



Guardian

\$3

COMMUNIST PARTY OF AUSTRALIA

We acknowledge the Sovereignty of the First Nations' Peoples.

www.cpa.org.au

ISSN 1325-295X



Anna Pha

Decades of neoliberalism slashing, and privatising public services are coming home to roost. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed, for all to see, the consequences of “small government.”

The private sector has been found wanting and the government/public sector unprepared for such an emergency.

Unemployment is skyrocketing with layoffs announced on a daily basis. The retail, hospitality, and arts sectors are amongst the hardest hit. Qantas stood down 20,000 workers, Myer closed its stores and stood down 10,000 workers, the Country Road Group, Katmandu, Adairs, Bapcor, and so the list goes on, did likewise.

During 2019 the RBA repeatedly urged the government to take measures to increase people's incomes. There was little more it could do lowering interest rates to stimulate an ailing economy. Big business – the Liberal Party's big donors – and their economic advisers pressured the government to put money in workers' pockets. The government eventually backed down realising the economy was on skid row. Hence the introduction of the JobKeeper payment.

The government is not making these payments out of concern for the working class. The primary aim is the economy, to pump prime it in a traditional Keynesian fashion contrary to its professed ideology. It is a throwback to when former Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd famously said the international challenge is, “to save capitalism from itself.”

That is what the Morrison government is attempting to do. The last thing the ruling class wants is workers to question the system of capitalism or look for a better way.

The Coalition government and Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) have committed billions upon billions of dollars to prop up a collapsing economy, and more are likely to follow. One of the latest measures is the allocation of \$130 billion for employers to employ or keep stood-down workers on their books.

JOBKEEPER PAYMENT

Employers qualify for the scheme if their turnover has fallen by at least thirty per cent as a result of the coronavirus. They will be paid the flat rate of \$1,500 per fortnight to be

passed on to employees stood down since 1st March or still working for them. This applies equally to full-time or part-time workers. Workers must also have worked for them for the past twelve months, and the money is not supposed to be pocketed by employers.

Within two days of announcing the payment, more than 430,000 employers had registered for the scheme. The system is based on trust – trusting bosses to pass on a legal entitlement! How the government will monitor the scheme and enforce employer obligations has not been spelt out!

The \$1,500 falls far short of what the stood down workers require to meet basic living costs. It is approximately half what the Australian Council of Trade Unions was campaigning for. It remains to be seen if it is large enough to discourage desperate people from going to work when ill.

This payment excludes the two million temporary visa workers in Australia, those who changed employers or were unemployed for a period during the twelve months. Other losers include many casual, intermittent, and undocumented workers.

Labour hire workers are also amongst those who miss out. In the building and construction industry, the number varies from state to state, with as many as one in three in Western Australia.

These workers, desperate for any income, will be extremely vulnerable and easy targets for employers attempting to drive down wages and erode working conditions. Unions are demanding that all affected workers be included.

In a similar scheme, the UK the government subsidy is eighty per cent of wages up to \$5,000 per month. In Canada, the wage subsidy is set at seventy-five per cent. These payments are important for housing, putting food on the table, and paying the utility bills. They are also critical in keeping the economy ticking, which is the main reason they are being made.

JOBSEEKER VS JOBKEEPER

The JobSeeker (rebranded JobSearch) allowance is \$1,130 per fortnight – \$370 less than the JobKeeper allowance of \$1,500. The difference, \$135 per week, is substantial and punitive.

It is consistent with former Treasurer Joe Hockey's “lifters” and “leaners” or the

more recent formulation of “deserving” and “undeserving.” The JobKeeper “rewards” the “deserving” with a higher payment than those who were not in work for the past twelve months with the same employer prior to the pandemic – the “undeserving.”

The difference between the two payments also has a divisive purpose, an attempt to pit one group of workers against another.

JobKeeper also conveniently makes a significant reduction in the number of unemployed approaching Centrelink, which is failing dismally as a result of years of cutbacks.

NEOLIBERAL POLICIES HIT HARD

The mask of neoliberal economics and politics has now been lifted for all to see it in its fullness. Policies of privatisation, deregulation, ongoing cuts to public services and research, corporate tax cuts, and subsidisation of the corporate sector have taken their toll.

Cuts to public health have left the public sector unprepared to cope with a pandemic. Not only was nothing done to have a back-up plan for a pandemic, but the hospitals were not coping before the health crisis.

The experiences of Ebola, SARS, and MERS should have sent a warning signal to the government to prepare a back-up plan for such a situation. It not only failed to do this, but ignored previous warnings by the World Health Organisation to be prepared for a future pandemic.

CentreLink is swamped with people attempting to apply for their entitlements. Years of cuts rendered the service dysfunctional long before the pandemic.

The government cut funding to medical research institutes and the CSIRO, some of which were working on developing a broad vaccine against the corona family. At the same time it paid billions of dollars subsidising costly private hospitals.

Too few nurses and doctors have been trained, with the government relying on a brain drain of poorer countries and the UK. This has also been the case with aged care and the various home care workers where the government relies on visa workers to make up the shortages and keep a lid on wages and working conditions.

Most of Australia's stock of public housing has been sold-off – privatised – to developers. What remains is being run down.

How do the more than 115,000 homeless follow the “stay at home” instructions? How do the people sleeping rough on the streets protect themselves? Little is heard about housing the homeless, yet in major cities there are thousands of empty apartments in new housing developments. The state should take these over and house the homeless.

TEMPORARY TAKEOVER OF PRIVATE HOSPITALS

State and federal governments have encouraged and subsidised the proliferation of private hospitals. There are now 657 private hospitals and 357 private day hospitals. Last week the federal government reached an agreement with them to take over their facilities, equipment and staff at an initial cost to taxpayers of more than \$1 billion.

This “partnership,” between the government and private hospitals, involves the federal government's takeover of 30,000 hospital beds and 105,000 skilled staff. It and the states will fund fifty per cent each of the operating costs each and the feds will guarantee to pay the gap between income received and the private hospitals' fixed costs. In other words, it will subsidise the losses.

In effect, it is a pseudo nationalisation, providing the public sector with more beds, staff, etc, to expand the public sector's capacity to fight the COVID-19 pandemic on a temporary basis.

This action alone demonstrates that the public sector is best placed to deal with emergencies. The profit-driven private sector and so-called market forces are unable to cope. It requires a people-first, centralised approach.

As soon as the health crisis is over the private hospitals will be restored to the private sector on a profitable basis. It is the usual social loss and private gain model.

A government with a genuine concern for people would reverse the privatisations of essential services and strategic assets including nationalising the major banks, the private health system, insurance and telecommunication companies and utilities. It also requires an extensive expansion of quality, affordable public housing.

The way forward must be based on public ownership, a planned economy and services driven by need not private profit – socialism. ★

3  THE SYSTEM HAS FAILED US

5  THINK MORE, ACT LESS!

10  NEW AGGRESSIONS AGAINST MADURO

 Communist Party of Australia Est. 1920

Guardian

Issue 1910

April 6, 2020

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'

Bob Dylan once sang those words above, expressing the discontent of the youth against an establishment that was sending thousands of them off into war. Now, discontent is swelling again as the Coronavirus cripples the economy, causing thousands to lose their jobs, without much security.

Human history is littered with moments that have served as catalysts for monumental upheavals of our society. The 21st century has already experienced one of those moments in 9/11. The attack on the twin towers saw a ramping up in national security protocols around the world. The US passed the USA PATRIOT Act, and Australia introduced a barrage of national security changes such as granting state police the ability to search without a warrant and giving ASIO the ability to interrogate non-suspects for up to twenty-four hours and detain them for up to seven days. However, not all responses led to reactionary developments. A massive anti-war movement grew as the West entered into a war with Iraq. We saw similar sentiments arise after the global financial crisis with Occupy Wall Street.

The success and failures of those movements are outside of the scope of this editorial. However, what is almost certain is that the COVID-19 pandemic will constitute another shift in human history. In some respects, it already has. Many people, some for the first time, are questioning or reassessing the strength and merits of capitalism. And this wouldn't be the first time in our history this has happened. It is not a coincidence that after the Great Depression and World War II that our party saw its membership skyrocket. People, particularly in the West, are seeing the dangerous outcomes of capitalism for the first time.

As communists, we need to seize this opportunity in two ways. The first is to make sure the government does not use this as an opportunity to pass reactionary legislation. We must ensure that we remain vigilant against government policies that hurt the working-class. Moments of crisis in capitalism will bring out its most fascistic (if not outright fascism) tendencies, and we cannot allow this to happen. Videos have already surfaced of police in full riot gear appearing at people's doorsteps interrogating them about where they have been because of COVID-19. We must at all times, keep the government in check, during and after the pandemic.

The second way we must seize this opportunity is by promoting the merits of socialism at every turn. We have seen how China, Vietnam, and Cuba have all dealt with the pandemic in their own countries. These countries are in a stage of recovery not seen anywhere else in the world because socialist economies are built to serve the working class, not bourgeoisie. Not only are these countries experiencing recovery rates unseen anywhere else, but they are also doing their part to stop COVID-19 internationally. For example, China and Cuba have sent doctors, medical experts, and medical supplies to Italy, where the pandemic is arguably at its worst.

We do not know how exactly the world will look once we come out of this pandemic, but if history is any guide, a shift in the political consciousness of the masses will take place. As communists, we must be there with the working class showing the way forward, fighting against any bourgeois narrative that will attempt to detract from capitalism's failures. Karl Marx famously opened *The Communist Manifesto* with the words "A spectre is haunting Europe — the spectre of communism" and across the world that spectre is haunting again. The capitalist class is spooked, and like an Ebenezer Scrooge is trying to right the wrongs it has committed against the proletariat. But don't be fooled! Capitalism cannot change its stripes; the temporary relief measures are designed only to save itself. We must strive to raise the working class' consciousness if we are ever to see socialism in Australia. Let's not let the political opportunity that this pandemic has created slip us by!

PRESS FUND

As subscribers will have noticed we have regrettably had to discontinue the production of hard copy issues. This is only a temporary measure. Meanwhile we intend to continue with the production of online issues and seek your patience in these difficult circumstances. From the *Guardian* collective we wish you good health. Take care.

This week's total: D Meadow \$20

Cumulative total: \$1,150

COMMUNIST & WORKERS PARTIES IMMEDIATE MEASURES TO PROTECT THE HEALTH AND RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLES

The Communist and Workers' Parties are positioned with responsibility before our peoples. We are here! We are present at the forefront of the struggle to immediately take all necessary measures to protect the health and safeguard the rights of the working class and the popular strata everywhere!

