society National Conference held in Sydney on October 17, noted the federal government's concern about sending doctors and nurses to help fight the Ebola epidemic in West Africa and the relatively small contribution to the international effort of \$18 million.

"Some of these concerns are valid," said Dr Con Costa, National president of the Doctors Reform

Society, "but we are worried about a lack of transparency and relative inertia compared to the Abbott government's aggressive position on international affairs to date. Especially a lack of information on Australia's preparedness and our part in the global response - including whether past cutbacks to the public health system and customs and immigration has increased Australia's vulnerability to any future international spread of the disease."

Given that the Ebola outbreak is rapidly reaching a new stage, and the importance of containment i.e. at the current rate of spread we could be looking at over 1 million infected and a fatality rate of over 70 percent by January 2015. An exponential growth in new cases is predicted if there is no well organised and well funded early response, as is being called for by the UN/WHO, President Obama of the USA and PM Cameron of Great Britain.

The Doctors Reform Society National Conference resolved to put to the Health Minister, Peter Dutton and PM Tony Abbott the following questions:

1. What measures are being looked

at by the Australian government to support Australian doctors and nurses going to West Africa - either as part of an Australian health team or embedded in international teams - given that early containment of the disease is the only realistic, practical, humane and affordable strategy in fighting Ebola?

2. Are less risky, but equally important support alternatives, being also considered as part of our global response - including sending public health workers, engineers and military teams to assist with infrastructure in West Africa?
3. Will the government make public the discussions it is having with the WHO and the CDC and what is being discussed in regards to Australia's contribution to the fight against Ebola?
4. What steps are being taken by the federal government to boost Australia's public health system to increase Australia's preparedness should the disease enter a new phase i.e. spreading internationally? ☘

Melbourne



Carry on the fight for a just, democratic and sovereign Australia

6:00pm Thursday December 4

The Eureka Hotel – Victoria & Church Street Richmond

RSVP 0409 854 996 / spiritofeurekavic3@gmail.com

more info www.spiritofeureka.org

Support *The Guardian* by donating to Press Fund

Climate change deniers, polluters run riot

Bob Briton

Coal mining magnate Clive Palmer has joined forces with climate change deniers in the Abbott government to deliver exactly the sort of “carbon abatement” scheme Australians would have expected from those quarters. The “Direct Action Plan” is a pledge to the big polluters in Australia’s economy to do nothing significant to reduce carbon emissions. The previous government’s carbon tax, which was carefully crafted not to impede highly polluting business-as-usual too significantly, was scuttled in July. Its successor puts the country further behind comparable economies in terms of carbon emissions policy and compounds the climate emergency faced by the planet.

The UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has released a report synthesising research since 1990 and the assessment is grim. “Science has spoken, there is no

reads as if there were plenty of time for real action. In spite of the threats, the government’s chief business adviser, Maurice Newman, has urged the country to prepare for global cooling.

Abbott has capped the amount of “direct action” funding at \$2.55 billion – the only cap the PM is keen to talk about. Grants will be doled out to corporations that may or may not want to clean up their emissions act. If ever businesses exceed emission “baselines”, they can simply buy “credits” from other companies. There are supposed to be penalties for rogues that simply ignore these gentle guidelines but it is unclear what the penalties will be. This is a government that boasts about cutting “red tape”, i.e. removing regulation that’s in the public interest.

The verdict of experts on the woolly Abbott/Palmer “Direct Action Plan” is unanimous. It won’t do much or anything to reduce emissions. It won’t achieve the unambitious target of a 5 percent reduction on year

Environment minister Greg Hunt, however, insists that no such scheme will ever be endorsed by the Coalition.

“The government has set up a review into emissions trading schemes, even though it has vowed not to establish an ETS; this is a mess and an insult to the intelligence of Australians,” Australian Conservation Foundation CEO Kelly O’Shanassy said. Authority chairman Bernie Fraser will head up this pointless 18-month inquiry.

The government is also moving to reduce the Renewable Energy Target (RET). The current target is set at 41 terawatt hours a year by 2020. That was expected to be 20 percent of overall energy consumption in the economy but that was before the quickening pace of de-industrialisation of the Australian economy had made its full impact felt. The new “target” will be 26 terawatt hours if the government gets its way. The renewable energy sector is facing a bleak future as the lack of official support causes investment to dry up.

It is disgraceful that the biggest contribution to reducing carbon emissions in Australia will come from the loss of thousands upon thousands of jobs and the destruction of the skills base necessary to maintain modern industry and safeguard national sovereignty. Clearly Abbott & Co aren’t interested in new industries that could help Australia and the world to steer onto a more sustainable course of development. Australia will be a quarry for the reckless extraction of the country’s natural resources until they are all gone. That’s the “plan”.

The Communist Party of Australia does not believe market mechanisms such as an ETS will serve to reduce carbon emissions. The chaotic nature of capitalist markets got the planet into the current predicament and won’t provide the way out. The CPA supports a genuine direct action plan that would legislate to make the big polluters pay and clean up their act. Sooner rather than later, major sectors of the economy will have to be brought under public ownership and control if we are going to be able to turn back from a climate change calamity. ☘

Australia will be a quarry for the reckless extraction of the country’s natural resources until they are all gone. That’s the “plan”.

ambiguity in their message,” UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said. “The report found that the world is largely very ill-prepared for the risk of changing climate, especially the poor and most vulnerable, who have contributed least to this problem. Leaders must act. Time is not on our side.”

While average temperatures creep up, the Arctic and the seas warm and permafrost melts releasing huge volumes of methane and carbon into the atmosphere, the Abbott plan

2000 levels by 2020. Clive Palmer, who stunned TV viewers with a joint press conference with climate change spokesman and former US presidential candidate Al Gore in June, claims he has secured important undertakings for backing the scheme he used to call “hopeless”.

The government will keep the Climate Change Authority it vowed to scrap. It will be tasked with examining trading scheme (ETS) proposals for possible adoption after the 2016 federal election.

Retired astronomer halts Santos’ CSG work

A retired astronomer from Coonabarabran has halted Santos’ clearing in the Pilliga forest in north west NSW last week attaching himself to a bulldozer.

Seventy six-year-old Malcolm Hartley worked for decades at the Siding Spring Observatory outside Coonabarabran. He discovered eight comets at Siding Spring during the 1980s. The internationally-renowned observatory is under threat from gasfield and other mining development nearby because light pollution will ruin the dark night sky the observatory needs. Mr Hartley’s actions follow

protests that saw young Coonabarabran mother Nicole Hunter lock herself to Santos’ bulldozer for six hours to stop the preparation of a new coal seam gas drill pad.

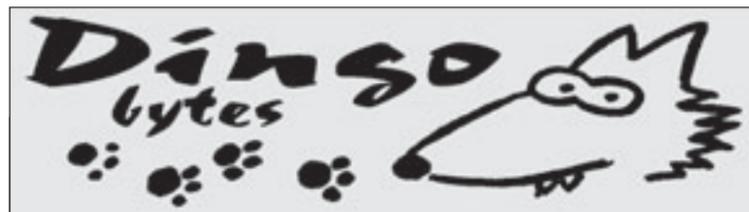
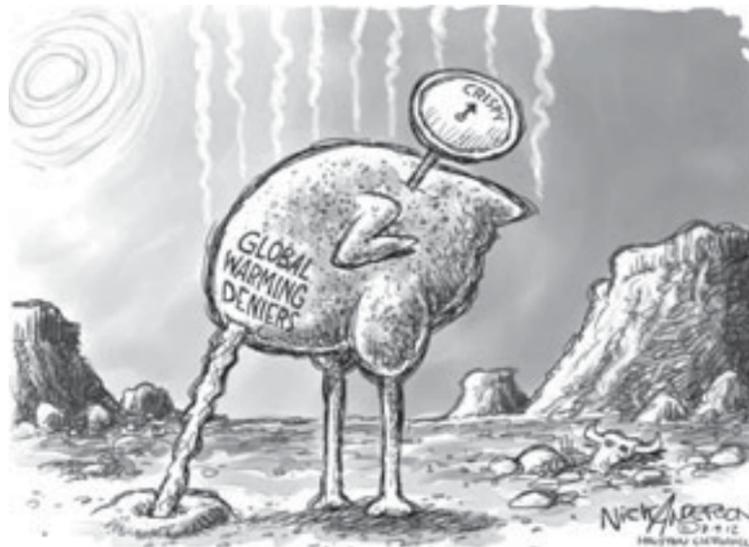
Mr Hartley said, “I don’t want to see the industrialisation of the bush and I don’t think our government is thinking clearly about the damage that Santos will do to this forest and the region.

