

Contradictions Galore

April 25th 2011.

The recent spate of sex scandals in the Australian military have precipitated a flurry of propaganda around ANZAC day this year. A new advertising campaign features various sportsmen and women urging citizens to support “our troops” by sending them encouraging emails and text messages, while the Prime Minister is beaming in pro-military messages from her tour of Japan and Korea.

And yet this same PM, commenting from Japan upon the riots currently underway in Australia's refugee detention centres, had an unambiguous message for the exasperated protesters: “Violence is never the answer to any problem – stop being violent and work your problems out peacefully.” On the one hand, violence is no solution; and on the other, we should commemorate violent solutions to problems, even to the extent of quasi-spiritualistic veneration when it comes to the wars in which Australia has played an aggressive part.

Why should we concentrate so hard on these military events in the past? So as not to notice the actual events in the present. As Fukushima continues to spew radioactive water out into the Pacific at a rate which now goes utterly unreported (radioactivity generated in part from Australian uranium, no less), Gillard simply ignores the real and present danger posed by nuclear power stations, pretending Fukushima doesn't exist, while at the same time pretending that [the mine which was the source of some of that uranium](#) has been leaking a staggering [100,000 litres of radioactive water into Australia's underground artesian basin every day for the past 30 years](#). This is massive cowardice, and an utter refusal to take responsibility for a disaster in which we are inextricably involved, thanks to the efforts of Australia's uranium industry. Soon enough we will see why, when she submits to the military's bidding, and tries to introduce nuclear power stations into Australia. These people are willing to create problems which will not go away for tens of thousands of years. The selfishness is mindboggling. All rational people can clearly see that geothermal, solar and wind power generation is the only responsible future, the only path which does not lead to a dead-end in the way coal and uranium do.

But this is not the only manifest contradiction exhibited by Julia Gillard. For on the one hand, she and her treasurer tell us that we must tighten our belts, and cut spending on inessential things like medical research. But on the other, the Navy have just spent \$39 million dollars sinking one of their own battleships, simply in order to make an artificial reef for fish to delight scuba-divers and fishermen. Now the HMAS Adelaide weighed 4,200 tons, and on today's market, scrap iron and steel sell for about \$400 a ton. Sold for scrap, the Adelaide would have been worth about one and a half million dollars. Instead of a deficit of \$39 million, the demise of the Adelaide *could* have generated a profit of \$1.68 million dollars. So all in all, the Navy simply blew \$40million for the hell of it, and were only prevented from contaminating the ocean with lead and PCBs by a magistrate's court injunction, thanks to the efforts of some activists brave enough to take the military bullies on.

And here we draw closer to the unifying thread of these two contradictions: the contradictory logic of the bully. For in fact the witless Gillard government are on the one hand sponsoring a low-profile anti-bullying media campaign, they are on the other hand sponsoring a very expensive and high-profile pro-bullying campaign on behalf of the military. No doubt the military have had their spin-doctors working overtime, figuring out how to distract the public from the embarrassing breakthroughs of military reality into the public consciousness: sexual abuse in the navy and army, with bastardisation rituals a crucial part of military indoctrination. But a militaristic government fosters a culture of bullying by setting the standard and tone of legitimacy to “violent.”

So what, am I saying Australia should have no defence force? No, I am saying that the one and only legitimate role of the defence forces is defending Australia. My objection is that the Australian army in Afghanistan is clearly not engaged in defence. It is engaged in offence. We are invading another country, but unable to admit to our collective self that this is what we are doing. Why do we not simply re-name the military the Offence Forces, and admit that we in fact do have a Department of Offence that we the taxpayers are compelled to fund whenever we buy food, or pay for any services, or work for a wage of any kind.

One of the most profound statistics in John Pilger's deep documentary "The War You Don't See" is this: that in WWI 10% of all casualties were civilian, whereas in WWII, the percentage of civilian casualties rose to 30%; and in Korea it rose to 50%, in Vietnam, to 70%, and in Iraq, to 90%. Our tax dollars helped to fund the deaths of over one million Iraqi civilians. And where did that money go? To the arms manufacturers and to military contractors and personnel. In other words, largely into the pockets of a handful of billionaires.

Like all world-historical contradictions, this one is big enough to tear the world apart. It has almost succeeded in destroying the USA. For while on the one hand, the government is so financially bankrupt that it has recently come within an hour of actually shutting down, on the other, the US military had a budget last year of a staggering \$708 billion dollars. Its an old story: the lust for war driving a country to ruin. Does it matter that the USA do not understand themselves to be waging war, but only to be "defending" the USA? No, not at all. A delusional self-understanding complicates the experience of waging war, but it does not alter the effects of the actual actions perpetrated on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan. What politicians in America say about their reasons for dropping a bomb on you just doesn't matter to you at all. All that matters is that the Americans are dropping bombs on you. And one thing certain about "market forces" is that if unregulated, they lead to war. If an increase in productivity is justified *at any cost*, then it just doesn't matter that the current boomtime for the armaments industry in the USA has come at the cost of a couple of million civilian lives in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Australia's conviction that it is a "peace-keeper" bringing "democracy" to countries by invading them is indeed a serious delusion. This is shown by the very need to have a media campaign at all, to "sell" the war in Afghanistan to the public. If the need for this war were not a delusion, there would be no need to convince people of that very fact. If a military force *was* invading Australia, no one would need any convincing that the defence force had a very important job to do. But no one is invading Australia. Australia is invading other countries. But this is not what is occurring. Australia follows England and the US in the satisfaction of the thirst for conquest – for offence – behind the mask of defence.

There is only one way for Australia to grow up as a country. It is to willingly withdraw from all these offensive actions, and restrict its military to a strictly defensive capacity. No invading anyone at all. Only then can we set about the difficult task of getting other countries to stop invading each other by smart means rather than by bully tactics. You do not get the human race to grow out of its bullying behaviours by bullying countries out of those behaviours. Real leaders lead by example, not coercion. Secure countries do not need to big-note their "world-classness" by trying to run the world. Australia should mind its political business, and stick to getting its own shabby act in order. Militarism is a dangerous sign of a deep insecurity, and actually a symptom of an inability to deal with the aggressive and violent elements in our own country. Once we're a model of social harmony, civic justice and environmental sustainability, then maybe we would be justified in exporting our values to the world. But as it is, we are the problem masquerading as the solution, simply in order to maximise profits for the arms manufacturers, who are easily able to manipulate the pith-helmeted ideologues, who are thirsty for the good old days of empire and conquest.

Had pacifists been able to prevent the rise of German militarism in the C19th, the slaughter of “the war to end all wars” of 1914-1918 might have been avoided. But the world was not mature enough for that one hundred years ago. The lesson to be drawn from history (read Eric Hobsbawm's *Age of Empire*) is that today's pacifists and diplomats are our greatest hope of avoiding the wars of the C21st. And the greatest problem confronting diplomacy and pacifism today is not the intractability of human conflict, but rather the ideology of military propaganda, basing the self-identity of nations on military actions. Our identity should not be grounded in our fights, but in our greatest flights of creativity; not in our destructivity, but in our productivity; not in the military, nor in any other kind of glorified bullying, but in our poets, musicians, scientists and intellectuals who are able to show us the true potential of the human spirit under conditions of sustainable peace.