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the doctors, nurses, the hospital, and health units personnel that are fighting this battle facing great difficulties.

We express our solidarity with those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and wish them a speedy recovery from the disease.

We salute the countries that develop solidarity actions with the most affected countries, such as the sending of protective materials and health professionals from countries such as China, Cuba and Russia, actions that are in stark contrast to the absence of the European Union.

The COVID-19 pandemic tragically proves the huge shortages of health systems in all capitalist countries that were known before the outbreak of the coronavirus. These shortages did not occur accidentally, they are the result of the anti-people's policy pursued by governments in the service of the big capital to commercialize and privatise health, to support the profitability of monopoly groups. This policy undermines the great scientific and technological capabilities available today to meet all prevention and healthcare needs of the people.

Today's experience reveals the anti-social and parasitic nature of capitalism and highlights the superiority and timeliness of socialism and central scientific planning based on popular needs, which can secure primary healthcare and prevention, hospitals, medical and nursing staff, medicine, laboratories, medical exams, and everything else needed to meet the constant as well as any emergency health needs of the people.

The pre-existing slowdown in world economy is now being further reinforced by the spread of the coronavirus and increasing the risk of a new crisis in the coming period. In spite of the propaganda about "unity", governments in the service of the big capital focus their financial measures on the support of monopoly groups and will once again seek to throw

the burden of the crisis on the workers and the other popular strata. The workers and the people cannot and must not pay again!

"Individual responsibility" cannot be used as a pretext to cover state and government responsibility. Today, taking the necessary measures also requires the struggle of the peoples against the policy of supporting the monopoly groups, which sacrifices the satisfaction of the needs and the health of the peoples at the altar of capitalist profitability.

The Communist and Workers' parties demand that all necessary measures be taken immediately to address the epidemic, including the following:

Immediate strengthening of public health systems by state funding, recruitment of full-time medical and nursing staff with full labour rights. Meeting all the needs of Intensive Care Units (ICUs) and the infrastructure needed for the full functioning of public healthcare and research services.

Immediate provision of all necessary means of protection (masks, gloves, antiseptics, etc.) by the state to the people free of charge and fight against profiteering. Provision of all protection measures to all healthcare personnel giving this battle at the hospitals with sacrifices and at their own cost.

Protection of the income and rights of the working-popular strata. To put a brake on the unaccountability of the capital that under the guise of the CoVID-19 epidemic proceeds to massive redundancies and tries to furtherly trample over wage rights, working time, leave from work, and other labour rights. Immediate action to protect workers in the workplace.

No to any curtailment of the democratic rights of the peoples under the pretext of the coronavirus.

End all sanctions and measures of economic exclusion, which in this situation are even more unjust and criminal and make the life of the peoples in the countries they turn against even more difficult. To take all necessary measures to protect the health and life of the peoples.

We say no to imperialist interventions and military exercises, such as those of NATO, and demand that public resources be redirected to support the needs of the peoples, such as the financing of public health and social security systems. ✪



**The *Guardian* is taking a week off over the long weekend.
So the next issue will be on the 20/04/2020.
Keep safe from the *Guardian* Collective.**

CPA STATEMENT ON THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THE GOVERNMENT HAS FAILED US.

THE SYSTEM HAS FAILED US.

CORONAVIRUS

The coronavirus was brought into Australia by travellers from other countries, yet for weeks they were simply allowed to get off planes and ships without any government screening, at most being told to self-isolate for fourteen days. The onus was put on the individual traveller. This did not work. The government's inaction led to the virus spreading throughout the country and people dying.

Why were travellers from Europe and the US (who have contributed to seventy-five per cent of our imported cases) not quarantined much earlier on, given the early signs of cases being imported from the US, including prominent Hollywood actors and Peter Dutton? The government was complicit in further endangering people's lives by its complete mishandling of the docking of the Ruby Princess cruise ship at Sydney.

Where has our government been in the need to protect frontline health workers with personal protective equipment (PPE) and resources, including ICU beds and ventilators, now with the looming health crisis? It has many questions to answer.

- Where are the billions of dollars, they've taken out of Medicare every year; are they coming back? Why are thirty per cent of ICU beds and ventilators now transferred to the private hospitals?

- Where are our scientists including the CSIRO scientists that were forced out due to government cuts? Why has science and disaster readiness been such a low priority over the years?
- Where was our government when our children and teachers were left at school without screening or temperature checks, and even without adequate sanitation facilities like soap and sanitisers? Where is the government's temperature screening and sanitising teams in the community – at schools or factories, in the mines or offices?
- How can the government shut down Parliament for six months to protect themselves and avoid public scrutiny – but mine workers must continue to FIFO to keep the mineral bosses happy?

Under what law can the government shut down Parliament for six months and hand over decision-making to a group of business magnates? The government has no concern for the people, and every concern for the financial and corporate world.

The CPA reiterates our more comprehensive list of demands in our statement of the 16th March 2020, and calls for a stop to all profiteering from the people's suffering during the emergency. The bankrolling of the private sector and the multinationals must stop. Instead, guarantee the essential areas of the economy

by nationalising the health system, the banks, Qantas, the supermarkets, and other essential services like Aged Care and early childhood education.

MILITARY SPENDING

COVID-19 represents the biggest threat to Australian security in living memory. To properly defend ourselves, we need the full resources of the military defence budget to be used to defend the people against the virus.

We must turn the submarines into ventilators, into hospital beds and into personal protective equipment for our frontline workers.

We must turn the strike fighter jets into building surge capacity in our hospitals for the looming crisis in the health system.

Now is the time to use our taxes more wisely. It is not the time to spend them on military "toys for the boys." Taxpayers' money is needed to feed and house the people, and to ensure that they get the healthcare they need, when they need it.

Our government has failed us. They did it during the firestorms that raged across Australia. They are doing it now with COVID-19, but this time we will not accept a government that leaves us alone "with buckets and hoses".

We need a people's government.

Communist Party of Australia, CPA
Central Committee, April 2020. ✪



A JOINT OPEN LETTER FROM WORLD POLITICAL PARTIES CONCERNING CLOSER INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AGAINST COVID-19

The following is a joint open letter from the Communist Party of China, signed by the Communist Party of Australia, along with 180 parties across the globe.

Today, as COVID-19 is spreading rapidly across the globe, it constitutes the most urgent and serious challenge to both the health of the humanity and world peace and development.

Faced with this unprecedented situation, we, major political parties of various countries tasked with the weighty responsibility of improving people's wellbeing, promoting national development and safeguarding world peace and stability, hereby issue our joint appeal as follows:

We pay our loftiest tribute to all the people, health workers in particular, who devote themselves to saving lives and protecting people's health. We extend our heartfelt sympathies and solicitude to those who are suffering from pain and whose lives are under the threat of COVID-19 as well as the bereaved families of those deceased. We also express our deep mourning for the unfortunate loss of lives in the outbreak.

We recognise that if the COVID-19 outbreak is not effectively and promptly contained, it will inflict even greater harm to the lives, safety and health of many more people, and exert a severe impact on the economic and social development of most countries as well as on international exchanges and cooperation. We call on all countries to put the lives, safety and health of the people above everything else and take resolute and forceful measures to put an end to the spread of COVID-19.

We support countries to put in place contingency plans and strategies for combating COVID-19 in light of their specific national conditions and to strengthen cooperation, with equal emphasis on containing the further spread and on patient treatment. Meanwhile, modern science and technology must be applied to the full to ensure the quickest and best possible results.

We call on the general public of all countries to comply with prevention and mitigation measures with a due sense of social responsibility. We encourage countries to fully leverage the strength of civil society organisations and volunteers with a view to unleashing the power of all social sectors to combat COVID-19.

We encourage all countries, while devoting efforts to epidemic control, to adopt an integrated approach to ensure economic and social development, take targeted measures to protect vulnerable groups and the SMEs, and honour their commitment to people's living standards and social progress. We call on all countries to step up the international coordination of macroeconomic policies to maintain stability of global financial market as well as that of industrial and supply chains, and to reduce or exempt tariffs for trade facilitation so as to prevent world economic recession. Countries are also encouraged to maintain an appropriate level of international exchanges, in particular to facilitate the cross-border transportation of urgently needed medical equipment and protective materials for the fight against COVID-19.

We are aware that the virus respects no borders, and no country can respond to the challenges alone in the face of the outbreak. Countries must enhance their consciousness of a community with a shared future for

mankind, proactively rendering mutual help and support to one another as the situation becomes more difficult. Closer international cooperation, coordinated policies, concerted actions, and mobilisation of resources and forces globally will enable us to defeat this virus, a common enemy to all of humanity.

We take note of the significant progress in the fight against COVID-19 in China and some other countries, which has bought time and offered experience to the rest of the international community. We highly commend countries including China for adopting an open, transparent and responsible attitude to disclosing related information in a timely fashion, sharing experience on response and patient treatment, and in particular providing medical and other supplies to the best of their ability to other affected countries. These represent a major contribution to the global fight against COVID-19, boosting the hope and confidence of countries that they can win this battle.

We welcome the Extraordinary G20 Leaders' Summit Statement on COVID-19 and support countries to strengthen the sharing of experience and medical cooperation in containing the outbreak, including joint research and development of specific medicines, vaccines and tests. We call on the provision of material, technical and other support to developing countries and countries with vulnerable public health systems. Let the sunlight of cooperation dispense the darkness of the pandemic.

We call for science-based professional discussions on issues like prevention measures and the origin of the virus. We strongly oppose the politicisation of public health issues and the stigmatisation of other countries under the excuse of COVID-19. We stand

firmly against all discriminatory comments and practices against any country, region or ethnic group, and call on governments of all countries to take proactive measures to protect the health, safety and legitimate interests of foreign nationals and students they host.

We are of the view that the COVID-19 outbreak has laid bare the need for all countries to further foster the global governance outlook of achieving shared growth through discussion and collaboration and to support the leading role of the United Nations and the World Health Organisation in global public health governance. We call for all parties to enhance coordination and cooperation within the framework of the G20 and other international mechanisms for effective international prevention and control as we strive to build a global community with a shared future for public health.

