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Guardian

Issue 1947 1st February, 2021

AUSTRALIA'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD IS A JOKE

Last month, at the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review of human rights, Australian officials faced tough questions over its human rights violations. The review touched on several topics such as Australia's border policy (including offshore processing and refusing to resettle people who arrived by boat) and the treatment of Indigenous people.

In its condemnation of Australia's treatment of refugees, China stated that Australia needed to "protect the rights of migrants and close offshore detention centres of migrants." China also believed that it was necessary to carry out a thorough investigation into "the war crimes committed by the Australian military overseas in military operations, pursue the responsibility of perpetrators, and prevent impunity and recurrence of similar crimes."

North Korea ambassador Han Tae-Song echoed these comments stating Australia had to "cease cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment in public places of detention" and start the "revoking of policies and practices that result in the arbitrary and indefinite detention of persons with disabilities."

Instead of accepting the criticism, attempts to distract from these crimes have been made by Australia's mainstream media who prefer to play the "what about?" game on the aforementioned countries.

Socialist countries weren't the only ones appalled. In a stunning rebuke of Australia's human rights record, over thirty nations condemned Australia's age of criminal responsibility which is ten years old. Among those countries were Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Greece, Sweden, Spain, Poland, Portugal, and Mexico.

Perhaps even more alarming (although not surprising) than the age of criminal responsibility is *who* is actually in youth detention. By our delegation's own admission, "While Indigenous Australians comprise only six per cent of young people aged between ten and seventeen, they made up approximately fifty-seven per cent of those in youth detention[.] [...] This proportion rises to seventy-eight per cent for young people between the ages of ten and thirteen."

Speaking on the universal response from the UN review, Simon Henderson, the head of policy at Save the Children Australia stated: "You cannot get a clearer message from the international community that children as young as ten should not be locked up."

When it came to Australia's treatment of its Indigenous communities, the message was clear: Australia is failing to comply with the most basic human rights measures.

Human Rights Law Centre executive director Hugh de Kretser said there were no excuses for Australia's human rights travesty given that it is "a wealthy, stable democracy."

Given Australia's position, de Kretser believed Australia was unable to "lead the world on human rights" but lamented that "too often Australian governments fail to respect people's human rights in critical areas."

In addressing these concerns, the Australian government's submission acknowledged that it needed "to do better" to address the inequalities confronted by First Nations people.

However, this acknowledgement means nothing.

In 1992, then Prime Minister Paul Keating said, in his now-famous "Redfern Speech": "We practised discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice." Yet it was his government who failed to adequately respond to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody report, whose recommendations have been largely ignored.

In 2008, then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd officially apologised on behalf of Australia for its mistreatment of First Nations peoples, "in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations." Yet the Rudd/Gillard/Rudd governments failed to stop the rising rate of Indigenous children being removed from their homes.

And this is from "the party of the working class"! Needless to say the Coalition has treated human rights with complete contempt. As these very procedures were happening, in Trumpian fashion, Prime Minister Scott Morrison stated that 26th January "wasn't a particularly flash day for the people on those vessels either" – mitigating the seriousness of Australia's genocidal actions.

The international community recognises Australia's atrocious human rights record but will not do anything serious about it. It is on us, the people, to stand up and put pressure on our own government to stop these heinous acts now!

CPA STATEMENT ON US INCLUSION OF CUBA ON ITS TERROR LIST

The Communist Party of Australia condemns in the strongest possible terms the inclusion of Cuba on the US list of "state sponsors of terrorism."

On Monday 11th January 2021, just nine days short of the end of President Donald Trump's mandate, the State Department under Mike Pompeo unilaterally decided to include Cuba on the US list of terror. President Obama had removed Cuba from that list in 2015.

Despite some improvements during the Obama Administration, the situation for the Cuban people has been difficult under the 60-year-long blockade. Cuba and its internal affairs have always been treated as a matter of "national security" for the United States.

Since the beginning of the Cuban revolution in 1959, Cuba has been a frequent victim of terrorist actions against the Cuban people. Terrorist actions organised, sponsored, and funded by the US have had an impact on the daily lives of the Cuban people.

Cuba has been a victim of terrorist acts such as the Bay of Pigs invasion, introduced plagues, the mid-air bombing of Cubana Airline 455 in 1976, bombings in hotels and other tourist installations, and the payment of internal operatives to carry out soft coup activities.

The US targets the Henry Reeve international medical brigades by exerting pressure on receiving countries not to accept Cuba's assistance. US funding has increased for subversive actions against Cuba internally and externally.

The Cuban foreign affairs ministry issued a firm statement condemning this new unilateral action by the Trump Administration. It exposes the hatred against Cuba for exercising its right to self-determination and defence of its sovereignty.

The Trump Administration reversed most of President Obama's goodwill policies, and the blockade was strengthened with the implementation of the Helms-Burton Act Chapter III, the persecution of investors, and the further introduction of economic sanctions, particularly during the pandemic.

The world is watching this latest action against Cuba by the US administration. The US has no moral excuse to do this and when we contrast it against the internal political mess that currently grips the US, even less so. The US would do better to turn its attention to the lives and safety of the US people which are being endangered by President Trump promoting local terrorism.

Central Committee,
International Department
14th January 2021

Cuba vigil in Perth.

Sydney Vigil

STOP USA BLOCKADE ON CUBA

Also solidarity with Venezuela & Gaza

5:30 pm Wednesday 17th of February

Sydney Martin Place outside of US Consulate Office

WorkChoices Mark II – Part 2

CASUALS CON

Anna Pha

The centrepiece of the Coalition government's industrial relations Omnibus bill is the schedule on casual employees. Industrial Relations Minister Christian Porter boasts that the bill will "solve the problem of uncertainty, provide better avenues for job security, remove the burden of double-dipping claims and recognise employee choice."

Well, it certainly removes the "burden of double dipping," to the tune of billions of dollars for employers – wage theft!

The claim is deceptive, to say the least. The only certainties that Porter is offering casuals are denial of leave entitlements, low wages, poverty, and job insecurity. As for employers, they will find it even more attractive to replace permanent workers with casuals.

Casuals have been amongst the hardest hit during the pandemic not only in losing jobs, having hours reduced but also in many instances finding they did not qualify for JobKeeper. They accounted for around two-thirds of workers who lost their job early in the pandemic (ABS Media Release 11/12/2020).

WHAT CHOICE!

The bill defines a worker as "casual" if, at the time of being hired, the offer of employment is made "on the basis that the employer makes no firm advance commitment to continuing and indefinite work according to an agreed pattern of work …"; the worker accepts the offer on that basis; and is employed as a result of that acceptance.

The bill contains conditions that must be met when the offer is made: "whether the worker can elect to accept or reject the work; will work only as required; will be entitled to a casual loading or a specified rate of pay for casual employees; the employment is described as casual employment. These are the **only** factors that can be considered." (emphasis added)

The bill remains silent on the question of how wages and conditions are determined. The employer makes the offer.

In theory, there is a choice – to accept or reject an offer of employment – but in reality, if it is a choice between the door or a highly exploitative situation in the context of close to one million unemployed and another 1.4 million underemployed this "choice" is hardly a choice!

Porter describes the bill as "clearing up confusion and uncertainty surrounding the legal status of casuals." It certainly does. It sets in concrete the lack of leave and other entitlements found in the National Employment Standards (NES), awards and enterprise bargaining agreements (EBAs). It also sets in concrete the lack of job security and uncertainty of future employment.

CONVERSION CON

This is particularly the case in the so-called Casual Conversion provisions which Porter describes as "providing a clearer pathway for those working regular shifts to convert to permanent roles after twelve months **if they wish to do so**."

But does it?

The bill obliges employers to make a written offer to a casual employee if they have been employed for the past twelve months and during at least the last six months of that period, the employee worked a regular pattern of hours on an ongoing basis which, **without significant adjustment, the employee could continue to work as a full-time employee or a part-time employee** (as the case may be).

The offer must either be for part-time or full-time work depending on the hours worked during the past six months. The worker must either accept or reject the offer in writing.