“I’ve been to the Queensland gasfields. I’ve seen what they want to turn the Pilliga into. I don’t want to see this special place given over to an industrial gasfield, and the wildlife driven out, just because it’s

public land and the government and Santos think it’s expendable.

“If there’s no private owner or leaseholder to lock this gate, then the people of Coonabarabran, who love this forest, will have to do it.

“The chief Scientist recommended an overhaul of the regulation of coal seam gas last month. We’re still waiting for the government to respond, and yet, here Santos is clearing the bush and putting down more wells. It’s not right that reform of this industry should come too late to protect the Pilliga and its dark starry skies.” ☘



The Abbott’s government is giving \$243 million to run public school chaplaincy programs next year. Not surprisingly, the funding is restricted to faith-based chaplains only and hundreds of qualified student welfare officers will lose their jobs. Victoria will be the worst hit as it has secular welfare officers working in 246 schools. In NSW 163 schools have secular welfare officers. “These qualified welfare officers who already have trusted relationships in our schools, and the students they support, will be the ones paying the price for this radical move to impose ideology on school communities,” said federal opposition education spokeswoman Kate Ellis. The Labor Party is not blameless on this issue as it had allowed the Howard government introduced chaplaincy programs to continue and be funded. The Gillard government gave schools the option of a secular welfare officer or counsellor and some schools opted for that. That did not last long and the change of government meant that secular professionals are out and proselytising amateurs are in.

Australians travelling to the USA will have to pass extra security vetting by the border authorities. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) bolstered security checks last week for foreigners from dozens of countries who do not require a visa. According to the new rules, citizens of Australia, Europe and other ally nations who travel to the USA on the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) will be forced to disclose additional personal information, including if they hold other passports, parents’ names and city of birth, employment information, etc. “DHS is concerned about the risks posed by the situations in Syria and Iraq, where increasing instability has attracted thousands of foreign fighters, including many from VWP countries,” a DHS official said. Tony Abbott told parliament that there were about 70 Australians fighting in Iraq and Syria backed by about 100 “facilitators” in Australia. The DHS said the US government does not have any credible information that IS or other terrorist groups are planning imminent attacks against the USA, but “there are significant concerns these groups may use these fighters to conduct external attacks.”

“We’ll find any way we can to take the money out of the universities,” Treasurer Joe Hockey told The Australian Financial Review. The Abbott government proposed to deregulate university fees, cut course funding by an average of 20 percent and increase the interest charged on student loans. Universities would have to raise their fees to make up for the funding cuts. All these measures could push the price of getting a basic undergraduate degree as high as \$100,000. The latest Fairfax/Ipsos poll found 64 percent opposed fee deregulation with 28 percent in support. It is one of the many extremely unpopular budget proposals. Free education was an enduring legacy of the Whitlam government and many, many people expressed their gratitude for this opportunity while paying their respects to Gough Whitlam.

Saving the Solomons' cloud forest

Kayt Davies

Indigenous landowners are taking their government to court over alleged irregularities in a logging company deal. Viewed from above, the island of Kolombangara is almost perfectly round and 30 kilometres across. From ground level, it towers dark green at over 1,770 metres high, with a volcano peak hiding shyly in a veil of cloud.

Only a few intrepid travellers visit. Hikers who tackle the mud and vines find that the vegetation changes around 400 metres above sea level, beyond which point they are engulfed by the "cloud forest" – a biodiversity wonderland that is home to several species of birds and frogs found nowhere else in the world.

The forest is also home to a network of "Tambu" sites – places important to the history and culture of the people who have lived on the island for more generations than anyone can remember.

Kolombangara is just one of many thousands of islands in the South Pacific, in the Solomon Island Archipelago. While it may not immediately seem remarkable, its own people care deeply about it and are making slow but groundbreaking progress in protecting it.

Most of the 6,000 or so people of Kolombangara live in huts made of timber and leaves, hacked from the bush with chainsaws or enormous bush knives. If they have light at night, it comes from kerosene or solar lamps, or the few diesel generators in the larger towns. Most homes have no plumbing, but water is easy to access from the many streams that course down the steep sides of the towering old volcano.

There are about 90 small villages scattered around the outskirts of the volcano, and a few larger settlements. The most developed town, Ringgi, owes much of its infrastructure to Kolombangara Forests Products Limited (KFPL), a timber company that has had Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification since 1998.

The Solomon Islands government owned 100 percent of KFPL until April 2011, when a Taiwanese firm called Nien Made Enterprise bought off 60 percent. At the time, it announced that it was keen to keep the FSC status, which means meeting certain environmental standards.

While KFPL's 75-year lease covers about 70 percent of the island and extends up to the volcano crater rim, it restricts its commercial activities to land up to 400 metres above sea level and allows traditional owners to access and co-manage the cloud-forest portion of their land.

It also provides vital infrastructure support to the Kolombangara Island Biodiversity Conservation Association (KIBCA), a community organisation established in 2008 to "protect Kolombangara Island's rich marine and forest biodiversity and to educate, promote and encourage sustainable management of natural resources through viable economic and social ventures".

It is this association which is pursuing a judicial review of key government officials involved in allowing Success Company Ltd to log an area that spans parts of the cloud forest.

Fighting law with law

The legal framework that the people of Kolombangara are trying to work within is the product of the nation's long political history.

Customary law is the term now given to the rules that evolved over millennia to govern island life, such as land and water rights, marriages and settling disputes. While ancient in its origins, customary law is still alive and well in the Solomons and governs the lives of many, especially in remote areas.

The first Europeans to visit the Solomons came in 1568; by the 1800s whalers, traders and missionaries started arriving. By the end of the century, contention over British and German control over various Pacific islands was resolved under a treaty that gave Germany more of Samoa and Britain control of all nine of the major island groups in the Solomons.

Britain granted the Solomons independence in 1978 and the young nation's 50 member-house of parliament started drafting legislation, with the safety net of British law still applying



Kolombangara Island.

unless it is overridden by the Constitution, an Act of Parliament, customary law or a judicial decision that declares it to be inappropriate.

Other quirks in the new constitution included a provision that, in general, only a Solomon Islander or certain groups such as companies majority-owned by locals can own land. There is also a provision that recognises customary law as a source of law.

The key logging law is the Forest Resources and Timber Utilisation Act (1969), which requires logging companies to do three things before they can start felling trees: enter into an agreement with landowners; obtain a licence from the Commissioner for Forests (who is appointed by the Minister for Forests); and get extra permission for logging at 400 metres above sea level.

On paper, this seems to be geared towards empowering local communities to protect resources in order to make their villages sustainable. In reality, the Solomon Islands have been logged unsustainably for decades, in many cases with few benefits flowing back to the local communities.

The first court case

In 2009 Success Company Ltd rolled in its trucks and started logging an area known as Lot 1. KIBCA investigated the company's actions, and found that while Success had a licence it hadn't gone through all the required steps and had not obtained the permission for logging above 400 metres required by the Forest Resources and Timber Utilisation Act.

In July 2010, KIBCA took the bold move of filing an application with the High Court, seeking to restrain Success and its contractor from logging. In August 2010 Justice Chetwynd agreed to hear the matter and granted a temporary injunction that stopped the trucks and chainsaws.

According to Stephanie Price, an Australian lawyer who worked on the case, one of KIBCA's most significant victories so far has been gaining recognition of its right to bring legal action against Success.

In the 2010 case, Success claimed that KIBCA "lacked standing" to make a claim because it was a group representing landowners and not a landowner in itself. The High Court rejected this argument.

"This was important because it paves the

way for other landowner and environmental groups to challenge decisions that are contrary to environmental laws," says Price.

Without this recognition by the judge, KIBCA would have been required to get official permission from the Attorney-General before it could "seek enforcement of public rights". It had already sought this permission from the Attorney-General but been denied, so Justice Chetwynd's decision was key to being able to move forward.

In November 2010, KIBCA was back in court making its case about the lack of proper permissions. It won the case, with Justice Chetwynd upholding his injunction against logging pending the granting of the proper approvals.

Yes, Minister

In the background, other things had been happening. In August 2010, Heinz Horst Bodo Dettke, who owns two-thirds of the shares in Success, was elected as a Member of Parliament and was also appointed Minister for Forests.