As major political parties from countries of the world, we undertake to maintain close communication under the unusual circumstances, and ensure better performance of the due role of political guidance for the purpose of injecting political energy into the global fight against COVID-19. We firmly believe that our current difficulties are only temporary, just as the sunlight shall eventually shine after each storm. If the international community makes concerted efforts with confidence and resolve and takes a science-based and targeted approach, it will definitely win the final victory in the global blocking action against COVID-19. It is our belief that, after the pandemic, the community with a shared future for mankind will emerge stronger and humanity will embrace a brighter tomorrow. ✪

PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT

Vinnie Molina

“Socialism is no longer a dirty word” is a phrase we now hear people screaming. Even corporations are appealing to the state to fix the dying economy, to take care of the health system, and take over responsibility.

The Morrison government, as expected, has its priorities wrong in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The first thing the government must do is ensure workers will have an income to feed their families so that they can quarantine. Workers have been dumped by employers from the very beginning of the pandemic. Even before the federal government announced some stimulus measures to assist businesses it was evident workers were going to be put out the door, led often by multinational corporations that boast obscene profits.

Last week we saw workers lining up outside social security in the thousands across the country. With the perspectives of up to two million unemployed workers an economic recession is almost certain. The shocker of the week was the laying off of 600 nurses from private hospitals in NSW. Such a criminal action of bastardry while other states desperately seek health professionals to employ, including calling out those in retirement to assist with the crisis.

The many years of neoliberalism in which privatisation of essential services went rampant are now exposing how those policies fail the people.

Countries like Spain and Ireland have begun a process of putting private hospitals into public hands to put some control into the health system.

The Morrison government has been able to put a \$180 billion stimulus package together including an extra \$1.1 billion into Medicare. The years of undermining Medicare requires it to be strengthened to deal with the pandemic. We don't want to see a situation where health workers have to decide who lives or dies due to lack of resources.

The funding needed to take full control of the private health sector is readily available

by abolishing the thirty per cent private health insurance rebate which amounts to some \$10 billion. If that is not enough to fully fund the required national health system and workers' wages savings must be found elsewhere. A good place to consider meeting this is through a reduction of at least ten per cent from the military budget. The real enemy is already here and has to be fought here. International cooperation to fight the pandemic is necessary and humanity must win.

Socialism is, and continues to be, the answer to rapacious capitalism. Workers must continue to demand a better system that works in their interest. The crisis must not be paid for by working people. People in Southern Italy and other parts of the world are already taking to the streets to take control of shops and to demand government action. Current times are very dangerous, our civil and democratic rights are under attack and the pandemic is put to use as an excuse.

The situation that arises when people are desperate and no longer prepared to live under the same circumstances can be full of opportunity and danger. Workers could now rebel and take control of their own destiny. Social change will come and the prospects are therefor the formation of national unity governments that could be formed as a result of the pandemic and economic crisis. This social change has to be in the interest of working people not the corporations.

I want to end these few lines by thanking the health workers out there on the front line who despite facing shortages of personal protective equipment and other essentials continue to do their jobs and are, right now, in our hospitals and clinics saving lives.

I also thank our small team in the *Guardian* collective who with so many limitations are managing to put *The Workers' Weekly Guardian* out every week working from home. The message to all our Party members and readers is to keep the struggle going while staying home to help prevent the spread of the virus. Humanity shall overcome! ✖



I want to thank the health workers out there on the front line who despite facing shortages of personal protective equipment and other essentials continue to do their jobs and are, right now, in our hospitals and clinics saving lives.

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE RENT STRIKE

Bri Sea

On the 31st March, the COVID-19 Rent Strike Australia group sent out letters to a list of real estate agencies informing them that tenants involved in the strike will be withholding rent during the COVID-19 public health crisis as of 1st April.

On the same day the group also produced an open letter to members of parliament to demand a universal amnesty on rent payments and mortgages, stating that, as of 31st March, almost 17,000 people had pledged to withhold rent on an online petition.

The organising of this rent strike began not long ago, in the middle of March, just around when COVID-19 began to seriously affect Australia. The purpose of this article is to explore the risks involved in spontaneous action.

In *What is to be Done?* Lenin commented on the strikes in Russia in the late 1800s and said at best they were a struggle only in its embryonic form; “more in the nature of outbursts of desperation and vengeance than of struggle.” The same can be said of the Rent Strike. The Rent Strike was not carefully planned over the past year, it did not precisely analyse the target of its strike and it did not organise apartment blocks or neighbourhoods. It began with a petition, simply calling on people to withhold rent, mortgage payments,

and a rent and mortgage amnesty to be extended. Following this, it called for the following demands:

- An indefinite amnesty on all rental payments
- A continuing ban on all evictions, until everyone has recovered from the crisis
- No renters will be left with debts or fines, or retaliatory rent increases
- No adverse rental histories for tenants who don't pay rent

The target of the strike seemed confused and the organisation lacked direction, with some participants wondering “ok, so we signed a petition, now what?” It was not clear whether people were to be organised based on councils or agencies. Nobody seemed to know *when* or *how* to strike until one week before the chosen date. Then, individuals were sorted into real estate agencies, with many left alone as a sole tenant striking at a sole agency.

Rent strikers were fragmented and out of touch of their neighbourhoods, especially because of the inability to organise in person due to COVID-19. Perhaps, from the beginning, the plan was flawed since organisation was not a question of building support from a local level up, but a task of organising 17,000 people who pledged to rent strike into local groups. This task became near impossible when the time frame was set to as little as two weeks.

The strike is clearly an “outburst of desperation.” The organisers correctly identified a flaw in the system but acted on it when it was too late. Organising community unions takes time and preparation, and it's especially important that no rash actions are taken that could put people at risk. Unfortunately, no amount of solidarity can overcome the mishaps of an unsuccessful strike. An unsuccessful strike can ripple throughout the consciousness of the working class, demoralising whole generations.

The group, responding with a knee-jerk reaction to the sudden threat of their housing and livelihoods, did not consider other vital questions of housing during COVID-19. Under the list of demands, where was the demand for emergency housing for those who are already in insecure housing? What about people in public housing getting kicked out of their homes due to ongoing privatisation?

A final question that failed to be properly addressed is: what of people who lose their homes because of the rent strike? Will these people have to move, couch surf, or move into a squat? As mentioned previously, during a public health crisis, insecure housing can be dangerous. There needs to be an actual militant response in which marshals can guard the front of apartment buildings and hold off cops. This is how the Unemployed Workers Movement protected



tenants in the 1930s. But for this to work, we need to be able to spend time preparing, planning, and organising *in* the community.

To reiterate, it is not a rent strike we oppose, it is the way it has been done, and we wish to learn from this experience. It is possible, as the rent strike group have pointed out, that they are able to succeed at their goal because of the current

moratorium on evictions. However, to organise in a rash way can risk people's livelihoods and break morale. Hopefully, the rent strike and the situation with COVID-19 will awaken working-class consciousness and demonstrate that preparation for capitalism's ups and downs through union and community organising is vital. ✖

OP-ED: COVID-19 AND CHINA

AN OPPORTUNITY TO THINK MORE, ACT LESS!

Bob Carr

Recent political statements regarding COVID-19 in connection with China have been relentless across the Australian political sphere; small and large political parties, media personalities, institutions, ordinary citizens, and multinational corporations have all contributed.

An instructive example of this phenomena was the recent Q&A episode where China's diplomat Wang Xining gave China's response to the COVID-19 outbreak and the way democracy operates in China. Subjected to questions and statements such as "But democracy involves voting!", "The suppression of information, that's true isn't it?," "That delayed things, that is a problem of a centralised power," reveals an opportunity.

It is against this context that the axiom "seek truth from facts" is given actual meaning and consistency in a collective manner against the Australian political system that rewards individualist political expediency against collective benefit as a rule.

This opportunity was given expression in Wang Xining's final statement, which drew audible silence from the panel and audience alike: "The whole population was advised to stay home. It's an unprecedented challenge in human history. It's an unprecedented campaign. Organised by the Chinese government against an epidemic which is a common enemy of mankind. The sacrifice China has done is for the benefit of the world!" With this statement, you could almost sense the subconscious reference to Australia's recent mismanaged and chaotic bushfires, and a very blatant reference to a proletarian internationalism that is now completely alien to the triumphant, capitalist Western world.

CHINA AND THE WEST

It is necessary to develop Wang Xining's concept of Chinese sacrifice here in recognition of China's own revolutionary history of itself. National myth or not, self-characterisation is always important. This is especially important when interpreting Chinese thought, where the best advice to foreigners is to approach with "big ears, small mouth."

The Chinese self-narrative of class struggle concentrates on the semi-colonialism and humiliation of Europe against China. It also focuses on the national liberation struggle of 1949, which transformed an economically backwards country, where ninety-seven per cent of the population lived in absolute poverty, into an economic superpower. Fundamental to this narrative is the seventy years long sustained effort by the US to use its dominant place in the global financial system to keep China economically backwards and impoverished.

With an understanding of China's history and their perception of their history, we can understand Xining answers ("Again, you are picking one piece out of a big jigsaw", "I don't think there was a cover-up") more holistically – they are made against a narrative driven to undermine China's success.

Xining's appearance on Q&A should serve as an example among many of Western spin, so should we be surprised, given their

history, that China sees the way the West is acting as arrogant and irrational? Western "socialists," typically namely Trotskyists and democratic socialists, weirdly assemble with conservatives in their thought on China, without actually studying the Chinese themselves.

SEEKING TRUTH FROM FACTS

How then, to "seek truth from facts" in China's response to COVID-19? The first admission is an admission that China's response to COVID-19 was extraordinary effective through the state-directed use of social distancing. Take what happened on 14th March as a microcosmic and materialist example, where there were only eighteen new cases of COVID-19 diagnosed in China, of which four cases occurred in the province of Hubei where the pandemic began. Meanwhile, there were 2,547 new cases reported in Italy on the same day. The NSW State Health Officer has predicted that 1.5 million people will be infected with COVID-19 in NSW alone as a best-case scenario. With only 1,000 intensive care unit beds in the state, and 2,000 nationwide, our health system is woefully unprepared, and parliamentary democracy is more interested in using the crisis for individual benefit rather than for the collective good. Assuming that only five per cent of the 1.5 million will require intensive care paints a truly horrific picture given the contrast in the non-existent willingness of the Australian government in officially endorsing strict social distancing. Imagine the mismanagement of the recent bushfires, only much, much worse.

Why no strict social distancing in Australia? Because the only doctrine of the ruling political class is managing irrational capitalist surplus and deficits in an unplanned economy and in keeping power from the "opposition" at the next election; *Life and death of the people mean nothing to those who worship economic graphs and parliamentary elections.*

To complicate the matter further, "opposition" in the parliamentary sphere represents a strange convergence of capitalist logic where the basic parameters of the game are already set. If there is one point of similarity between the average Australian and the average Chinese person, it would be that in my experience they agree on this point regarding about COVID-19 – a Liberal or Labor government would make little difference.