The bill then provides for an employer **NOT** to make a conversion offer in spite of the above conditions being met:

- there are reasonable grounds not to make the offer; and
- the reasonable grounds are based on facts that are known, or reasonably foreseeable, at the time of deciding not to make the offer.

What's more, the section defining casual worker states: "To avoid doubt, a regular pattern of hours does not of itself indicate a firm advance commitment to continuing and indefinite work according to an agreed pattern of work."

That lets employers off the hook, in particular during the pandemic and coming years when there is no certainty.

Also, an employer wishing to avoid conversion could easily do so by shuffling work patterns, creating breaks in employment, etc. only hurting the workers on the receiving end. Imagine a sole parent, the majority being women, attempting to tackle constantly changing hours.

Employers having nothing to fear here! They are on a winner with casuals. In practice, no obligation to convert casuals to ongoing part-time or full-time work with full entitlements as set out in the National Employment Standards, the relevant award or enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA).

If for some reason a worker declines an offer of ongoing work then they must wait six months before being able to request conversion. Likewise, if the employer refuses to make an offer, such as "for reasonable grounds" when the worker initially became eligible, there is a six-month waiting period.

There is a time limit of twenty-one days in which to apply. The employer is required to respond in writing with reasons for decision. These must be based on "reasonable grounds," whatever that means.

Porter, in true Coalition style, offers casuals "protection"! "An employer must not vary an employee's hours of work, or terminate an employee's employment, in order to avoid any right or obligation."

This would be laughable if it were not so serious. Employers use every loophole they can find and the provisions of the bill leave workers more vulnerable than ever. The employers and lawyers are the beneficiaries.

RETROSPECTIVE GIFT TO EMPLOYERS

More than twenty per cent of the workforce is classified as casual, but a large number of these workers are in ongoing employment with regular hours. As casuals, they have not been entitled to the leave provisions, for public holidays as worked, notice of termination or redundancy pay as required under the NES but are entitled to a twenty-five per cent loading in their wages – not that employers always pay it.

Mention casuals and industries such as hospitality, retail, accommodation come to mind, but casuals are also employed extensively in other areas such as construction, mining and transportation and postal services. In construction, casual labour through either labour hire or "on the books" has become the business model.

In two recent cases, *WorkPac v Rossato* and *WorkPac v Skene*, relating to the mining sector, the High Court found that "casuals" who worked regular and predictable shifts and a specific loading was not recorded in their employment contract, were owed permanent employee entitlements.

It also determined that their claim could not be reduced by the amount paid as a casual loading amount had not been specifically been identified in the employment contract. The Court found that Rossato and Skene could not be classified as casual employees.

The Court also noted that there was no legal definition of "casual" and listed grounds to be considered in any such claim. These include lack of continuity in employment, unpredictability, uncertainty as to the period of employment, and irregular work patterns.

Porter estimated it could cost employers as much as $39 billion in back payments. Other estimates were even higher. This figure alone is indicative of widespread use of casual labour.

Panic-stricken employers responded with cries of "double dipping" while demanding certainty and clarity. The government's response to their demands is found in the Omnibus bill, in particular the definition of "casual."

In addition, the bill contains provisions ensuring that where a worker identified as casual is found by the court not to be a casual, then the court **must** reduce any amount payable by the employer by an amount equal to the leave loading.

This section is **retrospective**, protecting employers who may be facing claims for past payments. The dangers of denying workers entitlements to leave provisions became evident during the pandemic when sick workers were faced with the choice of staying home with no income or going to work and risking the health of others.

ACT NOW!

The bill might "end confusion and uncertainty surrounding the legal status of casuals," but it does not provide "a clearer pathway for those working regular shifts to convert to permanent roles after 12 months if they wish to do so."

It is more likely to result in employers ensuring casual workers **DO NOT** have regular hours and uninterrupted employment.

The title of the bill – *Fair Work Amendment (Supporting Australia's Jobs and Economic Recovery) Bill 2020* – is misleading. It will **NOT** do anything of the sort. It encourages employers to take on more casuals in place of full-time and part-time workers.

Casuals are notoriously underpaid. They are amongst the lowest paid and most vulnerable workers. This will only drive down the wages and working conditions of **ALL** workers, resulting in lower living standards and hardship. It will not result in the creation of "real" jobs.

In terms of economic outcomes, lower wages mean reduced demand for goods and services. In the long-run they will be counter-productive.

There will be a Senate inquiry into the Bill. Submissions close on 5th of February. It is not too late to make a submission.

It is important that work commence now on organising a broad campaign to defeat the bill. Lobby your Senators, in particular the ALP and cross-bench Senators. A movement bringing together trade unions and community organisations and individuals similar to the Your Rights @ Work campaign that saw the defeat of the Howard government takes time to build.

Start now! ✪

It sets in concrete the lack of leave and other entitlements found in the National Employment Standards (NES), awards and enterprise bargaining agreements (EBAs).

OP-ED: TRUMP'S PRESIDENCY IN THE LIGHT OF DEMOCRAT NEOLIBERALISM

Eileen Whitehead

Joe Biden has now replaced Donald Trump as President of the United States. After Biden's electoral win, a photograph was taken of him wearing a hat that stated "We Just Did," a callback to Trump's "Make America Great Again" hat. But has America become great again? This might be a good time to look more deeply into that early assertion.

To start, like much of politics in the West, the US elections are no different, with each side denigrating the other, and popularity playing a large role in seeking the electorate's votes. It has become such a travesty that in countries like the US and Australia we seem to accept the lies told by both major parties, cynically conceding that their promises won't materialise. Thus, the claim that America's already "become great" by electing Biden is enough to cause one's eyes to roll.

We hear from America that Biden's election is a historic victory against "fascism," which is not simply misleading, but utterly false. The Democrats, aided and abetted by the press and the wallets of Wall Street, ensured excessive attention was paid to Trump's personality rather than giving an objective analysis of his presidency. He was a loose cannon, an outsider, with a populist message targeted against "the global elite" – a message, which in part, spoke to America's working class which had suffered under decades of crippling neoliberal policies. This pushback against the establishment was also found within the Democratic primaries, where Bernie Sanders fronted a more genuine working class rebellion. However, with mainstream media propagandising against him and the Democrats' ironically undemocratic selection process meant that he was unable to overcome the obstacles to win the Democrat nomination.

Trump's 2016 campaign was ostensibly about bringing jobs back to Americans and ending the continuous overseas wars – both of which were unacceptable to the American empire elites. Thus, in some respects, Trump represented a social force of the disenfranchised that wanted to see an end to the cycle of endless wars – this was totally at odds with the warlike ruling class.

The 2020 campaigns illustrate this point further when one looks at who was financing both campaigns. Statistics show that, in zip-codes with a median household income of at least US$100,000, Biden crushed Trump in fund-raising – US$486 million to only US$167 million. Biden's support came from wealthy America but had Trump not alienated white college-educated voters who knows what the outcome would have been.

The anti-Trump movement went into overdrive the minute he was elected. While it rightly called Trump a "racist" for his attack on immigrants and building a border wall, the messaging seemed insincere when these calls came from establishment figures like House Representative Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY). Because despite Trump's aggressive messaging on immigrants, he actually deported fewer immigrants than Barack Obama.

In moments, Trump managed to frustrate the neoliberal agenda. One of his first acts as President was to cancel TPP, the economic deal seeking to isolate China in the Asia Pacific region. He attempted to make "peace" with North Korea, a détente with Russia and, unlike Obama, did not take America into new wars. However, despite some of these advances, Trump tore up the Iran nuclear deal, started a new Cold War with China, and helped further colonise Palestinian land by moving the US embassy to Jerusalem – a move that has helped Israel cement its claims on the land.