One month later, the Commissioner for Forests (who works under the Minister for Forests) granted approval for logging above 400 metres.

Then, in March 2011, the Director of the Environment granted Success a "development consent". Success had already hired a consultant to conduct an EIA, as legally required, but the consultant spent just one day on the island making the assessment.

KIBCA was told nothing about these approvals. In June 2011 Prime Minister Danny Phillips dedicated all of the 20,000 hectares above 400 metres on Kolombangara as a special area for conservation, giving KIBCA a reason to celebrate. The feel-good declaration, however, lacked any legal clout.

Andrew Cox was working as a volunteer with KIBCA at that time and said that when the KIBCA board heard rumours that the approvals had been granted and that no one had bothered telling them, they were exasperated and suspected that it was "a sign of the same old practices that they were sick of, involving corrupt logging approval processes". Cox travelled to the capital, Honiara, to find out what had happened, and was able to confirm to KIBCA that the approvals had indeed been granted.

KIBCA was furious. In July 2011 it filed an appeal to the Environmental Advisory Committee against the decision. That appeal is still languishing in a queue, waiting for the attention of the Committee, which has drifted apart and isn't holding meetings.

Undeterred, in November that year KIBCA applied to the High Court for a judicial review and the quashing of both the Commissioner's approval for logging over 400 metres and the Director of the Environment's development consent.

KIBCA claims that the EIA doesn't meet the requirements in the Environmental Act and that the Director of the Environment took into account "an irrelevant consideration" in making his decision, namely that the Commissioner had already given logging over 400 metres the go-ahead.

In August 2012 the Attorney-General, representing the Commissioner and Director, filed a defence denying any wrongdoing.

The wheels of justice are turning painfully slowly. In June 2014 the parties met to put before the court the agreed facts. According to Martha Manaka, senior legal officer with the government's Landowners' Advocacy and Legal Support Unit, there's a chance that the court date may be set before the end of 2014.

Manaka stressed the importance of the case, saying that it "sets a precedent in terms of how companies deal with gaining 'development consents' for logging and other activities".

But while she and KIBCA are hoping for success, winning the court case does not guarantee long-term protection. As Price points out: "Even if the case succeeds, the Director of Environment and the Commissioner of Forests could just grant those consents again."

A more permanent fix

Ferguson Vaghi, the co-ordinator of KIBCA, is frustrated at how slowly the case is moving forward, but won't give up: "If the court cases were fast and the companies were punished for not following the law, then the system would work. But that's not how it is. The good thing about the case is that it has slowed down the logging activities and it has given us time to work on more permanent solutions."

KIBCA's new plan of action is to get the area above 400 metres designated as a

est

Is this the end of Pearson's Cape York "welfare trap?"

Geoff Bagnall

The Queensland government appears to have conceded the Noel Pearson-inspired Cape York Welfare Trial is over after more than \$220 million of federal and state government funding has been committed to the Trial.

When the Trial was first launched five years ago Pearson and the then Federal Labor and Queensland governments declared the Trial would be extended throughout Queensland and perhaps nationally.

However, five years later and after an assessment by the former federal government department of FaHCSIA (Department of Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) revealed doubts about the effectiveness of the Trial and there had been a lack of material for it to complete a detailed analysis of where the funding had been spent and which elements of the Trial, if any, had achieved acceptable outcomes.

Queensland's Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Glen Elmes, announced last month the Queensland government would not be extending the Cape York Welfare Trial to any other communities within the state except for one element under the Family Responsibilities Commission (FRC) which would be introduced to the Doomadgee community and this was only happening in that community because the community members had agreed.

Elmes appeared to indicate in his announcement the Cape York Welfare Trial would continue with the four communities of Coen, Mossman Gorge, Hope Vale and Aurukun although he did not reveal what level of funding would be provided in future.

Question mark

There also remains a question mark over whether Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, a strong supporter of Noel Pearson and his programs, will insist the federal government continues funding the Trial after the Indigenous Affairs Minister, Senator Nigel Scullion refused to answer questions from the *National Indigenous Times*.

The state's Assistant Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, David Kempton, said after so much money had been put into the Cape York Trial "the tap" could not be immediately turned off and there needed to be a transition to autonomy.

"It's a bit like the Family Responsibilities Commission. This is a slow transition and you can't just chop everything off and start something new," he said. "I think there's a transition out of that process into a new process and the funding has its role in that transition time."

The prospect of any further extension of the Family Responsibilities Commission to communities other than Doomadgee is also questionable after Kempton declared there would be no extension of Cape York-style welfare reform other than Doomadgee in his electorate.

Kempton, whose electorate of Cook covers Cape York in far north Queensland said while "a Family Responsibilities Commission would be set up and operate in Doomadgee", no further communities would be included "without prior consultation and informed consent from the community members".

"There won't be any communities, certainly in my electorate, Cape York, included in the Family Responsibilities Commission process without prior consultation and informed consent. It will not happen," Kempton said.

Despite the decision by Glen Elmes not to extend the Cape York Welfare Trial anywhere else in the State he maintained the \$220 million poured into the Cape York Institute by the federal and state government was money that has been well-spent.

"I think, overwhelmingly, it has. I think if you went back and looked at it again and asked could we have done some things better? Of course we could have.

"But I'm convinced we've changed lives, I'm convinced the outlook that communities have now is different and that is not just in those four communities, I'm talking about across all of our Indigenous communities," Elmes said.

Kempton also agreed a lot of good had happened in the four Cape York Welfare Reform Trial communities but he believed "it had had its day".

"I don't detract from the role it's played. I just think we're moving on and it's a different ball-game now," Kempton said.

Kempton said he was also "still very keen" to see a proper assessment of the Cape York Welfare Reform Trial that has run since 2007 in the four Cape York communities involving fewer than 3,000 residents and will have cost \$220 million in state and federal funding by 2015.

"It is something I'm still very keen to see but with all, respect to the Cape York Institute, the Welfare Reform Trial and its proponents have done a great job of raising awareness around the paternalistic approach of government to Indigenous communities over generations," Kempton said. "So they've really highlighted the fact there needed to be a change but that has come and gone now and it is time to move on."

Cuts

Kempton said the Cape York Institute now needed to relinquish control back to the local communities. "I just think welfare reform has had



Noel Pearson.

its day, I think it's just time to move on with more community autonomy and far greater self-determination within the regions and within the communities," he said.

As the federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Nigel Scullion continues his task of finding \$500-odd million of savings from services and programs for Indigenous communities throughout the continent he appears unwilling to look to the expensive Cape York Welfare Program as an option.

Child care, education, legal, violence prevention, housing and employment are all under the Scullion microscope to see what he can cut but amazingly the Minister was not prepared to respond to questions from the *National Indigenous Times* about whether the federal government intends to continue funding the Noel Pearson Cape York initiative.

We sent the Minister 11 questions about the Cape York Welfare Program in light of the Queensland government announcement the Cape York Welfare Program would not be extended throughout Queensland.

But the Minister obviously thinks not. His only response via a spokesperson to the questions was "the Minister was not available to comment".

The questions put to Senator Scullion were:

1. From 2008 through to 2015 the Cape York Welfare Reform trial will have received in excess of \$220 million in federal/state funding, with the majority coming from the Commonwealth. In 2012 there was a review of the CYWR trial by the then federal Department of Indigenous Affairs, which gave a less than glowing assessment. Has there been any assessment of the Cape York Welfare Reform trial since the 2012 FaHCSIA report?
2. If so, what were the findings of the report, where is it available and what did it conclude from its assessment of the Cape York Welfare Reform Program in terms of achieving meaningful returns from the \$220 million invested?
3. If there has been no evaluation since the 2012 report (cited above), what evidence is being cited for the continuation of those levels of funding going to just four communities in Cape York?
4. Why has there not been a complete and detailed assessment identifying what has worked and what has not?
5. If the CYWR trial has been deemed a success why has it not been extended to other communities in Queensland and across Australia?
6. On Tuesday of last week the Queensland government amended the Family Responsibilities Commission legislation to allow it to be extended beyond Aurukun, Hope Vale, Coen and Mossman Gorge announcing it would be extended to Doomadgee. Does the figure of \$220 million from 2008 until 2015 include funding for the Family Responsibilities Commission program or is that funded separately?
7. What federal funding, if any, goes into the FRC program?
8. Are there other initiatives that would have been a more, or equally, beneficial spend of the approximately \$220 million?
9. Given the federal government is undertaking a detailed assessment of all programs and services to determine which should continue to receive federal funding why has the Cape York Program been excluded from that same process?
10. Does the Minister intend to continue federal government funding of the Cape York Welfare Reform program after the 2015 commitment? If so will he be recommending funding will be at the same, less, or higher levels?
11. Does the Minister believe the \$220 million invested to date in the Cape York Welfare Reform program from both federal and Queensland government achieved meaningful outcomes which will deliver improved outcomes for Indigenous Australians? If so, what areas precisely from the program are they and why has the Minister not therefore instructed those elements of the program deemed to have achieved appropriate outcomes to be implemented throughout Indigenous communities throughout Australia?