We live in a world where it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine an end to capitalism. Parliamentary elections, which encourage us to release our political energies every four years, eternally result in the return of the same, with small administrative changes here and there thrown to the public as if they are dogs who want scraps.

In other words, do something all the time to ensure nothing will ever fundamentally change! Therefore, when confronted with these spectacular forces of unreason in political parties and the media, our naturalised response is to regard figures like Wang Xining in contempt, entirely divorced from seeking truth from facts.



Diplomat Wang Xining on Q&A gives China's response to the COVID-19 outbreak and the way democracy operates in China.

How then, should we seek truth from facts? Unreservedly, an investigation into Socialism with Chinese Characteristics should be encouraged. Attitudes against this simple assertion risk presenting themselves as Western idealists divorcing themselves from Marxist historical materialism. Consider the historical irony that the practical expressions of socialism in the form of the state have come from the relatively undeveloped Asiatic, subverting Marx's predictions of revolutions.

The great advantage of the study of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in connection with COVID-19 is that it is not a dry academic exercise – it is a living and topical phenomena where the people make history highly relevant to Australia. It is an exercise in historical materialism. This brings us to our greatest task of all in the Australian context; we must shift the parameters of the debate around COVID-19 from small administrative changes ensuring the eternal return of the same to an actual rupture within capitalism with a creative potentiality.

This rupture has great positive potentiality at the level of the communist idea. As argued by Plato onward in the words of Slavoj Žižek, "communism is the only political idea worthy of a philosopher". As Marxists, we must remember that actual political debate revolves around socialism against barbarism. If the debate occurs outside these parameters, it is ultimately apolitical and revolves around small administrative changes.

The conflation of politics with administration is a disaster, representing a form of linguistic terrorism whose main injunction is to "act more, think less" as opposed to "think more, act less!" In a time of social distancing, we need the slogan "think more, act less!" more than ever.

This debate must go beyond the level of the idea and be fully supported with mass work, especially in an international setting where there are more workers than ever in what Alain Badiou calls the "nomadic proletariat." The basic paradox of today is that there has never been better objective conditions for communist revolutions. Twenty-six people have as much wealth and income as the poorest 4 billion people combined.

This is an unprecedented divide in wealth in history, and can only be addressed with internationalism. Yet everywhere in the West, communists are regarded as ridiculous and criminal while we nihilistically embrace the contradictions of capitalism in our condemnation of Wang Xining.

We must be bold enough to live with an idea. All that is really required of you in capitalism is to live without an idea and go through the motions of protesting on single issues with the unsaid admission that nothing will ever fundamentally change. We must be bold enough to proclaim: all that moves ahead is red, and all that is true is rare and difficult. We can, so we must, and we will! ✳

We must shift the parameters of the debate around COVID-19 from small administrative changes ensuring the eternal return of the same to an actual rupture within capitalism with a creative potentiality.

DISEASE AND CAPITAL

Speech by Tibor Zenker, Chairman of the Party of Labour of Austria (Partei der Arbeit Österreichs, PdA), at the meeting of the Central Committee, Vienna, 15th March 2020.

The Coronavirus epidemic or pandemic has far-reaching consequences for all of us. It will also be relevant to today's meeting of the Central Committee – respectively it obviously already is. It seems probable that we will need to revise some of our further plans for the first half of 2020 and, more generally, to change some of the ways in which we work and some of our priorities, with serious consequences for some of the practical work and for our party and international relations.

I have taken the liberty of using the current events, measures, and their consequences as an opportunity to dedicate today's substantive introduction to the CC meeting to the subject of disease and capitalist class society, in general and finally, of course, in concrete terms.

It is certainly not necessary to go back over current developments, courses, reactions, and forecasts, which are known anyway. Also, I am admittedly not a medical doctor and not a clairvoyant, which limits my remarks a little. We therefore want to start in a fundamental way.

Capitalist accumulation, as is well known, is based on the realisation of profit, by virtue of the private ownership of the means of production. To this end, the workers must create surplus value, based on unpaid labour, which is inherent in the production process and the product itself. Only human labour creates this surplus value. This is the core of how capitalism works: it needs human labour, exploited through wage labour. Capitalism needs people, capital needs human labour.

In this respect, capitalism initially has no real interest in sick people, and certainly not in epidemics. The working class must be able to work and remain able to work; it should work as intensively as possible, for as long as possible. Of course, this can only be done with a necessary minimum of health, both physical and mental; [an] exhausted labour force is less productive, sick people may not be productive at all.

Furthermore, capitalism needs the working class as a mass of consumers. The appropriated product needs to be sold in order to realise profit. Any lasting disruption of this circulation means a capitalist crisis, an economic crisis, which occurs regularly and lawfully anyway because workers are paid the lowest possible wages that are below the value of the products. However, exceptional disturbances, such as an epidemic of disease, aggravate the crisis of the capitalist circulation.

Both facts are correlated with another fact, that human labour force must always be restored, it needs to be reproduced. This implies first of all, quite simply, rest breaks,

sleep and nutrition, but also, in a broader sense, shelter, household, bringing up children, education, leisure activities, and health care. Large parts of this reproduction cause costs. It is in the interest of the capital not to have to bear these costs: Wages should not exceed a minimum necessary for direct reproduction, state benefits, and facilities should not get out of hand, and a decisive part of the reproductive work should be unpaid work by the families of workers, not least women.

With these three points, it is already clear that the system is going round in circles, that there are obviously unsolvable contradictions: This system cannot work. This is a simple economic-social fact, which can be guessed with basic mathematical knowledge, even without having studied Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* [en: *Capital*] thoroughly. And that is why capital, its political parties and associations, its governments, its "educational institutions," and media spend so much time and energy to conceal and deny this fact. Capital cannot control the laws of its own "free market economy."

Therefore, capital will always accept to a certain extent that people will get sick, which in its view means nothing other than that labour force will become devalued and unproductive, and consumers will drop out. With various measures – in the following without claiming to be exhaustive – attempts are made to at least counteract the negative consequences, but also to use them for one's own purposes.

First, capital maintains a reserve army of labour, a basic stock of unemployed workers. This serves not only to depress wages and social benefits but also to compensate, if necessary, for the loss of manpower. If a worker drops out, there is always a replacement available and usually even at better conditions for the entrepreneur.

In addition, illness has been discovered as a profit opportunity. This applies in particular to the production of medicines, medical drugs, and medical equipment and to allegedly cost-intensive special treatments. In addition to the IT, automotive, oil/gas, and banking sectors, pharmaceutical companies are among the largest companies in the world. They do everything in their power to monopolise their patents, to prevent less expensive drugs (for example in the form of generics) from being available – not least in the less developed countries – in order to achieve maximum profits even from the treatment of patients, without regard for the needs of the people and the fate of entire countries.

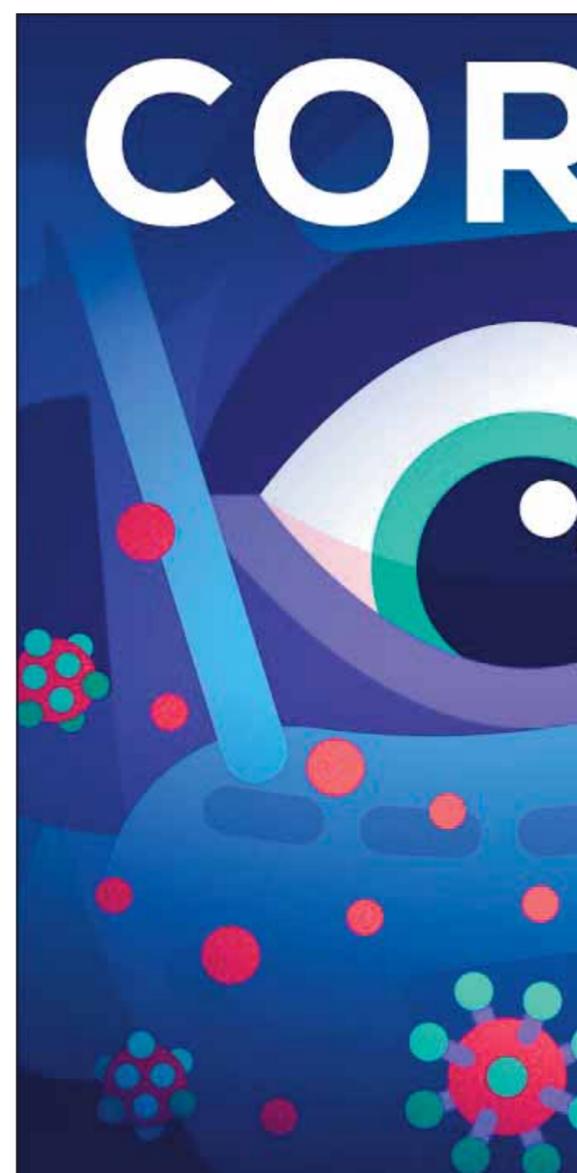
Linked to this is the desire to thin out or completely ruin existing state health systems or even prevent them from being created in the first place. Public health care

services are to be reduced and at the same time made more expensive for the people, through deductibles, cancellation of coverage and permits, necessary supplementary insurance, thinning out of infrastructure, site closures, savings in materials, deliberate staff shortages, subsidies for private institutions. This means a redistribution via the state budget as well as new profit opportunities, at the expense of the mass of patients from the working class. It is a subjection of the public health system to the rules of capitalist profiteering, mediated through arbitrary deficit or stability targets. Admittedly, in many countries of the world, a large number of people have no health insurance at all in the European sense – and also in Austria, by the way, there are more of them than one would generally assume.

More private, less state – that is, of course, to a certain extent a general motto of capital wherever costs are incurred that are not a necessary precondition for further, new profits. And this affects the care, nursing, and treatment of the chronically and long-term sick, of people with disabilities, of mental illnesses, of people who are unable to work [...] and, not least, of the elderly. The idea is to shift as much as possible into the private, unpaid sphere of relatives and families. There are ridiculous allowances and grants, which are at best charity. People have to pay for private care with their own money, from low wages, pensions or reserves. Inevitably, this often involves hiring lower-paid, precariously or even moonlighting foreign workers – these workers are then lacking in their home countries, but the enforced approach also undermines the education and provision of sufficient local staff and the creation of regular jobs.