It is important to note that despite all the damage done by Trump during his administration, the lack of new wars is quite startling given the US agenda. The inability to engage in new conflicts frustrated members of his cabinet like John Bolton. Here, we can turn to Glenn Greenwald's comments about a Wikileaks document – a classified 2010 CIA "Red Cell Memorandum":

> "What made this document so fascinating, so revealing, is the CIA's discussion of how to manipulate public opinion to ensure it remains at least tolerant if not supportive of Endless War and, specifically, the vital role President Obama played for the CIA in packaging and selling US wars around the world. In this classified analysis, one learns a great deal about how the 'military-industrial complex,' also known as the 'Blob' or 'Deep State,' reasons; how the Agency exploits humanitarian impulses to ensure continuation of its wars; and what the real function of the US President is when it comes to foreign policy."

If this is just a fraction of the Wikileaks' revelations, the witch hunt of Julian Assange needs no explanation.

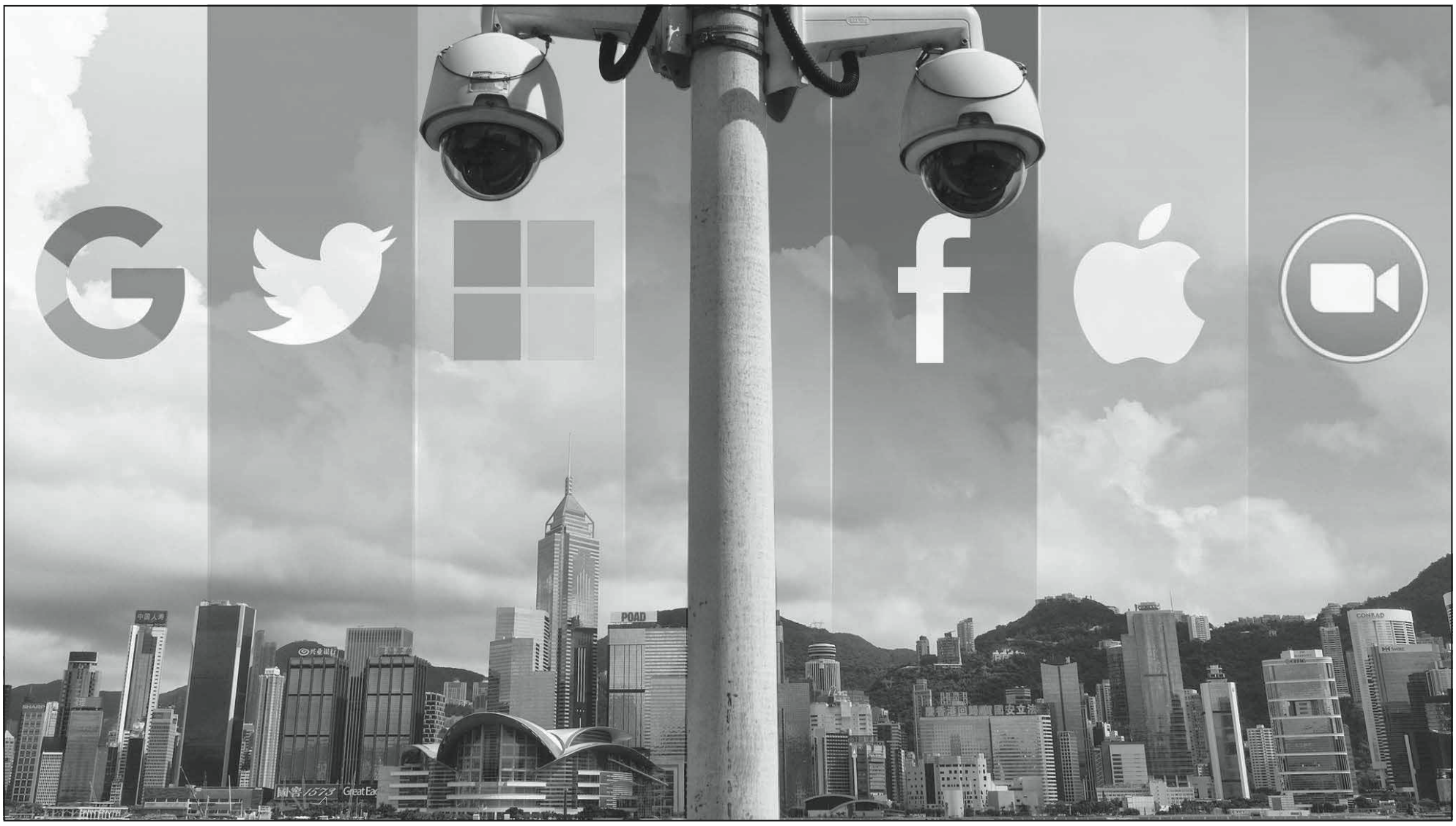
Another interesting point, made by Ajamu Baraka, the national organiser of the Black Alliance for Peace, in his paper *Agenda 2021: Resist the US/EU/NATO Axis of Domination* is the opposition Trump faced when he revoked the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPA) with Iran. His reintroduction of sanctions, requiring economic disengagement from Iran by many European firms, produced a major crack in the Atlantic alliance. This and the efforts to undermine the NORD stream two pipeline from Russia have alienated German capital and seen many European firms lose revenue.

Dr Archishman Raju, of the Rockefeller University, in his paper "What Happened in the American Elections?" stated that "the time calls for the establishment of a new international economic order, comprehensive reforms in the UN and a world campaign against American sanctions and military bases," commenting that "We are operating in very dangerous conditions where movements are no longer crushed, they are simply bought out" (in reference to Black Lives Matter). "Ideologies are no longer countered, they are simply manufactured by universities. In such conditions, what Fidel called the battle of ideas becomes paramount. We must battle for those ideas that are for peace and for a just social order and a human future. These ideas cannot come unless they draw from and are based in the people."

Thus, while Trump's presidency was never a serious countenance to US imperialism and never an administration for the working class, the fact remains that the populist rhetoric highlights a desire for systemic change. It is on us to ensure that change is one truly designed for the people. ✪

"We must battle for those ideas that are for peace and for a just social order and a human future. These ideas cannot come unless they draw from and are based in the people."

BIG TECH UPS THE ANTE



Casey Davidson

One of the most powerful social media behemoths, Twitter, has taken bold new strides in demonstrating its ability to censor information in the political sphere, by permanently banning Donald Trump from the platform while he still President of the United States. Facebook soon followed suit, imposing an indefinite suspension on Trump. Internationally, the exile has been strongly opposed by a number of nations. Google and Facebook have also threatened the Australian government if a proposed code for publishing news proceeds. These recent incidents also reignite the question of how to protect independent media from censorship.

Twitter later released a statement referring to the two Tweets from Donald Trump's account which lead to his suspension. On 8th January, two days after the deadly storming of Capitol Hill, Trump tweeted:

> "The 75,000,000 great American Patriots who voted for me, AMERICA FIRST, and MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN, will have a GIANT VOICE long into the future. They will not be disrespected or treated unfairly in any way, shape or form!!!"

This was determined by Twitter's decision makers as "Glorification of Violence" due to "the context of broader events in the country and the ways in which the President's statements can be mobilised by different audiences, including to incite violence." While it could be argued the Tweet could cause additional violence, the fact is that its subjective nature could lead to important political commentators being banned under such policies, enforced by unknown and unelected individuals.

It is understandable that many people are enjoying the satisfaction of Twitter "sticking it to Trump," – and for good reason. Many of his decisions have severely, negatively impacted the lives of those domestically, particularly with COVID19, and abroad, with continued imperialist aggression, including trade disputes, sanctions, attempted coups, and threats of war. However, Tweets about this somehow did not fall under Twitter's "Glorification of Violence" policy. Those who view Twitter's move a "violation of free speech" should refer to the many moments when Twitter allowed a Tweet where he actually incited violence, stating: We are prepared to launch fire and fury on North Korea!"

It is clear that Twitter only deems threats of domestic violence ban-worthy, or on a more concerning note, any threat against symbols of US power. This is why Twitter's move is most unsettling for the working class and other exploited people, who are struggling against continued oppression and violence themselves. Trump was only banned after his Tweet threatened the existing order, therefore the likelihood of stronger censorship of those fighting for justice and democratic rights is higher.