National Indigenous Times ✪

National Park under the Protected Areas Act 2010, which would make it illegal for the Director and Commissioner to grant approvals for logging.

This is a long process, though, requiring the consent of all the landowners, and there are some people in Kolombangara who see "locking up forests" as akin to giving them away for no return.

As Vaghi explains: "It's a local mentality that can be overcome by doing what we are doing. We are used to depending on the forest for almost everything, so if we are going to stop people from making money from the forest we have to find incentives and offer alternatives."

This, he says, means finding other ways of monetising the forest, such as ecotourism, agro-forestry, honey production and other sustainable industries.

Ian Scales, whose PhD focused on logging and land politics on Kolombangara, is concerned, however, that the process of gaining approval from all the landowners will be difficult because there is an undercurrent of power politics, an attitude of elitism among the "big men" and a reluctance to cede power: "The competing narratives will make it hard."

He explains that the nation's current Prime Minister, Gordon Darcy Lilo, who hails from Kolombangara, is a big player who made part of his fortune from logging – including logging above 400 metres. Scales believes that Darcy Lilo is keen to take decisions on logging out of the hands of local chiefs and have them made in Honiara. Other influential people, such as Luma Darcy, are keen for Kolombangara to maintain its independence.

Despite these gloomy predictions, Vaghi seems pragmatically optimistic: "It's not difficult; it's just that money talks. When we can offer money, we get agreement. It's taking time but we have money coming soon from the United Nations Development Program, and when that comes we will make more progress. It's the way forward, as far as I can see."

Back at the Landowners' Advocacy and Legal Support Unit office, Manaka is getting her papers in order, preparing for a court battle in the next few months.

New Internationalist ✪

An eye to privatisation

Solomon Hughes

BRITAIN: More details about a private contract for National Health Service (NHS) eye operations which left patients in pain and with poor sight are slowly appearing. A report of an investigation has slipped out. Getting the facts about NHS privatisation isn't easy. So I want to add some facts of my own.

The firm behind the "painful" and "rushed" eye operations is backed by a leading Tory donor who hangs out with Iain Duncan Smith. And thanks to its financial set-up, it takes money out of the NHS but doesn't pay any of the corporation tax that could be used to fund the NHS.

Back in May doctors were alarmed when nearly half of the 62 NHS patients given cataract surgery by a private contractor at Musgrove Park hospital in Taunton, Somerset, reported blurred vision and other complications. Vanguard Healthcare, a private firm which sells eye ops to the NHS under government privatisation rules, was supposed to carry out 400 operations in its mobile surgery – basically an operating theatre in the back of a truck – but was suspended after a week's work.

Musgrove Park hospital was reluctant to release its report into the event in case it was sued for libel. But last month the BBC got a copy under freedom of information rules. The report found that only 25 of the 62 patients had "normal" recoveries.

Operations were suspended after NHS staff said that complications were "10-fold" the normal rate. Three patients needed further surgery because of retention of lens matter, two suffered eye burns, while six patients were found with microscopic metallic fragments in their eyes.

Patients found the surgery "rushed" and "painful." The report says: "The pressures of operating on 20 patients each day may have contributed to the possible deterioration of surgical quality and reduction in patient experience." Investigators

found that because Vanguard subcontracted a lot of work, surgical staff were working with "new equipment" which was "unfamiliar."

Time was short and "patients were arriving at the Vanguard facility while training was going on, creating pressure to start the lists promptly and shorten training." Also arrangements for patient follow-up were not in place when operations started.

These are all indications that the privatisation, with its subcontracting, haste and disruption, was at fault. The report's main recommendation was to try to use the NHS hospital's own in-house eye surgery more.

Some of the patients are suing for damages – represented by Laurence Vick, an experienced medical negligence lawyer from Michelmore solicitors. But as Vick pointed out, it isn't clear who will pay any final settlement – Vanguard or the NHS.

So that's a whole heap of arguments against NHS privatisation – possible commercial pressures for over-fast work, unclear responsibility and inadequate use of the NHS's own resources – so why does it go ahead?

Unfortunately too many people around the government have an interest in it.

Vanguard Healthcare is part of the "current portfolio" of the investment company of a top Tory donor. Rory Brooks has given the Tories £276,000 since 2008. He founded and leads the venture capital company MML Capital.

Under his leadership, MML has invested more than £18 million in Vanguard Healthcare. Brooks set up MML in 2008 and is one of its partners, with special responsibility for European investments.

Another MML director, Ian Scott Wallis, sits on the Vanguard board thanks to its investment in the health company. Vanguard Healthcare's chief executive Ian Gillespie appears on the MML website, where he is quoted saying that "MML have been ambitious for us" and have "been fantastic for our business."



Patients found the surgery "rushed" and "painful." Privatisation, with its subcontracting, haste and disruption, was at fault.

Brooks, 60, is a member of the Tories' "leaders' group" whose members dine with David Cameron and his ministers.

He made his most recent donation, £50,000, this February. So he has funded the Tories, then his business profited directly from their NHS privatisation – while patients have suffered. According to the Conservative Party's own registers, Brooks has attended at least one leaders' group dinner.

He is also a director of the Centre for Social Justice, a think tank founded by Duncan Smith. Vanguard's annual reports show how much its business depends on NHS policy.

In 2009, before the election, the firm complained about "NHS uncertainty about the future direction of emphasis and priorities." In 2011, its annual report said the company was

concerned about "uncertainty" over then health secretary Andrew Lansley's pro-privatisation health Bill, which faced fierce protests.

In its latest report, Vanguard says: "The 'hospital reform' agenda is growing and Vanguard will benefit from the new thinking around health-care delivery as we look forward across the UK and Europe."

The involvement of a private equity firm like MML in the NHS has another effect – MML takes money from Vanguard in the form of interest and debt repayment, which is taken out of the firm's overall profits, and so reduces the amount of corporation tax paid by the NHS supplier.

In its current annual report Vanguard Healthcare boasts of a good "operating profit" of £1.6 million. This "operating profit" is one of the firm's "key performance indicators."

However, thanks to debt repayments to MML and other lenders, Vanguard makes no overall profit. Consequently Vanguard has paid no corporation tax since 2009. On its website, MML says investors should "watch Vanguard make history." The firm is backed by investment from a Tory donor's firm. Thanks to Tory-backed privatisation, Vanguard is doing NHS operations from the back of a van. Patients have been left in pain and their eyesight impaired. Vanguard's hurried, subcontracted work seems to be at fault.

Thanks to its financial organisation, the firm doesn't pay any of the corporation tax which is used to fund the NHS. So I think it is making history – but unfortunately it is a horrible history which we need to make a thing of the past. *Morning Star* ✪

Win ugly or lose pretty

A top US political consultant, dubbed "Dr Evil", has been caught on tape at an industry conference, advising oil and gas Execs to regard public policy as "endless war" and to play on people's fear and greed to lobby their interests.

Richard Berman's speech, which he gave in June in Colorado Springs, was leaked to the *New York Times* by one of the participant's at the conference who said: "It just left a bad taste in my mouth". The whistleblower asked for their identity not to be revealed.

"If you think about it these groups: the Sierra Club – who is the natural enemy of the Sierra Club? Who is the enemy of Greenpeace? You know at the surface, you would love to be a group like that because everyone should be in favour of you, who could be against you? That's very difficult to overcome, and they play on that, and they trade on that, and that's our opportunity and also our challenge. So, it is an endless war."

To win the war, the veteran lobbyist told the crowd to "marginalise" their opponents: "You can either win ugly or lose pretty,"

the founder and chief executive of the Washington-based Berman & Company consulting firm declared, noting that "wherever possible, I like to use humour to minimise or marginalise the people on the other side."