It is easy to see how fragile this entire system is, even though the situation in Austria is still better than, for example, in Italy, Greece, Eastern Europe, the USA or certainly in the less and least developed countries – and it is no coincidence that Cuba is a counter-example. It is a fact that the Austrian health care system is structurally not prepared [for] an epidemic like the current one. The capacities are not sufficient. It has become apparent that there are not enough hospital beds, not enough medical staff, not enough materials and equipment, not enough financial resources – as it is generally, but now even more so. The existing staff is overburdened and foreign personnel can no longer enter. These problems are systematic ones; they were consciously accepted in the past and therefore cannot be solved in the short term.

The current measures taken by the Austrian government with regard to the Corona epidemic are an expression of this fact. Fully aware that the hospitals and not least the intensive care units will be overstretched and overburdened, sick people – almost ninety per cent – will be accommodated at home. Only in the case of a severe course of the disease – this usually affects so-called "risk



groups" – hospital beds will be available. People will be left alone, and their fellow residents who have been quarantined as a precautionary measure will even be exposed to infection. This means that acute care (which is actually based on self-healing) is once again "privatised," transferred to the patient's own four walls at the expense of reproductive work of relatives (and possibly friends) and selective support provided by NGOs. Of course, this is also passed off as a containment measure, but in reality, serious containment has long since failed: in fact, all that is being attempted is to slow down the increase in the number of ill people relatively and to postpone the peak that lies ahead.

The presented rules of conduct, appeals, commandments, and prohibitions, are mainly directed at the personal sphere of the people – they may change their social behaviour, indirect interpersonal, family and social interaction. The helplessness of the government is expressed in all clarity:



CAPITALIST CLASS SOCIETY

CORONA VIRUS



it intervenes in people's leisure time, in the reproductive phases of the labour force, first on a small scale, then also in the area of education and training. This initially affects small self-employed people and single-person enterprises, bogus self-employed people, freelancers: they lose their revenues, as cultural workers, as sports coaches, as course instructors, as ticket rippers, as cloakroom attendants, as small innkeepers. They are followed by teachers and child caregivers, but indirectly also by all working parents. Home-office-work is only possible for a few. Capitalism can cope with all this for some time, but the breakthrough of the crisis is only postponed.

Our economy is based on social production, to a high degree. This area is only tentatively targeted by government measures, because the production of surplus value and the corporate profits should not be put at risk, as far as possible. However, it is a fact that large groups of people come together to

work. In the conurbations, they also travel to and from work together by public transport. Thus, restrictions on reproduction and services, the closure of theatres, cinemas, restaurants and bars, ski resorts, and schools may be one thing – as well as tourism, which is particularly important in Austria – but ultimately it will be about something else. [It will be] about the factories (in the broadest sense), which despite all deindustrialisation form the backbone of the capitalist economy, about large-scale industry and trade (e.g. supermarket chains), as well as about mass transport, where many people work and [...] interact. The government should be well aware of this, as several billion Euro are being prepared and provided in compensation for companies and more are being demanded. The workers, on the other hand, should and must get by with less. But even this and the effects of the cuts in reproduction will sooner or later reach the capitalist circulation anyway: every worker is also a

consumer. It is not easy to say how to deal with this, but one thing is evident: no matter how we estimate so-called "socialism with Chinese characteristics" in concrete terms, it is obvious that in the PRC successful ways have been found to deal with the crisis to some extent. The "Western" governments and media regard this fact only with moralistic arrogance, defamation, and imperialistic racism. In any case, our short-time working models will not be sufficient – that is for sure.

However, we do not want to be – now [or in the immediate future] – a doctor at the sick bedside of capitalism.

Capital wants to save its profits without regard to the losses of the working class. The bourgeoisie can also deal more easily with the Corona crisis in the personal sphere. [As] workers should continue to work at assembly lines, production chains and cash desks, the rich seclude themselves into their isolated living quarters, their urban villas, country houses and penthouses. The working class

is exposed to the ruined health system; the rich afford private doctors and facilities, expensive medicines, equipment, and special treatment. It is not a sudden "two-tier medicine," which the reformist parties sometimes regrettably thematise and which they intend to prevent with this or that parliamentary decision, but it is, after all, an entire class society in which we are supposed to live and possibly to die. Illness is always a class issue under capitalism. It must therefore also be considered from the class point of view.

The Austrian Party of Labour has already outlined in its recent statement of the Central Committee measures in favour of working people, which would be urgent and necessary in view of the Corona epidemic – I do not need to repeat them among the participants of this meeting. The Austrian government and the EU will not implement these measures because, despite all the hypocritical assertions, they are not working for the people, but for capital. Priority is always given to the accumulation of capital, under all conditions, not to the life of the working class. Capitalism will not create a health system that meets the needs of the people because it cannot and does not want to.

The current crisis will have to be overcome under the present conditions – this will require sacrifice and suffering. As far as possible, we, the Party of Labour, and our members want to help to ensure that both are kept to a minimum: With prudence, calm, attention, solidarity, support and assistance, while respecting appropriate behaviour and action. We will have to adapt our internal, public and international activities; we will have to rethink our event activities and our public appearances, to say the least; we will have to shift some of our priorities. I also assume that for the time being there will be no more Central Committee meetings in the conventional form. We are already using in parts electronic video and audio linkages during today's meeting, and the next Central Committee meeting will probably be entirely video-conferenced. All this is part of our responsibility towards our fellow human beings, which we have to take seriously. There can be no doubt about that.

But one thing is also clear: We will not under any circumstances be forced to make any kind of "Burgfrieden," of political truce with the government and capital because they are essentially responsible for the extent of the situation. No one can expect us to suspend class struggle, because the ruling class continues it unwaveringly, even in situations of crisis, towards the working class and even towards the sick. We will continue to raise this issue. Our task, after all, is to fight for a world in which the needs of the people are met, not those of capital; in which, accordingly, the human being is at the centre, not profiteering; in which the health of all people and the best possible treatment of the sick is indeed the highest priority; in which life and death are no longer class issues. This world will be socialism. ✪



This week marks our last week of articles on Australian Communist Thought on women's struggles. Here we look at our party's position on promoting the right of married women to work, criticising the position married women cause unemployment as a "scapegoat." We also look at how the party has promoted the role of women in leadership positions in the party.

In our history section, we are taking a look back at the Patrick's dispute, where the MUA fought valiantly against the scrapping of jobs by the Patrick Corporation. This was a watershed moment in the union movement and one we should never forget as unions are still being attacked today with the government attempting to pass the Ensuring Integrity Bill. The second article looks at the inadequate conditions of hospitals and hospital works in New South Wales in 1957. The descriptions are eerily similar to the ones we face today and, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, this article seems more relevant than ever.



MARRIED WOMEN HAVE EVERY RIGHT TO WORK

From the Communist Party radio session Voice of the Countryside.

To challenge the right of married women to work, and to accuse married women of causing unemployment and depressions is just an old trick to divide working people, a very clever trick used by employers to take people's minds off the real problems.

When our economy is booming, all women – married or single – are encouraged to go to work. But when there is unemployment, the would-be economists start looking for a scapegoat and the chorus starts: Sack the married woman!

What right has anyone, to say a married woman should not work because her husband has a job?

Once you start to discriminate against one section of the community, there is no end to it. If today it becomes married women against single women, tomorrow it could be married men against single men, the young against the old!

The right to work is a fundamental human right.

WHY?

Why do so many married women go to work? Why do so many farmers' wives work with their menfolk? The main reason is undoubtedly an economic one.

High prices, very big rents or repayments on homes, costly hospital, medical and dental expenses, and the cost of educating our

children, make it very difficult to manage on one wage in a family. So the mother takes a job.

If employers were honest, they would come out and defend married women working. Hasn't it always been to their benefit to employ women, whether married or single? Of course it has, because they are used as a source of cheap labour.

Yet, in an underhand way, it is the employers who spread the insidious propaganda about married women causing depressions and unemployment.

We don't hear these same people advocating a fair go for the farmers, so that their wives are not forced to work.

The Communist Party maintains that today the majority of married women work mainly because of economic reasons – the need for a larger income to cope with ever-rising prices. However, there are other reasons.

HAVE TALENTS

Some married women work because they do not want to see their talents and abilities wasted.

Trained women like to have an interest outside the home, and find satisfaction in pursuing their work in industry or the professions. As a community, we benefit from the contribution they make to our society.

The Communist Party believes that our country will advance more rapidly the sooner large numbers of women, married or single, take a greater part in social production and in the political life of our country.



Under socialism there is no unemployment, and we find increasing numbers of married women working and women receive equal pay with men.

In the socialist countries wives are helped to go to work by the provision of a wide network of child-care centres; catering and laundry facilities are supplied.

Married women there have the right to work or to stay at home if they so wish. Many do stay home.

The causes of unemployment and depression in Australia are not to be found because married women work; the causes lie within the system of capitalism itself.

The problem of hardship will be finally solved when the Australian people decide to change that system and take the road to socialism, as many other countries are doing today.

This article originally appeared in *Tribune*, July, 1959. ✪

PARTY WOMEN SHOW LEADERSHIP ABILITY

"No other party has such a high proportion of women with leadership capacity in politics and on behalf of the economic and social problems of the working people, and particularly working-class women and children" said Mr. JB Miles, in summing-up the MSW Communist Women's Conference held last week-end.

Of the 228 delegates, 112 were members of trade unions. Conference included interstate delegates from Victoria and South Australia and a visitor from West Australia.

Mr Miles said: "The success of this Conference is indicated in the number of Party committees, Party branches, and the special spheres of mass work represented.

"To carry our Party forward as the leader of the democratic masses, our Women's Committees and all women members must connect themselves closely with greater numbers of women and their organisations.

"Our women must represent the interests of the masses in the name of our Party, and all who can do so should become recognised as

Communists working, as indeed they always are, on behalf of the people."

MRS JOHNSTON'S REPORT

The National Communist Women's leader, Mrs Phyllis Johnston, submitted the main political report.

Mrs Johnston said: "We can say with pride that we were successful in many of the campaigns we organised in peacetime. In the war years, Communist women have played no less an important role for victory. Today Communist women occupy important positions as shop stewards, union organisers. They are in the forefront of the fight for greater production.

"Many Communist women are in the WAAF's, the AWAS, and the Land Army. Some are here in uniform today."

"The Communist housewife, along with the other women, is the leader of a hundred and one activities – packing parcels, comforts, rolling bandages, making nets, doing voluntary War Loan and War Savings work.