The response from around the world to Twitter and Facebook's exile of Trump has been significant. Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni temporarily banned Facebook and Twitter leading up to the country's general elections, and Poland is proposing a law that would fine Big Tech companies up to $13 million for actions that violate freedom of speech for Polish users. Most notable reactions were from leaders within the European Union (EU), who were "shocked" to see a private company make such an important decision. Junior Minister for European Union Affairs Clement Beaune stressed "there needs to be public regulation of big online platforms."

A policy paper for the introduction for a "European Internet" had been in the works more than six months before Trump's ban, in an attempt to "block off services that condone or support unlawful conduct from third party countries." In the wake of Trump's ban, French Minister Bruno Le Maire said the state should be responsible for regulations, rather than the digital oligarchy. He also expanded on how they are "one of the threats" to democracy. This is clear considering Twitter and Facebook's interests lie with expanding and maintaining US dominance for their own gain and stability.

Back in 2009, Facebook was used by terrorists in China to communicate and incite violence in the province of Xinjiang. As the Chinese government had no ability to curtail this interaction, the decision was made to block the social networking site. It was determined that other giant private American tech companies, Twitter and Google, presented similar concerns for national security, and were blocked not long after. Lu Wei, director of the State Internet Information Office in China explained in 2014 that if foreign Internet companies want to function in China, they should not harm China's national interest or the consumers' interests. While Western media condemns the regulation of these companies in China as an attack on free speech and democracy, the reality is that by blocking these foreign companies with foreign interests, and developing their own exceptional social media and search engine applications, it actually protects their sovereignty, hence protecting their democratic rights. If information exchange is controlled by US private companies in China, anti-imperialist forces can be censored, and terrorism and fascism can be advocated.

Now even in Australia, American big tech companies are demonstrating their dominance over our government. Following the US ban on the Chinese video-sharing application Tiktok last year, the Australian government pandered to the US by investigating its threat to national security. However, this move also put Google and Facebook under scrutiny and has led to a parliamentary inquiry. Under a new media code, the Australian federal government suggested that both services must pay news outlets for showing links to their websites and stories. In response, both Google and Facebook threatened the Australian government – Google warned it may by no longer make its search engine available in Australia, and Facebook threatened to remove Australians' ability to post news content to its platforms. Regardless of the reasons behind the Australian government's new media code, the response from the American companies clearly shows a complete disrespect and dismissal of Australian law, and that of other countries outside the US.

The eye-opening reality of Trump's social media ban coupled with the growing audacity of Big Tech conjures up growing concern of access to independent media sources which report on issues affecting the lives of working class citizens. It is unlikely that Australia would be able to develop its own services efficiently and proficiently, therefore, Australia must continue to rely on these American-owned platforms, and be continually forced to submit to their definition of "inappropriate" and "ban-worthy," while being fed news sources which support the Washington consensus.

For this reason, it is imperative that independent news sources continue supplying hardcopy documents such as physical newspapers and journals and work on developing their outreach skills beyond the confines of the Internet in its current state. Independent media must continue to be fought for to give the oppressed and exploited a voice, to educate all working class people about the true nature of capitalism and imperialism, and for nations to maintain their sovereignty over US hegemony. The Communist Party of Australia continues to provide a working class newspaper, *The Worker's Weekly Guardian*, to provide this voice, and condemns American Big Tech for its non-democratic practices. ✪

[Big Tech censoring] could lead to important political commentators being banned, ... enforced by unknown and unelected individuals.

THE CPA ATTENDS INVASIO

Around the country, Communist Party of Australia (CPA) branches attended Invasion Day rallies and marches in a solidarity effort with First Nations people.

SYDNEY

In Sydney, members from Central, Wollongong, Maritime, Inner West, and Beloyannis branch joined in solidarity in an Invasion Day that was done differently from other years. Typically held in Hyde Park, the speak-out was held in the Domain as a reclamation of that land. It also served as a space that enabled the event to be COVID-19 compliant. Also, unlike other years, there was no march as organisers had brokered a deal with police that allowed the protest to occur without the risk of getting fined.

Led by First Nations activist group Fighting In Solidarity Towards Treaties (FISTT), this Invasion Day marked eighty-three years since the first Day of Mourning protest. Attendance numbers vary. Police estimates were 2,000-3,000. However, organisers have stated that over 8,000 COVID-19 registration forms were filled suggesting the attendance was much higher.

Many First Nations leaders spoke about the significance of the day.

Lizzie Jarrett, a member of David Dungay Jr.'s family and Invasion Day organiser spoke about the genocide colonisation has caused: "We've gone from being 100 per cent of this country to less than three per cent in only 233 years. If that's not telling you you live under a genocidal regime, I'm not sure what we're learning about Australia.

Lynda-June Coe, one of the Invasion Day organisers and a Wiradjuri and Torres Strait Islander woman, stated that "your government, your police force, your health system, every single system in this country is built on racism, and the one thing this country is still proud of is that history."

Despite clear messaging from Indigenous elders who organised the event that no march was to occur, according to *Honi Soit*, "an offshoot of about 200 people, including members of the Australian Communist Party (ACP), appeared to march through Hyde Park, breaking the deal that organisers had made with police."

Members of the CPA Sydney contingent were deeply disappointed that participants from other parties did not respect these wishes of the Indigenous leadership.

BRISBANE

In Brisbane (Meanjin) over 5,000 people attended, according to local media sources present on the day, which included representatives of the CPA's Brisbane Branch. The crowd marched with placards and flags along with heartfelt vocal chants supporting the Yuggera and Turrbal people. Crowd numbers on the day were similar to last year's march, which was estimated to be the largest crowd to date at an Invasion Day rally in Brisbane.

Coming together in solidarity on Elizabeth Street, first heard from a number of speakers and activists, then marched across the Victoria Bridge, where some of the crowd performed a spontaneous dance circle at the corner of Grey and Melbourne Streets.

The crowd then moved forward through to South Bank.

Protesters carried banners and flags that included texts that said "Don't Celebrate Invasion," "Solidarity with First Nations People," and "Always Was, Always Will Be," among many other supportive messages. Chants of "What do we want? Justice! When do we want it? Now!" could be heard clearly by the bystanders as the assembly moved past.

The crowd ended their march at Musgrave Park, where a giant Aboriginal flag was spread on the ground and refreshments provided.

The rally this year was attended by Leeanne Enoch, Labor member for Algester, Quandamooka woman, and the first elected indigenous member of the Queensland Parliament, who was quoted as expressing that "people continued to argue back and forth, ignoring the ever-present weight of our past" and later tweeting that "Change the date or don't change the date, I'm not sure either way would resolve the perpetual argument."

Organiser Wayne Wharton gave an earnest speech calling for justice on behalf of a young indigenous boy who died in a bus last year while under the care of daycare staff. "The boy deserves more," he said, "and it's up to us to ensure he deserves better," while calling on the crowd to respond in the coming weeks, as one of the workers charged over the incident was cleared of manslaughter. "We don't deserve the irresponsible, racist governments we are getting at the moment," he said.

MELBOURNE

In Melbourne, thousands braved the cold, wind, and rain to attend the Invasion Day rally at Victorian Parliament House. Speakers included Uncle Bill Nicholson of Wurundjeri Country, Stan Dryden, Mandy Nicholson, Greens Senator Lidia Thorpe, the legendary Gary Foley, Arika Waulu Onus founder of Wuurn of Kanak, Tish King of SEED, writer Celeste Liddle, and musical performances from Indigenous artists.

The speeches drew on recurring themes such as the return of stolen land, the Black Lives Matter Movement, the promotion of treaty that achieves material goals, the destruction of sovereign Indigenous land, the history of Day of Mourning protests, and, at times, the denunciation of "Change the Date" and the Uluru Statement. A petition was also distributed, on behalf of fifteen families, calling on the federal government to take action on Indigenous Deaths in Custody, and for justice for their own relatives. The overarching message was a demand for real structural change in the lives of Indigenous Australians.