"I get up every morning and I try and figure out how to screw with the labour unions – that's my offence. I am just trying to figure out how I am going to reduce their brand."

According to Berman, who has waged campaigns against labour unions, animal rights activists and environmentalists, the battle is usually worth millions. "I think US\$2 to US\$3 million would be a game changer," he said. "We've had six-figure contributions to date from a few companies in this room to help us get to where we are," he said, adding that anonymity is key to success.

"People always ask me one question: 'How do I know that I won't be found out as a supporter of what you're doing?' We run all of this stuff through non-profit organisations that are insulated from having to disclose donors. There is

total anonymity. People don't know who supports us. We've been doing this for 20-something years in this regard," he explained.

The June 2014 Western Energy Alliance conference featured representatives from Anadarko Petroleum, Halliburton Company, ExxonMobil, Devon Energy, and Noble Energy.

According to the *New York Times*, Berman has recently solicited up to US\$3 million from oil and gas industry executives to finance an advertising and public relations campaign called Big Green Radicals.

Berman said that a sure way to win public support on this or that issue is to confuse people to the point where they can't tell right from wrong and finally give up.

A vice president of Berman & Company, Jack Hubbard, suggested "branding" entire movements, such as anti-fracking movements, as "not credible."

"What we wanted to do is brand the entire movement behind this as not being credible and anti-science."

"Fear and anger have to be part of this campaign. If you want to



"Dr Evil", Richard Berman.

win, that's what we're going to do. We're not going to get people to like the oil and gas industry over the next few months."

"If you want a video to go viral, have kids or animals," he remarked, showing a spot his company created featuring schoolchildren taking part

in a mock union election – to imply that union bosses have "childish" elections.

"There is nothing the public likes more than tearing down celebrities and playing up the hypocrisy angle," Hubbard wrapped up. *RT* ✪

Harbinger of more war

Finian Cunningham

The US mid-term elections, which saw the Republican Party take control of the Senate and extending their hold over the House of Representatives, proves one thing: money can buy an election, but it can't buy democracy. That indictment of eviscerated democracy in America, however, is a portent of more foreign aggression and wars.

Congressional elections this week saw US\$4 billion being poured into media campaigns – a record high. But even with this largesse, the majority of American voters were underwhelmed by what was on offer. Some 60 percent of voters did not even bother to cast their ballots. That is perhaps the real, shameful result of this election. Americans by their absence at polling stations are saying that there is nothing worthwhile voting for from among the two parties, whether Republican or Democrat.

In other words, democracy in the US is certified as dead. The official winners of the mid-term elections may be Republicans. With deep pockets splurging on vitriolic television attack-ads, the Grand Old Party may have managed to buy a majority of seats in the Senate and House, but buying these seats hardly amounts to a mandate-to-rule from the people – when the vast majority of citizens refuse to vote, and many of those that did vote express only contempt for both parties.

As an article in the *Washington Post* notes: “Voters interviewed leaving the polls offered negative opinions about almost everything, from the president and Congress to the Republican and Democratic parties to the state of the economy, the direction of the country and confidence in the federal government”.

You have to sneak a laugh at Washington for its asinine irony. Only days before the mid-terms, US officials were denouncing the elections in Eastern Ukraine as a “sham”. No matter that more than 60 percent of the electorate in Donetsk and Luhansk mustered the courage to cast their votes to elect pro-independence leaders, while they are being slaughtered by the Western-backed regime in Kiev firing Grad rockets and cluster bombs at civilian areas.

The disturbing thing is that the election-buyers in the US will claim – in spite of the facts – that they have a mandate to embark on a more militarist foreign policy. This is a classic case of adding 2 plus 2 and getting 5, a conclusion that only multi-millionaire politicians divorced from public reality could arrive at.

With Republican control over the Congress, US President Barack Obama is now a lame-duck leader who can't even quack. Not that Obama has shown any enlightenment towards international diplomacy and curbing military interventions throughout his two terms in office. But with the more gung-ho Republicans able to over-ride the White House, we can expect a turn for the worse in international relations over the remaining two years that Obama resides in the Oval Office.

On Ukraine and Russia, the Republicans will step up their vociferous support for the ultra rightwing Kiev regime. Even before this week's Congressional elections, they have been calling for more military aid to the CIA-installed junta.

The Republicans have also been leading the media frenzy demonising Russian President Vladimir Putin as the “new Hitler” and pushing for a

Polls have consistently shown that most Americans are opposed to Washington's wars overseas.



more militaristic advance of NATO towards Russia's borders.

In Syria and Iraq, Obama has limited US involvement to sporadic air strikes against the Islamic State terror network and other Jihadists, while promising “no American boots on the ground”. Obama's hesitancy has been mocked by the hawkish Republicans who want to escalate US military presence in the Middle East and extend it to an all-out attack on the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad.

That is, to make American regime change in Syria a full-throttle campaign, not the pusillanimous approach adopted by the Obama administration.

Perhaps the only fig leaf to international diplomacy under Obama has been the nuclear negotiations with Iran over the past year. This month a potential deal is in the offing on November 24, via the P5+1 forum, which might see US-led international sanctions on Iran finally being lifted. Obama has previously said that he is prepared to use executive powers to over-rule opponents of an Iranian deal in Congress.

But with both chambers on Capitol Hill now under the complete control of Republicans it is extremely doubtful that Obama will have the courage or political will to close the long-running dispute with Tehran. Failure to clinch an agreement portends a resort to belligerence from Washington towards Iran – an outcome that will bring glee to the closely aligned Israeli lobby.

All in all, the Republican dominance emerging last week in Congress spells a hardening of Washington's foreign policy – or, more accurately, an even more reckless American militarism riding roughshod over diplomacy and international law.

The travesty of this is that Washington has, in fact, no democratic mandate to pursue the belligerence that the Republican lawmakers will claim to have.

Polls have consistently shown that most Americans are opposed to Washington's wars overseas.

Of the minority of American voters who did participate in the mid-term elections, their concerns were mostly driven by domestic economic woes. Foreign policy, and much less foreign wars, was not on the

agenda of the electorate. As even one Republican Senator Rob Portman of Ohio remarked, the voters came out “against Washington dysfunction and [for Washington] to get back to legislation on issues that will help them and their families.”

The *New York Times* also commented that “voters seemed to be reaching for a way to end Washington inertia”.

From soundings of exit polls, the *New York Times* reported that 70 percent of voters expressed dissatisfaction with the state of the economy. Some 80 percent voiced their fear that the economy will become worse – despite official claims of a “recovery”.

Tellingly, too, many (25 percent) who cast their vote for the Republicans said that they were doing so not out of a positive endorsement of the party, but out of a general protest against the political establishment in Washington.

The Democrat president and his incumbent administration naturally would receive the brunt of this popular discontent, or as a *Washington Post* headline put it: “An unhappy electorate is toughest on Obama and the Democrats”. But that does not mean that Republicans have anything to crow about. Far from it, a logical conclusion would be “shame on both sides of the House”.

The Republicans may have bought the election results this week – from an embarrassing minority of the US population – but this is far from a mandate. The results are more a sign of how futile American elections are now seen by the vast majority of the population. When confronted with no real choice, most voters simply chose to stay away, and those that did vote, simply voted for the best way to express protest at the oligarchy in Washington – whether Democrat or Republican.

Nevertheless, for the rest of the world, the carnival of American money-politics and the bellicose arrogance of those sitting on top of Capitol Hill, is something to view with deep dread.

For the next two years, the world better be on its guard against America's war machine – a war machine that is fuelled with a delusional mandate.

Information Clearing House ✪



Region Briefs

At a military/political work conference in one of the old revolutionary bases in Fujian Province on November 1, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Military Commission, Xi Jinping, said that the military should continually hold to the principle that follows the CPC's leadership. Xi stressed that the ideological and political development of the military safeguarded the CPC's command, and it had made the military establish its proud traditions of serving the people's interest, promoting fairness and rigorous discipline, and developing the spirit of sacrifice and spirit of revolutionary action.

At an economic cooperation dialogue between Vietnam and Laos in the province of Binh Dinh on November 2, data from the Ministry of Planning and Investment showed that Vietnam was the third biggest investor in Laos with total investment worth over A\$5 billion in 250 licensed projects, and bilateral trade between the two countries reached around A\$995 million. At the dialogue, Lao Deputy Prime Minister Somsavat Lengsavad and his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Xuan Phuc agreed that the two governments would increase support for bilateral cooperation, solving difficulties and improving efficiency.