"By these activities Australian housewives are really taking the offensive. They are 'backing the attack.'

HOUSING NEEDS

"The housing problem must receive attention. In Sydney alone there is a shortage at present of over 100,000 homes.

"We do not consider we can afford to wait until the post-war years. The aim of the Communist Party is to unite with all progressive people in the struggle for victory over the forces of fascism.

"That the Communist Party is the champion of democratic liberties, the best organiser of the people's war, and the most consistent fighter in defence of the people's real needs and for Socialism is accepted by ever-increasing numbers of workers, farmers, and middle-class people.

PEOPLE'S UNITY

"Tonight we send greetings to the women of Britain, America, and Soviet Russia, who stand with us in the fight to free the world of fascist slavery.

"We send greetings to the women of China, whose struggle together with their menfolk has done much to keep the fascist invader from Australian shores.

"Victory over Hitler will be brought nearer when all Allied blows are rained on his head at the one time, and the concentration of vast resources in the Pacific will bring relief to the New Guinea battlefront.

"Our task is to establish a firm alliance between workers' organisations, the middle class, and farmers.

"Our task is to win the masses for Socialism, to show them the Communist Party is the only truly Socialist Party."

Mrs Diana Gould and Miss Carmen Coleman made special supplementary reports.

Discussion, which was keen and enthusiastic throughout the Conference, gave much attention to child welfare, black marketing, education, housing, work in the auxiliaries of the armed Services, and other patriotic tasks.

Miss Flo Davis, organiser of the Hotel, Club and Restaurant

Employees' Union, described how low wages and bad working conditions in the textile, catering and other industries were impeding the war effort.

Mrs Danica Covich, a Yugoslav delegate from Broken Hill, said that twenty-five to twenty-nine per cent, of General Tito's Partisans were women.

"When we read of their heroism and sacrifices, we women of Australia should ask themselves, 'Are we really doing enough?'"

Mrs Minnie Wilson, a member of the Newcastle District Committee of the Party, declared that black marketing was fifth column activity.

"The black markets and other racketeering in foods and clothing are undermining morale. It's not just a question of prices and money – it's a matter affecting the whole conduct of the military struggle against the fascist enemy."

[* (WAAF) Women's Auxiliary Air Force, and (AWAS) Australian Women's Army Service.]

This article originally appeared in *Tribune* November 1943. ✪

WATERFRONT UNION: “WE’LL FIGHT LAY-OFFS!”

A massive lay-off of waterfront workers is anticipated by the union movement as the employer, Patrick Stevedores, plans to replace its unionised workforce with non-union labour trained at Webb Dock in Melbourne.

A young non-union wharf trainee blew the whistle on Patrick's plans. He said that trainees were informed that Patrick planned to sack its Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Fremantle workers.

There have also been reports of Chubb Security recruiting staff to manage a lockout of wharves in the Port of Brisbane. Chubb was the company used on Webb Dock when Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) members were locked out there.

The ACTU co-ordinated a meeting of unions last Friday to discuss ways of providing financial assistance if the mass sackings take place.

“This is arguably the most concerning dispute that the union has been confronted with in its history”, Robert Coombs, MUA NSW Central Branch Secretary, told *The Guardian*.

“It’s the first time that there has been an organised force out there

with the will and massive political support prepared to challenge the coverage rights of the Maritime Union and also install non-union labour into Australia’s waterfront”, Robert Coombs said.

The Prime Minister John Howard and Queensland Premier Rob Borbidge have both given their support to the National Farmers’ Federation and Patrick’s in their war against the MUA.

Borbidge met with the employers last Sunday night to discuss how his government could assist in defeating the MUA.

BRISBANE

The National Farmers’ Federation has said it wants to expand its stevedoring operations to Brisbane and has sought assurances from the Queensland Industrial Relations Minister that he would assist in providing police protection of its non-union labour force and make dock space available.

The NFF is also looking to buy tug boats, giving it its own fleet of non-union tugs to ensure it can operate.

John Coombs, National Secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), said the union was

prepared to stage a national strike of its members, affecting all stevedore companies, if Patrick sacked its entire unionised workforce.

Mass sackings would bring the dispute with Patrick and the Federal Government to a head. The outcome would depend on the strength of the MUA, the Australian trade union movement as a whole and international support.

National action by the MUA in defence of sacked members could bring the union and striking members up against the full force of the Workplace Relations Act, with employers and third parties suing them for millions of dollars.

The Australian Workers’ Union announced last week that it would recommend a national strike of oil refinery workers if Patrick sacked waterfront workers.

The Federal Government and its competition watchdog, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, responded with a threat of legal action and heavy fines under the secondary boycott provisions in the Trades Practices Act.

The ACTU and MUA may, however, continue to confine industrial action to the waterfront.

ACTIONS CONTINUE

The MUA met last Friday with Patrick in an attempt to make progress with the EBA for Patrick workers at its four major ports, Fremantle, Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne.

Robert Coombs said those discussions “weren’t very fruitful”.

The union is seeking to preserve a number of existing award conditions in EBAs when the award is stripped back to twenty “allowable matters” as required by the Workplace Relations Act.

Patrick’s Brisbane workers went on a four-day strike last Friday over the company’s lack of commitment to EBA negotiations but decided to return on Monday, a day early.

Wharfies at Patrick’s Port Botany terminal in Sydney returned to work last Tuesday after a seven-day strike. They were due to commence another seven-day strike on Tuesday this week.

POLICE ON WHARVES

In a separate dispute at Port Botany, police took over wharfies’ jobs after they refused to load

a shipment of nuclear waste at P&O Ports CTAL terminal because of safety concerns and a lack of consultation.

Not only were the workers given little warning that they would be handling nuclear waste, but when they refused, the company sought an order from the Industrial Relations Commission for them to load it.

MUA Assistant National Secretary, Vic Slater said, “We were given little warning of what was happening. It was all at short notice, under the cover of darkness, presumably to avoid protests by environmental groups.”

Mr Slater said, “Instead of sitting down and alleviating the workers’ fears over safety and environmental factors, management went to the Industrial Relations Commission, ordering our members to work the vessel.

“When the delegate on the job and the portainer crane operator refused to load the containers, the company threatened them with dismissal. At this point all labour walked off the job”, said Mr Slater.

The company called in the police who helped load the vessel.

This article appeared in *The Workers’ Weekly Guardian* April, 1998. 📌

OUR HOSPITALS DESPERATELY ILL

Should hospital workers be penalised because of the hospital financial crisis?

This question has been posed because of a repudiation by the New South Wales Hospitals Commission of an agreement with the Hospital Employees Association to increase wage margins by thirty per cent.

The Hospitals Commission says hospitals are broke – and that is undoubtedly true.

But why are they broke?

Must hospital workers head the same way?

Tribune sought answers to these questions from Jim North, Secretary of the NSW Hospital Employees’ Association.

“Hospital boards of directors, the Hospitals Commission of NSW (and through this body, the NSW Government) still have the wrong slant on solving the serious financial crisis facing hospitals throughout the Commonwealth today,” Mr North said.

“This crisis will not be solved by keeping hospital employees’ wages down to an abnormally low level. On the contrary, low wage-levels mean that many people (including technicians) have to seek work in other callings that pay a decent living wage,” he continued.

“In attempts to solve the financial plight of hospitals, it seems that all kinds of so-called solutions are to be tried, except the right one – the supply of sufficient money by the Commonwealth Government.

“In 1952, the Page scheme of insurance for hospital treatment was hailed as a solution to the hospitals’ financial problem. The Page scheme was in reality a confidence trick designed to make the people pay, one way or the other, for their hospital treatment while the Menzies Government used for-war-like purposes, a large portion of the money that the Australian public paid for social service contribution tax.

“The Menzies Government deliberately scrambled together social service contribution tax and income tax so that the full extent of their villainy, in this regard, could not be accurately assessed.

“Incidentally, it is calculated that if the same proportions of social service contribution tax, payroll tax, and income tax applied in 1956 as applied in 1949 – which was the last year in which these two taxes

were not scrambled – then the Commonwealth Government collected £30,000,000 (\$962,717,770.03*) more from social service contribution tax and payroll tax than it spent on the whole of social services for 1956 alone.

“It was inevitable that the Page schemes would not succeed. If any doubts remain on this score such doubts should be removed by the unanimous declaration by the conference of Health Ministers held in January, that the schemes were a failure.

“This conference included Ministers from non-Labor as well as Labor governments.

“Increased patients’ fees have not improved the situation but rather worsened it. Money derived from patients’ fees has increased 400 per cent between 1950 and 1956, but the financial crisis has deepened, taking a sharp turn for the worse at the end of 1955 when hospital fees increased by fifty per cent.

“Increasing the number of intermediate and private beds at the expense of public beds, although tried, has proved no solution either.

Observations by our officers throughout the state show there are many intermediate and private beds vacant, but the waiting lists for treatment in public beds grow no less.

“There remains only one immediate solution, and it was obvious all along; it is the substantial increase of the Commonwealth subsidy direct to hospitals; this to be henceforth related to hospital costs.

“This also was a unanimous decision of the conference of Health Ministers.

“It clearly placed the onus on the Commonwealth Government to make a statement about its intentions. So far that Government has said nothing, but persistent rumours from Canberra are that the Government will increase the amount paid to insurance societies for insured patients, thus giving an insured patient a greater subsidy.

“No doubt insurance societies will be expected to increase their “benefits” to meet the increased fees. This, of course, will also mean increased contributions by the insured.

“If this is true, then it also appears that the Commonwealth Minister for Health (a doctor, as was his predecessor) is setting out to implement the British Medical Association policy of classification of patients.



“IN. a nutshell the BMA scheme is:

“1. Patients who qualify by the means test as public ward patients, but who are insured, are automatically classed as intermediate patients.

“2. Patients who do not qualify by the means test as public ward patients automatically become classified as private patients.

“3. Only patients who qualify by the means test as public ward patients (and who can prove that they are financially unable to afford to belong to an insurance society) will be allowed to remain as public patients.

“The basic idea of this scheme is to enable doctors to charge patients in hospital. It can be seen that it achieves this very cunningly; the great majority of patients are to be put into intermediate and private beds where the doctor is allowed to charge.”

“At the same time, it is an inducement to unthinking hospital administrators and the Hospitals Commission because it puts most patients into the higher paying bracket.

The accent of the scheme is on insurance.

“The scheme will only seriously worsen the situation, and incidentally the prospect of my members for a decent wage. The Commonwealth Government must be prevented from implementing such a scheme.