Most of the Melbourne Branch attended the rally as marshals, with a small contingent participating as marchers. Marshals maintained compliance with the COVID Safety plan, and helped to deter clashes with Victoria Police and Australian nationalists. A strong emphasis was placed on conducting the march in a COVID-safe and respectful manner. This years' marshals went above and beyond their regular duty, as they had to keep marchers in blocks of no more than 100 people to ensure compliance with Victoria's social distancing restrictions.

CPA General-Secretary Andrew Irving has been marshalling Invasion Day for the past few years and he said that, even though there were not enough people for the job, he was impressed with this year's marshalling, with an extra 200 people turning up to help on the day. Marchers did an excellent job of adhering to the COVID safety plan and the rally proceeded largely without incident. Congratulations to both the marshals and the organisers, Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance, who made this year's Invasion Day possible despite COVID-19 restrictions.

PERTH

In Perth, Invasion Day was organised by Noongar woman Corina Abraham-Howard. Over 4000 people, young and old and from all cultures, were in attendance to hear the speeches and occasional song. Abraham-Howard has worked in the justice and health systems, and spoke to the fact that not only are Aboriginal people overly represented in these institutions but they often don't fare well by the time they are released. She echoed the sentiments of many Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people at the rally when she said there is nothing to celebrate on this day: "our lands were stolen; our children were stolen and our men incarcerated. It was also time also to bring back respect – respect for our elders, for our land and our culture."

Dr Hannah McGlade, Senior Indigenous Research Fellow at Curtin University and Member of UN Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues, said that it was "Time to tell the truth about structural violence being suffered by Australia's Indigenous people," adding that there were no Aboriginal Justice Committees set up in Australia to look at issues such as domestic violence, Aboriginal women's health, and the effect this has on Aboriginal women being able to have the care and custody of their babies when they are born.

Aunty Madeline was one of the next speakers who had come a long way to attend the rally, from the western Kimberly, was critical of the Native Title Land system which she said was broken and what was really needed was, "to have proper land rights." Aunty Madeline, like many people in the Kimberley, is worried about fracking on their land and the quality of their water. Aboriginal people said Aunty Madeline, should have the right to make decisions about what happens on their country. To this end it was important that Aboriginal people remain united when they are dealing with corporations and governments lest these groups play one party off against the other. Aboriginal communities had to listen to and respect their elders or soon there would be no country to come back to – for if you look after the land, the land will look after you.

After the speakers, the 4000 plus people in the rally decided to march through the city and on to Langley Park to take their message of justice and reconciliation to the people.

N DAY RALLIES NATIONWIDE

STORMING THE CAPITOL: STAGING A FARCE

Valentin Cartillier

On the 6th January 2021, the US Capitol was overrun by various factions of Trump supporters under the false pretence that the recent election had been rigged. Following former President Trump's speech earlier that day at the "Save America" rally, the crowd walked a mile and half from outside the White House to the Capitol. Trump had told them "we're going to the Capitol and we're going to try and give ... our Republicans, the weak ones ... the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country."

The immediate problem is how to understand this event: what name does it deserve? An insurrection, a coup, a riot? To simply call them rioters would downplay the more dangerous and organised factions of the protest. A coup is a far too grandiose a word to describe people simply trying to maintain the existing system. As for insurrection, you'd reckon that an insurrection would require that your leader be up the front there with you instead of tweeting about you from afar. However, we'll go with insurrection seeing as they were trying to disrupt the process of confirming the victory of then President-elect Joe Biden.

Despite the use of pepper spray, tear gas, and barriers, the "protesters" managed to break through the police line relatively easily; a particularly stark contrast to the enormous police presence during the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests. You only need to look at the side-by-side photographic comparisons to see the inherent fear the ruling class have of social movements like BLM who push for genuine structural change and the measures they will take to defend it. Once inside, the insurrectionists were met with minimal resistance considering the importance of the building for so-called American democracy. Nevertheless, the "insurrection" was not bloodless: there were five deaths, one of them was a police officer and the other four were Trump loyalists.

The particularly curious feature of this event became apparent once the group had gained access to the building. Lacking any form of centralised organisation, the various factions began pursuing different objectives. Unsurprisingly, the insurrectionists did not understand the necessity for unified political organisation as they've never had to consider a political alternative, which is a luxury of people who seek to retain the political status quo. Under the vague, sloganistic jargon of "taking back our country," once they were actually in a position to make demands of any sort, they were already scattered throughout the building on the flimsy pretence that the election had been rigged in favour of the Democrats. This is the aimlessness of a disunified front, comprised of a people who have never had to pursue change in order to prosper.

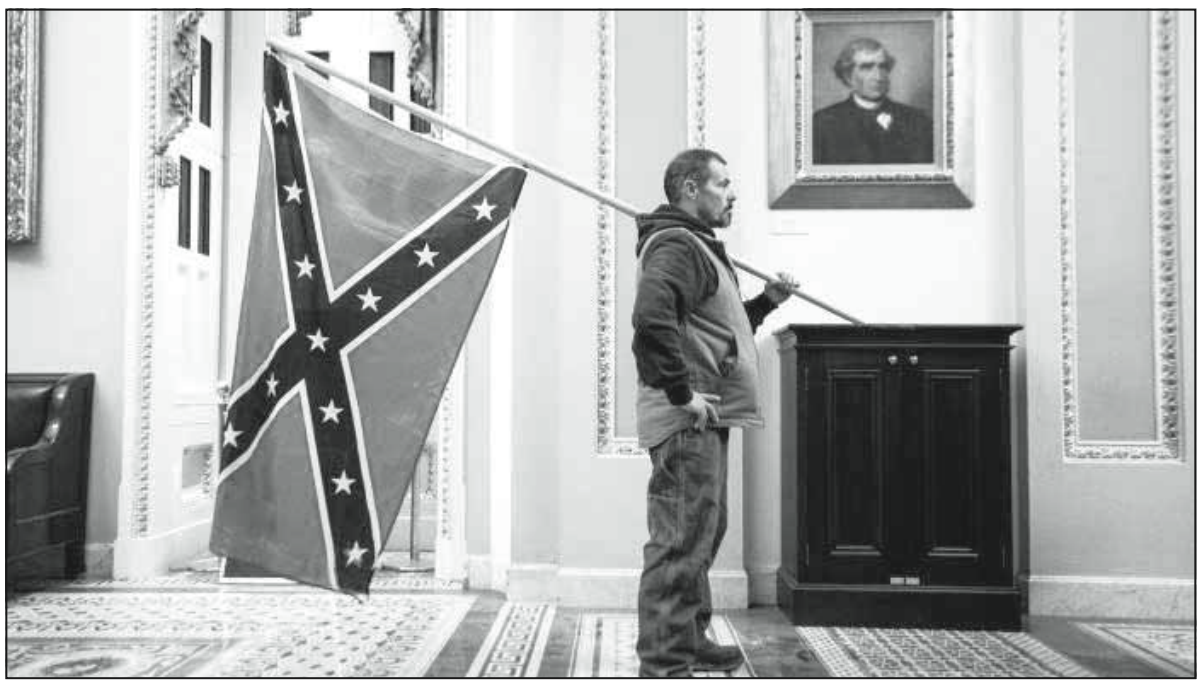
One has to wonder what they expected would happen when they got inside. It is tempting to speculate that they were not even expecting to gain entry and so when they did actually get in, they were at a total loss about what to do. However, to reduce the entire day's events to a single factor would be a one-sided and incomplete analysis. There were far more sinister and organised factions at the rally. While a lot of the media focus was on the absurdity of the "Qanon shaman," more organised factions erected makeshift gallows outside of Capitol. Amongst the targets named by the chants in crowd were Nancy Pelosi, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Mike Pence. Twitter had to ban the phrase "Hang Mike Pence" due to its enormous popularity.