On November 4, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) condemned the US for attempting to use their version of human rights to overthrow the DPRK's social system, after the US Secretary of State John Kerry once again openly accused the DPRK of human rights issues. A DPRK foreign ministry spokesman said that the US intended to “cause internal instability” and “seek regime change” in the DPRK. He added that the DPRK was open to any dialogue on human rights, but only with countries that respected its sovereignty.

On November 4, the tenth seminar between the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) was held in Vietnam under the theme of experiences in building a socialist country under the rule of law. CPC Political Bureau Central Committee member Liu Qibao and his Vietnamese counterpart Dinh The Huynh attended the seminar. Liu said that the people are masters of China and state governance should follow socialist rule of law. He added that China was willing to exchange experiences with Vietnam and lift the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership to a new height. Dinh introduced Vietnam's governance experience and said that Vietnam “was ready to work with China to promote mutual learning for common development”.

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

email: tpearson@cpa.org.au



Victory from struggle

Inner-city women's services which lost funding under the NSW government's *Going Home Staying Home* reforms have had their full funding and buildings restored following lengthy discussions with the government.

The inner-city women's services will continue to operate following the signing of new contracts last week.

We're extremely pleased that the NSW government has recognised the important work of these refuges and that we were able to work closely

with the government on ensuring these essential services can continue into the future. We'd like to thank the Minister Gabrielle Upton for recognising the essential work of these services and her willingness to work with us to find a solution, after recognising that cuts to the inner city were too drastic and funding needed to be restored.

The women's services that have been saved specialise in providing support and safe accommodation to women with mental illness, drug and alcohol dependency, domestic violence and leaving custody.

We're particularly pleased that Young People's Refuge in Leichhardt will remain open as it's the only girls-only crisis refuge in NSW and provides a critical service to girls as young as 13 escaping domestic violence and sexual abuse.

The five successful services are Detour House, Young People's Refuge, B Miles, Stepping Out Housing and the Community Restorative Centre women's program.

Our heart-felt thanks also to the many MPs, councils, health and social services and community members who've thrown their support behind the campaign to support women's refuges. This was a huge community effort and it's a massive achievement which will mean thousands of women and girls are better off.

We will continue to work with the government and affected communities on ensuring these reforms deliver the best outcomes for women and children.

Roxanne McMurray
SOS Women's Services

A dose of conspiracy

The article from Global Research on the Ebola virus which ran in the *Guardian* (issue #1662) should be read with a heavy dose of scepticism.

While not completely inconceivable – *Guardian* readers will be well

SUPPORT THE CUBAN 5

Support event outside US Consulate

Martin Place, Sydney
Friday December 5, 5pm

Come and support the Five.

Organised by Sydney Central Branch, CPA
Further info Maria 0431 275 434



aware of the lengths imperialism will go to in order to control resources – the suggestion that US military interests are responsible for the current outbreak of the virus in Liberia is fanciful and perhaps comparable with the anti-communist propaganda that charges the Chinese with organ harvesting.

Apart from anything else Ebola isn't airborne so the likelihood that it

could be effectively transmitted for military purposes seems low. Also, it has no delivery system to allow it to be spread.

I'm interested in why the *Guardian* would print this piece given the lack of clear intelligence to substantiate the claims.

Craig Greer
Adelaide

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland



The struggle for food, water and energy

In Britain, thousands of workers in the National Health Service took strike action in October. Thousands of civil servants did the same, while teachers balloted for strike action in November. The main issue in all the disputes was falling real incomes, which have declined steadily for the last seven years. As TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady says, "Across the country people are struggling to make ends meet, as their pay lags behind prices and there seems to be no end in sight to their financial misery."

The plight of the poor cuts no ice with the country's Tory government, however, which is insisting on more cuts to government services and benefits along with wage freezes and continued austerity measures.

In Germany, supposedly the most economically successful part of the EU, train drivers also took strike action in October in support of demands for higher wages. The previous month, pilots at Lufthansa staged a one-day strike over attempts by the company to raise the retirement age. Meanwhile, in Morocco, public sector workers took strike action against government changes to pension and retirement rules that would mean cuts to pensions of between 25 to 30 percent for most workers.

The cuts in real wages, the raising of the retirement age, the cuts to pensions, attacks on working conditions (including safety provisions), the whole "austerity" scenario, are part of an on-going and intensifying war being waged by capitalism against workers as the capitalists try to dig themselves out of

crisis – a declining rate of profit and fewer new sources of profit – by gouging money out of the pockets of the poor and shifting it to the much deeper pockets of the already rich.

Not satisfied with this, however, the main capitalist powers have been pushing a series of so-called "free trade" deals. Incorporated into international agreements with the force of law, these deals give corporations (and corporate lawyers) extraordinary power over elected governments. Transnational health or education companies can bid to supply services currently supplied by state health or education departments or institutions and the contract must go to the lowest bidder, regardless of the quality of the service they render or the desirability of the changes they cause to the working conditions, wages and employment prospects of workers in that sector.

Usually characterised as "trade and investment partnerships", the provisions of these agreements mean that any government that tries to block corporations from making maximum profits by any means can be accused of unfair trading practices and sued for recovery of the "future" profits a company could have earned if it were allowed to do as it pleased. And the case would be heard, not in a court of law, but before a tribunal made up of three corporate lawyers whose decision would be final. It is an extraordinarily blatant attempt by capitalists to replace even the limited popular rule embodied in bourgeois democracy with outright corporate dictatorship.

The largest of these bilateral trade deals ever brokered is that between the US and

Europe, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Last month there was a Europe-wide day of action against the TTIP. Protesters in Britain hung a large banner from Westminster Bridge reading "HANDS OFF DEMOCRACY # NO TTIP".

Aware that "trade deals" like TTIP cannot be justified or even portrayed as being in the public interest, capitalist governments have taken to negotiating them in secret. British Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Keith Taylor told *HuffPostUK*: "Even my colleagues who sit on the European Parliament's Trade Committee don't get a proper look at the negotiating document, and most MEPs don't get any say on the deal until we're presented it as a *fait accompli*."

Australia is being lined up for a similar deal with the USA, as part of this global push to establish a locked-in corporate rule that elected governments will be powerless to change. It is yet another attempt to create the "corporate state" that Mussolini dreamed of. And like all forms of Fascism it is inherently inimical to working people, indeed to all ordinary people, and it must be fought vigorously.

One corporation that expects to benefit greatly from agreements like the TTIP is notorious bio-tech giant Monsanto. The company made lots of money in earlier years by manufacturing such wholesome products as the pesticide DDT, the defoliant Agent Orange that left so many Vietnamese children horribly deformed both physically and mentally, as well as the modern scourge of recombinant bovine somatotropin (bovine growth hormone).

Monsanto is even more notorious, however, for its unscrupulous practice of pushing genetically modified seeds upon farmers, especially in the Third World.

Monsanto is the company that distinguished itself by trying to gain control of patents to crops and by trying to tie farmers up legally so that they were prevented from saving, sharing or re-using seeds or plant varieties. This was a key element in the drive by big capital to gain control over the world's food supplies. The corporate goal, so far only partly achieved, is to gain control of global energy, water and food supplies. Like Big Oil, the major agribusiness and water supply companies must be salivating copiously at the thought of the profits they will make when food and water is as sewn up under corporate control as oil production and distribution already is.

A large part of Europe's energy supplies come from Russia, and a major motivating factor for the disturbances in Ukraine has been scheming by imperialism to disrupt the flow of Russian oil and gas, which reaches Europe via pipelines that cross Ukraine. Another major source of energy for Europe was to have been oil and gas from Iran, delivered via a pipeline through Syria. The actions of ISIS in Syria (and before them the so-called Free Syrian Army) acquire a special significance in this context.

It has always been big business versus the working people. But now we can see exactly why that is a fight the workers cannot afford to lose. ☘



Sunday November 16 –
Saturday November 22

Touching The Void (ABC2 Sunday November 16 at 8.30pm) is Kevin MacDonal's reconstructed documentary of a near-disastrous ascent of a 21,000-foot mountain in Peru, in 1985.

Made in 2003, MacDonal's film is based on the book of the same name by Joe Simpson about his and Simon Yates' near fatal climb up the previously unclimbed West Face of Siula Grande in Peru. They decide to do it "Alpine style", that is without a support team, no helicopters, no string of supply dumps along the way, etc, just the two climbers with all their gear loaded in their back-packs.