“I repeat, the only immediate answer is for the Commonwealth Government to substantially increase the subsidy direct to hospitals, not to insurance societies, and for this subsidy to be related to hospital costs.

“I believe that the labour movement, and in particular, the trade union movement, should fight vigorously for increased subsidy to hospitals.

“Ultimately, there must be a demand for a return to free hospitalisation financed by the special tax that every wage earner already pays. The money contributed is more than sufficient and free hospitalisation is our right.”

This article originally appeared in *Tribune* April, 1957. 📌

NEW AGGRESSIONS ARISE AGAINST MADURO

Seamus Carey

In late March the US Department of Justice (DOJ) laid charges against Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and several other top Venezuelan government officials, accusing them of engaging in a “narco-terrorism conspiracy.”

The US State Department has also offered US\$15 million for information leading to President Maduro’s arrest. This is an act of open aggression towards the sovereign Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The indictment document alleges an intricate conspiracy between the Venezuelan government and Colombian Communist guerilla group FARC, “to ‘flood’ the United States with cocaine and inflict the drug’s harmful and addictive effects on users in this country [the United States].”

The document also contrasts these alleged actions of the Venezuelan government with the equally extraordinary claim that “most drug-trafficking organisations in South and Central America have sought to recede from their roles in importing narcotics into the United States in an effort to avoid US prosecution.”

So while the US DOJ claims that most of the many powerful drug cartels around Latin America have decided it is in their best interest to avoid US soil, the Venezuelan government – with a lot more at stake – has supposedly come to the opposite conclusion.

A small amount of logical consideration casts significant doubt on these theories of conspiracy. The comment on drug-trafficking organisations seems to serve no purpose but to complicate the story. But the seemingly superfluous claim that other cartels are receding, just as the Venezuelan cocaine is supposed to arrive, is a necessary part of the narrative for a simple reason – the objective data does not suggest any “flood” of cocaine attributable in any way to the Venezuelan government.

There certainly are several drug crises in the US. But by far the greatest is the opioid crisis, created by the willingly reckless actions of US pharmaceutical companies. Several of these companies have already been convicted of criminal

actions but none have been accused of terrorism!

The term narco-terrorism has been in the vocabulary of Latin American politics since the ’80s. Up until now, it has been used to describe drug cartels which use terrorist acts to intimidate the people and government. But this is an entirely original usage of the term, which instead redefines the concept of terrorist act to include supplying drugs. This new usage has seen no application except to attack President Maduro, without any basis in fact.

The concept could be more useful than just a propaganda term; after all, there are plenty of drug cartels worthy of classification as terrorists. However, since its invention, the term has been used almost entirely to attack left-wing groups, and in fact, right-wing governments around Latin America have usually treated right-wing drug gangs as allies against left-wing guerrilla groups, with US backing. The terrorist crimes, committed by these gangs with the support of their right-wing governments, have caused indescribable suffering to millions of people, particularly peasants, trade unionists, and socialists.

We can perhaps forgive the Americans for mistaking themselves for experts on the topic of governments using drug gangs to interfere in the affairs of other countries – they were certainly the pioneers in that field. Their support to the “Contras” in Nicaragua is the most memorable example, but there are too many others to mention.

Any thinking person must see right through these fake claims being pushed by the US DOJ.

I spoke to Mr Daniel Gasparri, Chargé d’Affaires of Venezuela in Australia. He pointed out to me that over a decade ago, the late President Hugo Chávez predicted this exact scenario: that the US government would use fake allegations of state involvement in drug trafficking to justify intervention in Venezuela. This is despite the Venezuelan government’s impressive record of struggle to eradicate the drug trade in Venezuela, which the US Drug Enforcement Administration has itself recognised in the past.

Mr Gasparri also highlighted the Venezuelan government’s key role in negotiating ceasefires



Venezuela’s President Nicolás Maduro holds a copy of the National Constitution while he speaks during a news conference at Miraflores Palace in Caracas, Venezuela on January 9, 2019.

between FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – former guerilla group) and the Colombian government, and FARC’s eventual disarmament. He stressed that the Venezuelan government had no interest in the matter beyond peace and the wellbeing of the people in the region, and never has any interest in interfering in the internal affairs of any other country.

These aggressive allegations by the US DOJ come at a time when Venezuela, like the rest of the world, is engaged in a life-or-death struggle against the COVID-19 pandemic. The US has made its callous disregard for the Venezuelan people clear as day by its persistence in imposing unilateral sanctions on Venezuela, restricting access to vital resources, including medical supplies. The US persists in these criminal sanctions despite condemnation by the UN, and even the EU.

The saving graces for the Venezuelan people in this epidemic have been twofold: the swift and effective response by the Venezuelan government – including imposing immediate quarantine measures, mobilising the people to distribute essential supplies, guaranteeing incomes for employees of small and medium businesses, and suspending rent payments; the international

solidarity and assistance provided by many countries including Cuba, Russia, and China, which likewise are demonised by the US and made targets of aggression.

In a press statement last Tuesday, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said: “The United States has long been committed to finding a solution to the man-made crisis in Venezuela. The urgency for this has become all the more serious in light of the Maduro regime’s failure to adequately prepare for and address the global COVID-19 pandemic.”

The “failure” of which he speaks does not exist in reality, but exists vividly in the wishful thinking of the US regime, which has gone to great lengths attempting to ensure such a failure.

If failing to adequately prepare for and address the pandemic means the government responsible should stand down (which is the only “solution” the US has ever had in mind for Venezuela), then the Trump regime should be the first to go. The Venezuelan government with President Maduro at the head would be one of the few in the world left standing.

Pompeo is quite right that the crisis in Venezuela is man-made. But Pompeo, and his

co-conspirators past and present, are the men who made it.

The COVID-19 epidemic is shining a spotlight on the incapable failures of capitalism and advantages of socialism. It is in this context that the headquarters of the empire of capital lashes out in extreme desperation, making baseless allegations against other sovereign countries that they have no right to jurisdiction over in the first place.

This new round of allegations against the Venezuelan government bear no relation to fact, and are nothing but a last-ditch effort to interfere in Venezuela’s affairs after the embarrassing failure of the Guaidó coup attempt.

The Australian government must cease its flunkeyism towards the US and reject these policies which are alien to the Australian people. The Australian government must recognise President Maduro as the legitimate President of Venezuela, in accordance with fact, and reject the criminal US-imposed blockade which is of no benefit to anything but US geopolitical interests.

The CPA stands in solidarity with President Nicolas Maduro, the Venezuelan government and the Venezuelan people. ✪

CPA MESSAGE IN SOLIDARITY WITH PRESIDENT NICOLAS MADURO AND THE VENEZUELAN PEOPLE

The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) condemns in the strongest possible terms the recent trumped up charges of narco-terrorism on President Nicolas Maduro and other top government officials of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Putting a price on the head of a legitimate president is a very dangerous precedent. It can only be compared to the past overthrowing of governments and assassination of leaders, including military invasions organised, sponsored and carried out by the

United States in Latin America, Asia, Africa and elsewhere.

The world is currently calling for the end of blockades and sanctions imposed on some 39 countries including Cuba, Venezuela, Iran, DPRK, Syria and others to help them deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. The Trump Administration has responded with more sanctions and other atrocities such as the accusations against the government of Venezuela.

Venezuela has seen its resources stolen or frozen by the financial system controlled

by the United States. Billions of dollars that belong to the Venezuelan people, which could be used to purchase food, medicines and medical equipment, have been blocked.

The people of the world are suffering with the COVID-19 pandemic and it requires international cooperation to be able to eradicate the pandemic.

The sanctions must be lifted and these latest attempts to overthrow the legitimate government of Nicolas Maduro have to cease.

The CPA joins the international community in demanding that the economic

sanctions on Venezuela be lifted and that recognition be given of the legitimate government lead by President Nicolas Maduro.

The CPA stands in solidarity with President Nicolas Maduro, his government and the people of Venezuela in these difficult times of the coronavirus pandemic.

Humanity shall overcome!
Communist Party of Australia, CPA
International Department
30th March 2020 ✪

CLASS DANGERS IN PUBLIC EMERGENCIES

People's Voice Editorial Board

On 23rd March, Justin Trudeau held a meeting with all premiers to discuss whether or not to implement the federal Emergencies Act. As this issue of *People's Voice* goes to press, he is stating that he will hold off for the time being.

Without question, the coronavirus pandemic is an emergency that warrants urgent and extraordinary action by governments. But it is unclear what powers the federal is reaching for when it looks to the Emergencies Act, or what impact those powers could have on the working class. After all, every provincial and territorial government in the country has already declared some type of emergency, so the main challenge right now seems to be ensuring consistency and improving coordination between those jurisdictions.

The Emergencies Act was introduced in 1988 to replace the War Measures Act, which had become severely tarnished following its use in October 1970. At that time, the government of Pierre Trudeau used the emergency powers to create a virtual police state – not just in Quebec, but across the country – in which 3,000 searches were carried out and 500 people arrested and detained without charges or access to legal counsel. The widespread militarisation of society and sweeping suspension of civil and democratic rights was described as “unprecedented,” and had the (desired) effect of putting a chill on support for Quebec sovereignty, as well as on radical political organising throughout Canada. The current legislation differs from the

War Measures Act in that it requires Parliament to review a Cabinet decision to declare an emergency and makes temporary laws declared under the Act to be subject to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

It all sounds very transparent, safe, and reasonable. So, what could go wrong?

The Emergencies Act empowers the federal government to prohibit travel, forcefully evacuate or remove people, requisition property and penalise people who disobey emergency measures. The Act allows for summary convictions with a fine of \$500 and six months in jail, or convictions on indictment with fines of \$5,000 and five years in jail.

A big part of the current crisis is the deep global economic recession that the virus has triggered. As in the 2008 financial crisis, the federal government is already kowtowing to corporate interests, particularly in the oil and gas sector. The Trudeau government is highly vulnerable to pressure from the right-wing premiers in Alberta and Saskatchewan and has already indicated its commitment to prioritising Canada's “petro-economy” at all costs. Ottawa will undoubtedly, commit huge resources to propping up the oil industry and removing all barriers to its post-pandemic expansion.

Perhaps the main barrier is opposition to pipelines and tar sands development, from Indigenous people and their allies right across the country. There is no question that politicians and oil industry executives have pondered this reality and addressed it in their plans for a “corporate recovery.” And it is not at all unthinkable that the federal government would be prepared to use emergency powers of requisition, removal and prosecution to ensure such a recovery. Trudeau and company have already shown



Canada's prime minister Justin Trudeau.

their willingness to sacrifice “reconciliation” and “sunny climate action” on the altar of corporate profit. If they're prepared to send the RCMP to dismantle an anti-pipeline blockade after only a couple of weeks, what is their limit now?