These were not just idle words. Many of the protestors showed up armed and in combat gear. Various factions were not simply civilians, counted among them were army veterans, off duty police officers, and the like. Even the Democrats had a rare moment of clarity, short sighted as it was, in realising that it was not simply the spontaneous protest a lot of other media outlets have made it out to be. Democratic Representative Jim McGovern stated "I saw this crowd of people banging on that glass screaming ... Looking at their faces, it occurred to me, these aren't protesters. These are people who want to do harm ... What I saw in front of me was basically home-grown fascism, out of control." While the statement that the objective of the "protestors" was simply to cause harm is correct given their general political aimlessness, the second half does make one wonder, does home-grown fascism only become a problem for Democrats once it gets out of control?

Pelosi held a more structured stance, "the evidence is that it was a well-planned, organised group with leadership and guidance and direction. And the direction was to go get people." This statement, while being more representative of the overall situation, still fails to grasp, unsurprisingly, one of the fundamental principles of genuine political activity: having an organised list of demands. "To go get people," is not an organised demand in the same way that workers on strike demand better wages and working conditions or how a revolutionary working class demands democratic ownership over their workplaces. "To go get people," is a politically empty phrase that can be used by anyone against anybody and therefore has no genuine political meaning.

In perhaps the greatest irony, many of the Trump loyalists were accused of being secret Antifa agents, planted there to discredit Trump. Many of the "protestors" have pleaded with Trump to give them pardons in the final days of his presidency to little avail. The sheer proliferation of misinformation and propaganda embedded in the American ideological landscape was ruthlessly intensified by Trump and has now come full circle: like a snake biting its own tail, it is now devouring itself. But unlike the allegory of the snake, it is the duty of the working class to ensure that this cycle does not repeat itself.

This event not only perfectly encapsulated the Trump presidency; it also forced American liberal democracy to show itself for what it is: a farce with no substance. ✪



BIDEN OR TRUMP, IT DOESN'T MATTER: AUSTRALIA'S ROLE IN US IMPERIALISM REMAINS FIRM

Seamus Carey

ALP leader Anthony Albanese delivered a speech 20th January entitled "US-Australia relations under a Biden administration."

The basic implicit promise of the Biden campaign has been a "return to normal" relative to the Trump years. There were no radical promises of progressive developments, merely a return to certain features of the Obama administration, in many cases even less ambitious. Make America Normal Again – but what on earth is this normal?

The very idea that there is a "normal" situation for a country like the US to exit or re-enter according to the choices of political leaders is an illustration of liberal metaphysical-idealist delusion, which fails to understand events in the course of their development and change according to material processes.

As far as most Democrats are concerned, the characteristics of the Trump administration were largely a product of the personal qualities of Trump and his cohort. There is only a dim understanding of how the political force of Trump developed out of the needs of the disordered, crumbling domestic economy, as well as the changing balance of economic power internationally. Trump's "isolationism" and "protectionism" tend to be seen as his personal whims, rather than a direct outcome of the necessity for the US economy to attempt to restructure internally and externally as the hold of US imperialist pre-eminence over the world begins to weaken.

That US imperialist pre-eminence is exactly what "normal" actually means, and in fact Democrats and pro- and anti-Trump Republicans are all united in this goal. The fact that both candidates' rhetoric depended upon imagined pasts is a clear sign that the US system is past its use-by date.

The ideological debate between them often takes the outward form of a debate over what America represents. Depressingly, this ridiculous conceit is to be found in Australia as well.

ALP leader Anthony Albanese delivered a speech 20th January (no doubt a deliberate symbolic choice to coincide with Biden's inauguration) entitled "US-Australia relations under a Biden administration." In it, he criticised PM Morrison's attachment to Trump and co., and insisted upon developing strong relations with the new Biden government. In doing so, he unintentionally laid bare the sad fact that Australian political discourse is an embarrassing echo of Washington's vanities.

Some excerpts from Albanese's speech:

> "The great tragedy of the recent past is the power of America's example has been diminished from within. It is in Australia's interests as a US ally to encourage the restoration of that power. Also because the world is weaker and more uncertain, when America is weaker."
>
> [...]
>
> "Under President Trump, we saw the first steps in a retreat by the US from its historical role as the leader of the post-War international order; an order whose underlying values are those which Australians hold dear. It appeared the US was no longer interested in being the indispensable power. So, I welcome Joe Biden's strong commitment to US leadership in the world and the desire to bring together US allies to face the challenges I identified earlier."

Such sickening grovelling cannot but be disheartening to hear from a "Labor" leader, however unsurprising it might be to us. But as Albanese pointed out:

> "The [US-Australia] alliance was forged in World War II under Labor [...] and we have deepened it each time we have been in government. Labor's support for the alliance will remain stronger than ever under a government I lead."

The bipartisan doctrine of the US' position as "indispensable power" with a "historical role" as leader of the world shows clearly what interests command Australia's parliament. The two-party system is simply an efficient way for the one-class dictatorship to play both sides of any contradiction in bourgeois affairs, and gauge how much the people are willing to take. This can be seen clearly in both Australia and the US.

A majority of the American people were not willing to take another four years of Trump. Of more consequence though, a majority of the US capitalist class didn't want it either – while Trump's anti-worker policies gave temporary boost to profits, features of the period such as the mass unrest, criminally negligent mishandling of the pandemic, and diplomatic failures, are recognised as not sustainable by those of the bourgeoisie who can think a few moves ahead.

The Biden presidency is expected by many to restore good relations with the EU countries – in other words, to reunify the fracture-ridden imperialist camp under US leadership, which in the imperialist outlook (demonstrated by Albanese) is supposed to be a good thing. However if this happens, it is likely to be a prelude to new wars and military interventions.

Some have pointed out that Trump, unlike every other US president of recent times, did not start any new wars. However, this was certainly not due to lack of trying: Trump and his government threatened military action against the DPRK, Venezuela, Iran, China and others. These efforts failed in part due to the inability to unite the imperialist camp around these adventures. The failed attempts to get Europe on board with a war against Iran were particularly glaring.

President Biden is likely to continue US interventions around the world, the build up towards war with China, and the deadly sanctions and other aggressions towards countries such as Cuba, Venezuela, Iran, Syria, and the DPRK. There is no indication that US foreign policy will soften in any way, only return to being more competently criminal.

It is shameful that the Australian Labor Party leader sees fit to beatify such an "example," such "leadership," such "values." ✪

"LABOR'S SUPPORT FOR THE ALLIANCE WILL REMAIN STRONGER THAN EVER UNDER A GOVERNMENT I LEAD."

REVIEW: *ROADKILL* – STAGY BRITISH SCANDAL-A-RAMA JUST GETS THERE

Floyd Kermode

Hands up who likes a good political scandal! Nobody? Fair enough, we are kind of drowning in them. Hands up who likes a good political scandal on TV? A sea of hands! Well, fair enough, fictional politics can be fun, and cheering or booing fictional politicians is infinitely more enjoyable than cheering or booing the real thing. Actual politicians are much less photogenic and witty than dramatised ones, and they can literally kill us. Hands up who thinks the British do the best scandals? Keep the hands up if you like Hugh Laurie – the guy who went from being the comedy goon in *Blackadder* to being widely respected and wildly successful in his semi-serious role in *House*. Alright, your arms are probably tired by now, you can put them down.

Myself, I like a good small screen political scandal. Lenin said that bourgeois parliaments were "a means of duping the workers, and phrases about democracy are used to cover up financial swindling and every kind of bribery," and it's fun to see that sort of thing at least get some comeuppance even if only on TV.

Well, fans of screen UK political scandals and Hugh Laurie have I got a scandal or two for you!

Roadkill stars Laurie as an ambitious, cynical minister in a Tory government led by a terrifyingly bland female PM who seems to be trying to combine Theresa May and Margaret Thatcher. Laurie is a "man of the people" sort of Tory, who grew up poor and has strong opinions about how to reform the justice system (radically, especially for a conservative, he thinks they lock too many people up). As the series opens, he's just survived a court trial for perjury because he's been lying about his whereabouts whilst looking for some serious far-right money in the US. Luckily for him, a witness has been leaned on.