They reach the summit OK, but Simpson falls during the descent and badly breaks his leg. Yates undertakes to lower him 150 feet at a time rather than leave him, but in the blinding blizzard, Simpson eventually drops off a cliff. After about an hour, Yates believing that Simpson must already be dead, cuts Simpson's rope and descends alone, looking for Simpson's body.

He cannot find it, because when he cut the rope Simpson fell deep into a crevasse. But Simpson is not dead, although – lost in a deep crevasse with a broken leg and no visible way out – he might as well be. The well-handled re-enactment of his escape from the crevasse, and his subsequent crawling descent of

the mountain, spending days making his painful way over rocks, almost dying of thirst, and finally crawling into the base camp only hours before the other two had decided to leave, is a saga of physical and mental courage and determination.

When post-Whitlam governments forced universities to substantially increase their fees, there was a marked surge in the number of female students (and males too, presumably) funding their studies through prostitution. Despite cloaking it in all sorts of feminist jargon popular at the time (the word "empowerment" was thrown around a lot) nothing can really disguise the fact that obliging students to fund their studies in that way is inherently sexist and encourages the exploitation of women (not to mention the associated risk of violence or disease).

As a system based on exploitation, capitalism panders to sexism, promoting it in every conceivable way. Boosting business at pubs by having "lingerie" nights where female bar staff serve liquor while wearing only their underwear is one practice that was tried for a while in a couple of my local hostels. I don't know how much extra business it brought in (if any), but the practice is very much alive and well in the mining communities of WA, it seems.

There they are called Skimpies, and the short film *Skimpy* (ABC2 Monday November 17 at 9.30pm) follows some of these women as they travel by car from suburban Perth along dusty outback roads to country pubs and remote roadhouses to serving beer in their underwear. The film tries to say that "it's a tale as old as the invention of mining – whenever men have flocked to mining boomtowns, women providing 'entertainment' are never far behind." It's still exploitation.

Eclipse (ABC2 Wednesday November 19 at 8.30pm), the third film in the *Twilight* saga, received better reviews than its predecessor, but they were still decidedly mixed, citing too many characters (only a problem for people who



Touching The Void (ABC2 Sunday November 16 at 8.30pm).

hadn't read the books, of course) and uninspired dialogue. The latter was an interesting criticism since the script was by the same scriptwriter as the previous two. More significant perhaps was the directing of David Slade, which was definitely uninspired. In fact, the *Chicago Tribune* gave the film only 2 out of 5 stars, and said that David Slade's pacing was "everything like molasses running uphill". [Ouch!]

On the other hand, the *New York Times* praised Slade's ability to make an entertaining film, and called *Eclipse* "funny and better than its predecessors". The *Los Angeles Times* also praised it as a funny movie. I must be dumb. I suppose, but like most people, I didn't find the film either slow or funny. But then, I like the books.

Nor do I share some critics' low opinion of the performances of Robert Pattinson as the vampire Edward Cullen or Kristen Stewart

as his human girlfriend Bella Swan. There are more animated people in the cast, that's true, but both performances are consistent with the characters as written in the books. The temptation for a director to "liven up" a film version of a popular novel has been indulged in (by Hollywood in particular) ever since films were invented. In the films of the *Twilight* books that temptation has been largely avoided (except in the climax of the last film in the series which they obviously thought wasn't "exciting" enough as written).

Eclipse certainly has plenty of excitement in its plot. Bella is being stalked by a female vampire, Victoria, seeking revenge for the death of her mate, killed by the giant wolves (really Quileute Indians) when he tried to attack Bella. As part of her revenge plan, Victoria creates a small army of newborn vampires she hopes will take down the Cullens. Ironically, this threat results in an alliance

between the vampire Cullens and the shape-changing Indians/wolves.

Fantasy literature is a very old tradition that includes folk and fairy tales, epic romances about heroes and dragons, and tales involving gods and devils and lesser spirits. Vampires, based on legends that grew up around the blood-thirsty historical figure of Rumanian ruler Vlad the Impaler, have been popular in Western literature as figures of evil since Bram Stoker made him so in the 19th century as Dracula. Modern authors looking for a new angle turned the vampire into a hero (or at least an anti-hero).

Now, bookshop shelves, especially in their "young adult" section, are filled with fantasy novels involving not only vampires but djinn, ancient Egyptian gods, witches, wizards and all manner of magic. Realism it is not, but if well-written it can be very entertaining. ☺

International Day of Action Against Trade Union Repression November 16

Are workers in your country free to organize unions?

There are many countries where workers' right to freedom of association is violated. Trade union leaders and members are intimidated, illegally laid-off, harassed, tortured or killed.

As we mark the International Day of Action against Trade Union Repression, let us light a candle on or near the day November 16, in our workplaces or homes to show our solidarity with all workers who are struggling to organize unions, without which all workers' rights become vulnerable. Let us also remember the martyrs who were killed in the struggle for workers' rights.

**Stop trade union repression!
Justice for the all victims of trade union repression!
Fight for the right to organize!**

For all solidarity actions, please post in Facebook and use the hashtag #StopTUrepression, or email ilps.commission5@gmail.com

Thank you.

Subscription to **The Guardian**

12 months: \$100 (\$80 conc/\$150 solidarity) 6 months: \$55 (\$40 conc/\$80 solidarity)

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

POSTCODE: _____

Pay by Cheque Money order (Payable to "Guardian Publications")

Phone in details on 02 9699 8844

Or send to: Guardian Subscriptions

74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010

or by credit card: Mastercard Visa *\$20 minimum on cards

Card# _____

Amount: _____ Expiry Date: ____/____/____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

The Guardian

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

Editor: Tom Pearson

Published by
Guardian Publications Australia Ltd
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010

Printed by Spotpress
24-26 Lillian Fowler Pl Marrickville 2204

Responsibility for electoral comment
is taken by T Pearson,
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010

Enmore Newsagent

195 Enmore Rd (near Edgeware Rd) Enmore, NSW
This Sydney newsagent regularly stocks *The Guardian*

Dr Jacob Rumbiak and the Australian West Papua Association (AWPA) Melbourne seek new friends and donations in the struggle against genocide, environmental destruction and resource theft.

Australian West Papua Association (AWPA) (Melb)

PO Box 1093, Windsor 3182 Victoria
03 9510 2193 eng.peacechild@hotmail.com

Sydney

POLITICS IN THE PUB

November 13

THE ONGOING DISGRACE OF HOMELESSNESS: WHY NEITHER LABOR NOR THE COALITION GETS IT?

Michael Moore, CEO Homelessness NSW;
Sister Anne Jordan, President, Cana Communities;

November 20

REGULATING THE REGULATORS AND WORKPLACE BULLYING – WHEN THE BULLYING REGULATOR FAILS TO TAKE CARE OF ITS OWN

David Shoebridge, Greens MLC, NSW Parliament;
Anne Gardner, General Secretary Public Service Association;

November 27

THE POLITICS OF AIDS IN THE 21ST CENTURY – A FORGOTTEN EPIDEMIC

Neal Blewett, Dr, Former Labor Health Minister when Australia lead the world in response to the AIDS crisis;
Alan Brotherton, Director, Policy Strategy & Research at ACON;

Every Thursday 6:30 pm 'til 8:15 pm

Harold Park Hotel

Cnr Wigram Rd & Ross St Glebe

Charles Bradley 02 9692 0005
odl_bradley@pacific.net.au

www.politicsinthepub.org.au

Canada

Decoding Harper's terror game

John McMurtry

Stephen Harper is the most deeply reviled Prime Minister in Canada's history. On the world stage, he is the servant of Big Oil boiling oil out of tar-sands to destroy major river systems and pollute the planet with dirty oil, while his attack dog John Baird leads the warmongering and bullying of nations like Iran and Syria targeted by the US-Israeli axis.

He is the most despotic and toxic first minister in the life of our country. His administration de-funds every social program and life protective system it can. It strips the country of its public information infrastructures at every level – including now the gagging of non-profit NGOs by eliminating their charitable status if they question any policy of his regime.

Just as his friend George Bush Jr, Harper holds government by big-money backing, continual lies, attack ads, and life-blind policies to enrich the already rich. Canada's neo-con political class may have its head on backwards, but Harper is very cunning in skirting, subverting and perverting the law to abuse power at every level. He is the poster boy of the global corporate agenda of wrecking society and its common life support systems.