When asked how far he was prepared to go in October 1970, Pierre Trudeau replied,

“Just watch me.” People watched, and they suffered. Hopefully, the labour and progressive movements have learned a thing or two since then, and they'll organise now to defend the working class and oppressed people against the same kind of tyranny.

This is no time to watch and wait.
People's Voice ✪

POLITICAL PRISONERS IN TURKEY THREATENED WITH DELIBERATE INFECTION WITH CORONAVIRUS UNLESS THEY OBEY

Steve Sweeney

Political prisoners held in a Turkish jail have been threatened that they would be infected with coronavirus unless they kept compliant, according to a prisoner welfare group.

The Arrested & Convicted Families Law Solidarity Associations Federation (Med Tuhad-Fed) reported that the chilling warning was made to detainees held in the Aksaray T-Type prison in central Anatolia last week.

In its weekly report, Med Tuhad-Fed said the prison administration warned those held: “You have to obey the rules, otherwise we will bring in someone who has the coronavirus.”

The group warned that prisoners were “not suitable for healthy life,” urging authorities to release elderly prisoners and children who are at risk of coronavirus.

Its report exposed appalling conditions in Turkey's overcrowded prisons, where officials have failed to provide protective equipment to staff and detainees.

Beatings and torture are widespread, and detainees are unable to practise social distancing precautions due to cramped conditions.

A lack of cleaning and a refusal to refer prisoners displaying symptoms to medical units is risking a serious outbreak of Covid-19 among Turkey's bulging prison population, Med Tuhad-Fed warned.

Prisoner numbers swelled after a failed coup attempt in 2016. Jails were built especially to hold almost 50,000 political

prisoners including journalists, opposition politicians, and academics on trumped-up charges.

Last week the ruling Justice & Development Party (AKP) tabled proposed draft legislation that would see about 100,000 of Turkey's 300,000 prisoners freed, many on extended probation with sentences drastically cut.

But more than 200 women's organisations and seventy-six legal professional associations warned that those set to be released included paedophiles,

rapists, and those who have committed gender-based violence, including murder.

They called for the scrapping of the Third Judicial Package and the immediate release of all those held as “political hostages” including Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) former co-chairs Figen Yuksekdag and Selahattin Demirtas.

Morning Star ✪

Subscription to **The Guardian**

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

Special offer: 10 issues for \$10 (new subscriptions only)

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

POSTCODE: _____

Pay by Cheque Money order (Payable to “Guardian Publications”)

Phone in details on 02 9699 8844 or info@cpa.org.au 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: Franc Stregone

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

Sydney

POLITICS
IN THE PUB

April 7
WAGE THEFT – AUSTRALIAN UNION

• Art
• Mel
• Union

CANCELLED
DUE TO COVID-19

6:30pm
Sarat Chandran – Corner of Wentworth & Goulburn Surry Hills
Sarat Chandran 02 9674 9179 psaratchandran@gmail.com
www.politicsinthepub.org.au

CUBAN INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL BRIGADES FOCUSED ON SOLIDARITY AND CAUTION

Abel Reyes Montero

All 28,268 members of Cuba's sixty-one medical brigades working abroad are free of the coronavirus, reports Dr Jorge Hidalgo Bustillo, director of the Medical Collaboration Central Unit.

For those who love their family members and their compatriots, the spreading COVID-19 pandemic is cause for alarm, given the risk faced by the more than 28,000 Cuban health workers serving on missions around the world.

But it seems that their solidarity and internationalist vocation has been, thus far, a moral repellent.

According to information provided by Dr Jorge Hidalgo Bustillo, director of the Central Unit for Medical Collaboration (UCCM), all 28,268 members of Cuba's medical brigades working in sixty-one countries around the world, remain free of the virus, to date.

Given the situation, the centre is maintaining close contact with brigade leaders via video conferences, and provides a report on the health of doctors and technicians which is updated daily. "There is permanent communication, as has historically been done, and we have here, at the UCCM, a command post that works twenty-four hours a day," Dr Hidalgo reported.

Of the countries where Cuban medical brigades are present, he said, Qatar, Algeria, China, South Africa and Kuwait have cases of infection within their populations, but added, "Our personnel is well protected, and has not had contact with the sick patients."

He said that communication is also maintained with health directorates in brigade members' home provinces, to keep family and loved ones informed of their health.

Confirming this reality were heads of medical missions in Haiti, Guatemala, Algeria, South Africa and Qatar, who interacted with the press via video telephone calls to describe the health condition of their respective teams, and precautions being taken.

From Guatemala, mission leader Dr Yuri Batista Varela stated that the 441 collaborators there were healthy, following protocols established by the nation's Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance. He stressed that, of the members of the delegation, fifty-seven per cent are considered to be at high risk since they are over fifty-nine years of age and have chronic diseases.

"Today we have fourteen epidemiologists on the team, who will perform the task of caring for suspected patients. We have a national referral hospital, located in Guatemala City, with a capacity of 200 beds for the care of the most serious cases," he added.

Dr Batista pointed out that Cuban personnel have the necessary resources to prevent contagion, including face masks, disinfectant solutions and medicines, and attention has been increased for the twenty-four brigade members serving in locations along the border. He noted that the country has sufficient supplies to handle test samples in the capital city laboratory.

In Haiti, Dr Luis Olivero Serrano described the experiences



of Cubans in this sister country, which is vulnerable due to its weak health infrastructure, and permeable border with the Dominican Republic, which has reported several COVID-19 cases.

He stated that the 345 Cuban healthcare professionals – three on vacation – who provide services in the needy country are meeting their responsibilities without interruption, and that relevant measures are taken to prevent contagion. Dr Olivero added that updated training on COVID-19 has been provided; all brigade members have protective resources; and that security protocols are followed for those who travel to Cuba.

On the other side of the world, in Qatar, where the 499 members

of the Cuban medical mission work in a single hospital, brigade chief Dr Ernesto Lopez Cruz, reported that, within the country's population, several cases of coronavirus have been confirmed, and there is also concern given the situation in neighbouring nations such as Iran.

"A policy has been designed here for contingency plans. The sick are kept in a quarantine centre with all the appropriate conditions. Our hospital has five rooms with negative pressure – for cases of infectious diseases – which would be used if necessary," he said.

From South Africa, another of the countries reporting the existence of Covid-19, Dr Reynaldo Denis de Armas, in charge of 216 Cuban medical brigade members,

reported that one coronavirus patient is being treated at the hospital where three of our doctors work, but they are not in danger of infection.

In Algeria, the country where Fidel first began our efforts to offer solidarity around the world through Cuban medicine, the head of the brigade, Dr Reinaldo Menendez Garcia, stated that the 891 brigade members providing services in forty-seven health centres are healthy and not involved in the COVID-19 cases reported to date.

"None of our staff members have respiratory symptoms, or any suspicious signs of infection," he said, and in a completely natural tone added: "We're good!"

Granma ✪

COVID-19 CRISIS COULD TRIGGER GLOBAL FOOD SHORTAGE, UN WARNS

If the COVID-19 infection does not get you thanks to government prevention measures, the downside is that these steps may deprive you of fresh food, including fruit and vegetables.

While people rushed to stock up on toilet paper and other supplies as the coronavirus crisis escalated, some countries decided to enforce protectionist measures, including export bans for certain products, to satisfy growing domestic demand.

"The worst that can happen is that governments restrict the flow of food," Maximo Torero, chief economist of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, told the UK *Guardian*, adding that we

may face the consequences of these steps soon. For example, Russia halted exports of buckwheat and other grains for ten days starting from 20th March. Neighbouring Kazakhstan followed suit and introduced restrictions on shipments of wheat flour, buckwheat, sugar, several types of vegetables, and sunflower oil.

The UN official warns that protectionist measures and trade barriers only make the situation worse, creating "extreme volatility."

Another problem is that some countries now lack the workforce to harvest the crops due in part to border closures and domestic lockdowns. As the coronavirus sweeps

through Europe, farmers in France, Spain, and Italy complain that fruits and vegetables are quickly ripening and will be left to rot if the situation does not change, according to Bloomberg. Strawberry and asparagus growers are already unable to pick their crops, while everything from salad greens and tomatoes, to onions and peas could be next in line.

"Coronavirus is affecting the labour force and the logistical problems are becoming very important," Torero said as cited by the UK *Guardian*. He added that special policies should be introduced to keep the food supply chain operating.

In order to not waste tons of harvest,

Germany, which lacks around 300,000 workers, has created a special website to bring together struggling farmers and those who can help. Students and those forced to quit their jobs, for example in the service sector, are welcome to join the initiative. A similar platform was reportedly launched in Austria.

Average citizens themselves are contributing to the looming shortages by hoarding food in amounts they can't even eat before it expires. Panic buying only deepens the crisis, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization said, advising people to avoid wasting food.

Russia Today ✪

Communist Party of Australia

www.cpa.org.au cpa@cpa.org.au

General Secretary
Andrew Irving
email: andrew@cpa.org.au

Party President
Vinnie Molina
email: president@cpa.org.au

Adelaide Elias Alevizos email: sa@cpa.org.au phone: 0405 020 614

Brisbane phone: 0499 476 540 email: bris@cpa.org.au
postal: PO Box 6012, Manly, Qld 4179

Canberra email: act@cpa.org.au

Darwin Vinnie Molina phone: 0419 812 872 email: darwin@cpa.org.au

Melbourne Andrew Irving email: cpavic@cpa.org.au
postal: Box 3 Trades Hall, Lygon St, Carlton Sth Vic 3053

Newcastle email: newcastle@cpa.org.au

Head Office (Sydney)

postal: 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010
phone: 02 9699 8844 fax: 02 9699 9833 email: info@cpa.org.au

Perth Vinnie Molina email: perth@cpa.org.au phone: 0419 812 872
postal: PO Box 98, North Perth, WA 6906

Western NSW Allan Hamilton email: western.nsw@cpa.org.au
postal: 121 McKay St, Cootamundra, NSW 2590

Sydney email: sydney@cpa.org.au phone: 02 9699 8844
postal: 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010

Tasmania Andrew Irving email: tas@cpa.org.au phone: 03 9639 1550

Wollongong wollongong@cpa.org.au

Youth email: youth@cpa.org.au postal: 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010