Another problem for Laurie is that he has a habit of being serially unfaithful to his wife and has a daughter he fathered with a supermarket cashier. The daughter is in that justice system as a prisoner. Naturally, the prison is run by a fairly evil private company who have no compunction in leaning on the daughter to get to her father. So the action is fairly evenly divided. Between a brave lawyer who was on Laurie's defence team, but has a conscience, and the daughter's troubles in getting in contact with her father and surviving the prison. Cameos are made by other members of Laurie's troubled family; His two other daughters, from his marriage, who are traumatised by and hostile to their neglectful father, and a wife who'd like to pretend nothing's wrong. What complicates matters is that one of Laurie's daughters from his marriage won't let matters rest, and insists on confronting her parents about Laurie's philandering.

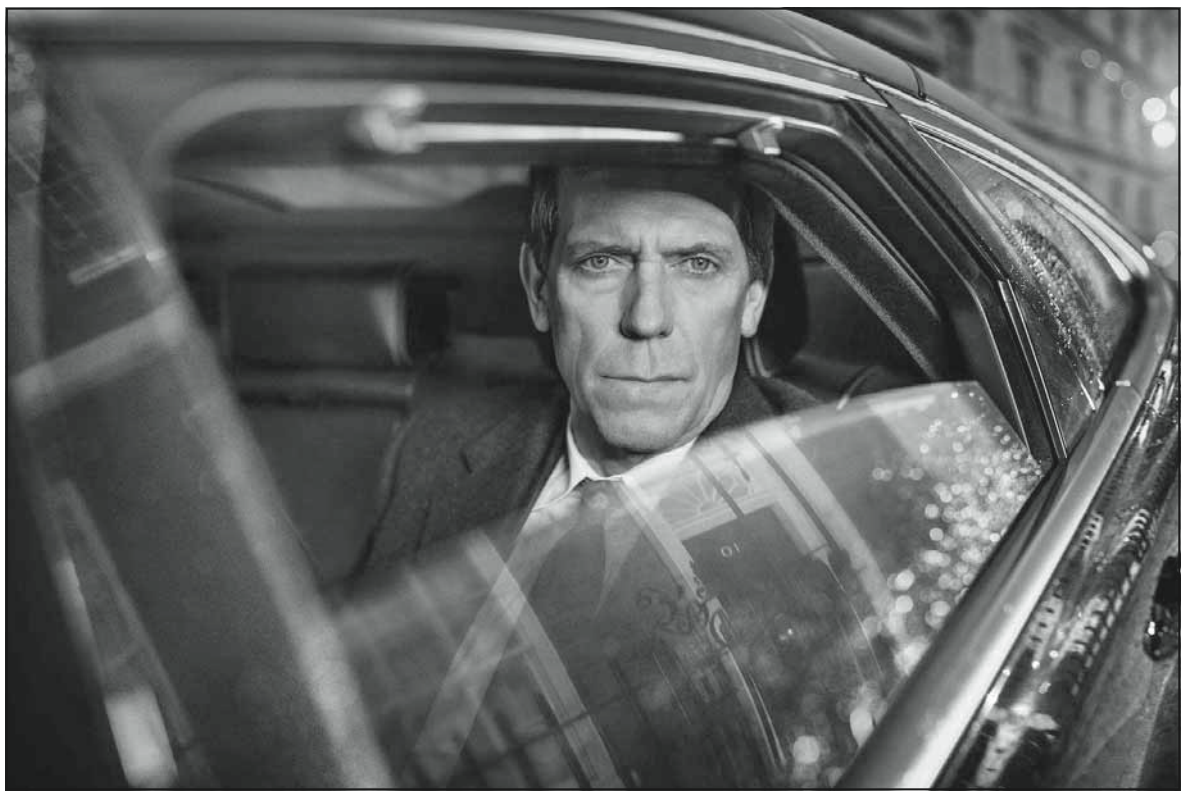
Will Laurie outmanoeuvre the PM? Will he survive the various potential scandals brewing? Will the plucky lawyer prove that he perjured himself? Will the press find out about his illegitimate daughter? What about the dodgy financial doings that depend on his wife's cooperation?

The series is, in case you haven't worked it out yet, a bit twee and quite contrived. For a start, at a time when PM Boris Johnson doesn't know how many children he has, it's more than a little old fashioned to ask us to believe that Hugh Laurie's fictional daughter really needs to trouble his political career at all. It's commendable, I suppose, that the lawyer who helped Laurie win his perjury case should care about finding out the real truth *after* that case is done and dusted but it's also less believable than anything in "Harry Potter," and this show doesn't make me want to believe it. If that wasn't enough, Laurie has even more on his plate romantically. Laurie has a mistress in *Roadkill* who played the Danish PM in the Scandinavian political drama *Borgen*. She is dissatisfied with her role as Hugh Laurie's occasional bit of "stress relief." And while it is completely plausible for a self-serving MP to have "a bit on the side," it is less plausible that every other minor character in *Roadkill* is having it off with another minor character in between dramatic revelations. You start to wonder if there's something in the English water supply!

Another thing which makes *Roadkill* nowhere near the treat that the original UK *House of Cards* was, is that the script, by respected British playwright David Hare, often seems designed for the stage rather than the screen. Time after time, characters deliver lengthy monologues at each other which would have a theatre audience applauding or at least nodding admiringly, but which in real life and, more importantly, in modern TV, someone else would interrupt. We are long past the days when TV was mostly just stage plays on video. *Roadkill* had me thinking: Hare should go and write more stage plays and leave television to someone who knows there's a difference between the two.

So will you enjoy it? Well, it's not all bad news. Hugh Laurie is very convincing as a politician who still has a resentment of the born-to-rule types who dominate British politics and especially the Tory party. It is refreshing to have a main character who isn't simply evil or nice, but three dimensional. There's a fair amount of suspense as we wonder if one of Hugh's various scandals will trip him up, and if he'll get away with it all somehow. The series is screaming for a sequel, with large amount of plot threads still unresolved at the end – it could only be more sequel begging if they tied Hugh Laurie to some railway tracks and left the viewer with credits reading "To be continued ..." at the very end.

All up, I give *Roadkill* a six out of ten and commend it to viewers who have already finished *Borgen* and don't have the energy to go and find the original *House of Cards*. ✪



Hugh Laurie as an ambitious, cynical minister in a Tory government.

Helen McCrory playing a terrifyingly bland female PM.

Pippa Bennett-Warner as a brave lawyer.

BIDEN MAKES IT OFFICIAL: NO KEYSTONE XL OIL PIPELINE

Mark Gruenberg

President Joe Biden's made it official. He yanked, effective immediately, the federal construction licence for the remaining section of the controversial Keystone XL tar sands oil pipeline from Alberta through the US.

Even before Biden took the oath of office at noon on the 20th January, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, citing DC lobbyists, reported Biden would cancel the Keystone permit on his first day in office. He did so late that afternoon, as one of seventeen executive orders.

News reports added Biden is also cancelling the US Army Corps of Engineers' permit for another controversial project, the Dakota Access Pipeline, on grounds that it both endangers Missouri River drinking water and that it traverses sacred Native American lands.

Court orders have held up DAPL, whose construction drew opposition not just from Native Americans and environmental activists, but from several unions. National Nurses United delegates were among protesters arrested at the key DAPL site several years ago.

Biden's Keystone cancellation drew cheers from "green" groups, who strongly oppose the project and have for years, due to its threat to increase global warming. But this move also set off on-line resistance, including a petition to Biden to keep the pipeline going.

Unions have split on Keystone ever since six construction unions, including the Teamsters, the Laborers and the Operating Engineers, signed a Project Labor Agreement with Keystone's corporate sponsor, TransCanada Energy, more than a decade ago.

That means the 1,200-mile (2,000 km) pipeline was to be erected and maintained by union construction workers. North America's Building Trades Union (NABTU), citing government reports, states Keystone's construction could provide at least 20,000 well-paying union jobs.

Other analysts put the jobs figure as low as 7,000, but with a US$900 million (AU$1,200) payroll over the life of the project.

Former President Barack Obama nixed Keystone's northern segment on environmental grounds in 2015. Obama's successor, GOP Oval Office occupant Donald Trump, reinstated the construction permit, which Biden has now dumped.