Harper also owes his political life to the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police). After a non-confidence vote triggered the 2006 election, RCMP commissioner Giuliano Zaccardelli instructed his staff to include former Liberal finance minister Ralph Goodale's name in a news release announcing a criminal investigation. This reversed the stench of the Harper regime's continuous scandals and corruption onto the Liberals by a false RCMP smear. As a former top insider of the Tory party advised me, "The RCMP won the election for Harper". The elected Harper regime then surrounded the RCMP with blocks to silence all facts – the signature operation – so the truly deepest scandal of the era proceeded with impunity to the present day. So it is not surprising that CSIS (Canadian Security Intelligence Service), the RCMP and Harper are collaborating to get more secret powers for the police and spooks in return for serving Harper's underlying agenda.

Ideal patsy

Harper certainly needs an accepted domestic enemy to save him from the rising revulsion of the thinking public against his rule. His regime's record of destroying the life substance of Canada piece by piece cannot be denied. One already knew what was coming when Harper immediately called the crazed run-over of soldiers in Quebec on October 20 "a terrorist act" about which he was "deeply worried".

In fact, it was the act of a criminally insane loner run amok in a small Quebec town without any evident objective as required under the law's definition of terrorism. But with the foreknowledge of his added Islam by the RCMP and CSIS, he seems to have been an ideal patsy for Harper's home "terrorism" claim. He had already been arrested and his passport cancelled in June. We can imagine how an effective undercover agent might have whipped him into a Jihad frenzy knowing he would soon be full of holes and unable to report what happened.

One can more clearly see such a scenario in the case of the clinically insane, drug-addicted petty criminal living in a homeless shelter in Ottawa who had warned a judge in front of the police back in 2011: "If you can't keep me in,

I'm going to do something". Who could have been a better tool for the events to come? On October 22 after the first "radicalised terrorist" attack, a long-gun impossible to hide that no-one saw before ended up in the hands of Micheal Zebaf-Bibeau. The rest is history. He went on a killing spree with no known blood testing afterwards for the drugs he was evidently driven by in the video record of his frenzied and super-charged behaviour, just as there was no known test of the body of crazed drive-over killer, Martin Couture-Rouleau. How extraordinary. How unspoken in the lavish profusion of other details and official false connection to Islamic State.

"Terrorist" stops the mind, and "jihadist" locks it in. Harper's first invocation of the mind-stopper was, as always, strategic. Although blood tests for a substance-abuse driving offence are automatic, none was reported although the videos show every sign of chemical possession. Bibeau too went crazy and was dead with countless bullets through him before any questions could be asked. All such strange coincidences are part of the now familiar covert-state modus operandi.

Joining the dots

Since Harper publicly claimed an "act of terrorism" two days before the sensational Ottawa murder and crashing of Parliament and as soon as the Quebec killing occurred, questions arise. The normally zipper-lip Harper did so long before any forensic facts were in, and before the idea even occurred to anyone else. Why? Revealingly the federal security state had been running war games exercises depicting just such attacks weeks before the crazed murders (Canadian Authorities Ran War Game Drills Depicting ISIS Attack Scenarios – Brandon Martinez, *Global Research*, October 24, 2014). Lone-wolf nut cases, killings out of nowhere, unknown motivators and arming, and the state leader most profiting from mutation of the demented murders into "terrorist acts" before anyone else – who joins the dots?

It is taboo to think through such situations, and this too is known beforehand. Sure enough within the day, the RCMP and CSIS get the new extraordinary powers they sought, and for the first time in office the robotic Harper is behaving with a warmth not even extended to his young son with whom he shakes hands in farewell. He is hugging opposition leaders in Parliament to show a new human side to complete the image makeover in motion.

Harper is happy because he thinks his next election is saved. But the first forensic question in acts of murderous crimes is again never asked. The hypnotic trance of "terrorism" in sedate Ottawa holds the narrative unchallenged. Cui bono? Who benefits from these unbelievable closed-case murders in two days which have the media headlining "terrorism" and "anti-terrorist legislation" everywhere Canadians look, and Harper now as the strong hand in charge. The top banner headline of the weekend Globe screamed "How far should we go?"

Harper's re-election

The first function of the terrorist claim is the standard one – diversion from the ailing economy and the majority's growing revulsion of the leader and his party. Harper has made enemies of every thinking Canadian in the country by his stripping of the country's public life and knowledge bases, and reversing the country's global reputation as an agent



Canada's Prime Minister, Stephen Harper.

of peace, social conscience and reverence for nature. Diversion to a constructed Enemy is the oldest strategy in the book of despised heads of state, and Harper is in unprecedented need for distraction to another target to uplift him at the same time. Bush Jr ran on this formula for eight years.

If the stratagem is not seen through, the second big boost to Harper will be to justify the despotic rule and quasi-police state he has built with ever more prisons amidst declining crime, ever more ant-terrorist rhetoric and legislation, ever more cuts to life support systems and protections (the very ones which would have prevented these murderous rampages), and ever more war-mongering and war-criminal behaviours abroad.

The evil regime of despotic control and life oppression he has instituted surpasses any ill rule in the nation's history. As the US prototype of the life-blind right wing has taught him, the greatest justification of one's rule is knee-jerk hatred of a safe Enemy. But in Canada, that does not work over time. So the domestic "acts of terrorism" in Quebec and Ottawa themselves provide the needed Enemy within Canada to justify anything with ever new pomp, mandatory agreement of others, and ruling power at centre stage.

Drive to total control

The rest follows. The "New Terrorist Laws" in execution were already the feature news headline on October 25, allowing for any new surveillance and control of citizens. Keep in mind our already-installed totalitarian airport regime that deprives people of water and hygiene products, dehumanises all, and undresses millions with no questions allowed any step of the way. It is a synecdoche of the larger total rule advancing with the Harper gang in charge further than ever before. "Nothing can be the same again" cheer the corporate media in choral support.

More favours to the Harper regime from the RCMP and CSIS may be in store – for example, false allegations and naming of even the most honest opponents like Ralph Goodale

who spent "the worst year of my life" recovering from the RCMP smear that kept Harper in power. It is a bit like the War Measures Act – new capacity to lock down any city at any time with armed-force control pervading the streets and police-army powers in the glory of mass-controlling armed command and kill license. It has already happened in Ottawa with a lone crazy, and the lock-down was infinitely more heavy-handed than in 1970 Montreal which I observed first hand. Keep in mind the trumped-up cause for it – one likely-drugged and managed murderous homeless mental case dead before any questions could be asked.

Observe too how the language changes to fit the agenda of total control. The keys are "terrorists" for lone individuals driven crazy with no more social supports for them, and "radicalisation" with no modifier as the ultimate problem of thought behind the terror. What deprived group or oppositional rethinking cannot be so labelled?

Behind all the public psych-ops is the operation of reverse projection long perfected by the US war machine. Blame the opposition for what you are doing as the reason for attacking them. At the Canada level, the reverse projections define the Harper regime.

He is punitively and vindictively despotic, rigidly and vengefully doctrinaire, intolerant of deviation, shames and slanders at will, and overrides every democratic constraint to his insatiable drive to total control. Narrow and life-blind absolutism, indifference to others' suffering, and certitude of virtue while destroying people and common life support systems complete the unseen rule of terror at work. A coterie of mediocre and corrupt subordinates surround and serve him to allow no shard of light in on the ruling mission of society destruction.

With most people not yet suspecting it, Harper rule is an American mirror image of the jihad-fascism he uses to multiply his and his corporate allies' rights and powers. Behind him lies the transnational money-sequence cancer he embodies in every policy line.

globalresearch.ca ☘



Communist Party of Australia

Guardian

Website: www.cpa.org.au/guardian
Email: guardian@cpa.org.au

Central Committee:

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

Website: www.cpa.org.au
Email: cpa@cpa.org.au

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

Newcastle Branch:
newcastle@cpa.org.au

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

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

SA State Committee:
Bob Briton,
PO Box 612, Port Adelaide BC,
SA 5015 Ph: 0418 894 366
www.adelaidecommunists.org
Email: sa@cpa.org.au

West Australian Branch:
Vinnie Molina perth@cpa.org.au
PO Box 98 North Perth WA 6906
P: 0419 812 872

Brisbane Branch:
PO Box 33, Camp Hill, Qld 4152
P: 0449 202 189
cpabris@live.com.au

Tasmania Branch:
Bob Briton tas@cpa.org.au
P: 0418 894 366