Many unions, despite the position of the building trade unions, have opposed the pipelines. The union-created BlueGreen Alliance, the Steelworkers, National Nurses United, both mass transit unions, environmental organisations and others retort that past oil spills along Keystone's route show the pollution danger is high.

They also contend you can create more construction jobs through retrofitting buildings and repairing other infrastructure, rather than building Keystone.

More importantly, the Keystone foes note the "heavy oil" from the Albertan tar sands would increase carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions responsible for global warming and climate change, in two ways: The oil itself is high in carbon and sulphur and the method used to extract it from the tar sands releases even more CO_2 and threatens underground aquifers.

People's World ✪

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SUCCESS OF CUBA'S FIGHT AGAINST CORONAVIRUS

Abdul Rahman

On the 1st of January, 2021, Cuban revolution completed 62 years. The socialist revolution carried out by a group of highly motivated individuals under the leadership of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara among numerous others in this small island nation in the Caribbean Sea in 1959 has since attempted to create an egalitarian society with a high standard of living for all its citizens sans exploitation. In the last six decades, it has survived continued imperialist assaults and built strong solidarity among its citizens. [...] Today, the entire world is going through an unprecedented crisis in the form of COVID-19 pandemic which has left even the most advanced capitalist countries struggling to get past it. At such a time, Cuba's success against the pandemic must be credited to its unwavering commitment to its revolutionary values of socialism, scientific temper and international solidarity.

Coronavirus or COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the world's capitalist system and broken some myths. [...] By contrast, socialist countries and governments have proven once again that they care about people and their wellbeing over anything else. Cuba, a small country with less than twelve million people, has established, in more than one way, standard of a successful fight against COVID-19. It did not only control its spread and provided free public health care to all but also took care of economic and social wellbeing of its citizens. It has also emerged as a world leader in providing aid to other members of the world community and helping them in their fight against the virus.

The success of Cuba's fight against COVID-19 lies in its commitment to socialist values and scientific temper. The twin approach of considering universal public healthcare as a fundamental right for all members of the society with total trust in modern medical science in dealing with the disease has made Cuba a role model for the world to imitate. Its commitment to internationalism has proven to be contrasting and better approach than the narrow nationalistic approaches adopted by most of the developed capitalist countries who, unlike Cuba, have failed on every front and caused misery to their citizens.

EARLY RESPONSE AND INFORMATION

Cuba's success against COVID-19 is based on the fact that it was one of the first countries to respond to the WHO warnings and follow its guidelines with all seriousness. The early response included gathering and disseminating crucial information, acting on the preventive measures and developing a crisis response mechanism much before the actual outbreak. Cuba did all of it at the correct moment due to the socialist commitments to prioritise people over profits.

At a time when no one was talking about it, Cuban media was already reporting about the Coronavirus in the middle of January, a few weeks after it was first reported to the WHO by China. Its Ministry of Public Health (MINSAP) convened a national-level meeting on the 24th of January on novel Coronavirus and created a National Working Group to keep a vigil and lead the fight against the virus. Immediately after that, the MINSAP started training doctors (95,000) and nurses (84,000) of how to diagnose and treat COVID-19. This was much before the first reported case in the country.

Cuban media and mass organisations started disseminating all crucial information about the disease and ways of its prevention, including the necessity of hygiene to people early in March. The MINSAP also declared a strict vigilance on all ports of entry tacking people with known symptoms of COVID-19.

The country reported the first case on the 10th of March when some foreign tourists were found positive. It had already set up a strong system in place to face any outbreak. Thousands of medical students in Cuba's thirteen medical schools joined a campaign to visit every house in the country identifying people with symptoms and reporting the cases to nearby doctors in the mid-March. The medical students covered six million people, half of the country's population, within a week.

EXTENSIVE MEASURES AND ADEQUATE COMPENSATION FOR ALL

When Cuba finally decided to impose WHO mandated physical distancing norms on the 20th of March after the number of cases had risen to twenty-one, the government made sure that all WHO norms are strictly followed. It had to face the economic impact of around 60,000 foreign tourists leaving the country in the wake of the pandemic compounding its economic troubles.

It imposed strict physical distancing norms and restrictions on the businesses and movements of the people. However, the government made sure that no one who has lost his/her job is left without help. Apart from suspending private business from paying taxes, the government paid all workers furloughed due to the lockdown their full salary for the first month and sixty per cent salaries for subsequent months. All workers in the private sector affected by the lockdown were given an amount equivalent to national minimum wages for the period of the lockdown.

The socialist government of Cuba made sure that no one goes hungry. Through its extensive network of neighbourhood stores, it served more than 3.9 million families with a food basket comprising of vegetables, rice, cooking oil, eggs and sugar.

On the 6th of April onwards when the number of cases started rising and reached 396 the government imposed stricter lockdown measures with the suspension of all non-essential economic activities. It mandated self-quarantine for all vulnerable sections of the population including the old and people with serious ailments. It also suspended the payments for water, electricity and gas services until the further notice in a big relief for the working people who had no substantial income to pay for these essential services due to the shut down of the economic activities.

A delegation of Cuban doctors arrives in Angola on April 10 to help the African country fight the Covid-19 pandemic. (Photo: Ampe Rogerio)

THE ROLE OF THE MASS ORGANISATIONS

Cuba's response to COVID-19 pandemic was quick and effective. It has been able to control the spread of the virus and reduce the total number of deaths. In a country of more than 11 million, the total number of cases has not exceeded 13,000 and the death rate is one of the lowest in the world with a total number of 147 until the first week of January, 2021. A large part of the credit for this success goes to the crucial role played by different mass organisations affiliated to the ideas of the Cuban revolution.

The public action carried out by organisations such as the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) with eight million estimated members along with the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) and Federation of University Students (FEU) played crucial roles in spreading information, maintaining a constant supply of food and other essential items to remote parts of the country and helped the state agencies in executing lockdown measures. The role of thousands of medical students in identifying the infected quite early from their house-to-house surveys was crucial to check the spread of the virus in the country. These voluntary mass public actions created a community of mutually caring individuals which is impossible to achieve in a non-socialist country.

INTERNATIONALISM

Cuba was one of the first countries to help provide the required medicine to China and several other countries. By the 24th of February it had provided 150,000 double dose vials of Interferon Alpha 2B to China alone. Several other countries were supplied the drug found to be effective in raising the immunity of the patients. But that was just a small part of country's commitment to internationalism. Group of Cuban doctors, formally known as Henry Reeve International Medical Brigade formed in 2005, has defied the geographical and political boundaries during the COVID-19 pandemic and provided crucial medical assistance to more than two dozen countries as they have done before during the outbreak of Ebola and other disasters. The countries which received crucial medical assistance from the thousands of Cuban doctors and medical staff at a time when most of the capitalist countries were unable to even think of helping others range from Italy in Europe to Barbados in the West Indies. The Cuban doctors trained the medical staff in these countries and prepared them in ways of dealing with the pandemic.

Despite these efforts, Cuban doctors have faced vilification by the US instead of getting applause and recognition for their unparalleled work. This has prompted several rights groups and progressive individuals for starting a campaign for Noble Prize of Cuban Doctors.

CUBAN VACCINE

Defying the American sanctions and its commitment to science, Cuba has registered four vaccines candidates, namely "sovereign" or Soberana 01 which was announced in August and it was the first vaccine registered in Latin America and the Caribbean, Soberana 02, Mambisa and Abdala. All of these vaccine candidates are at different levels of human clinical trials and are expected to be available for the public by February 2021.

As per the announcement made by the Cuban government, the vaccines developed in Cuba will not be treated as private property or a source to make a profit as most of the other vaccines developed all across the world and will be available for the world as and when it is ready.

Above is the short description of the pro-people measures undertaken by the small socialist government in Cuba. Other socialist countries such as China and Vietnam and socialist government in the Indian state of Kerala have too adopted similar ways and successfully fought against the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast, people in the world's rich capitalist countries are forced to suffer an ineffective and inhuman system.

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