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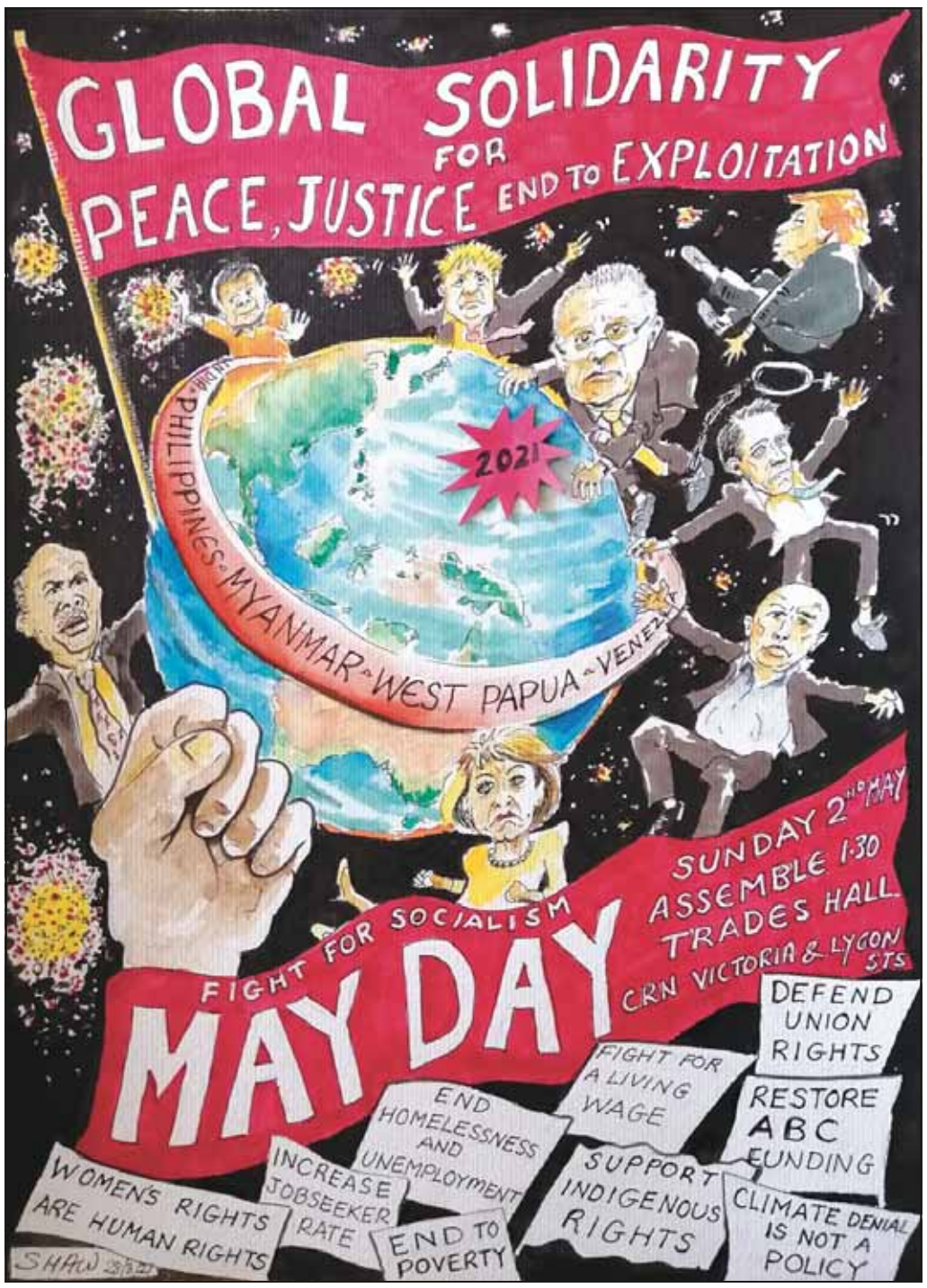
MAY DAY

FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO STRIKE

FIGHT FOR A BETTER WORLD



This May Day the Communist Party of Australia calls on the government to:

- Legislate for the unfettered right to strike
- Replace enterprise agreements with union-negotiated Industry agreements
- Fully restore penalty rates to wages
- Abolish the Australian Building and Construction Commission
- Abolish labour hire and gig economy practices
- Close the gender pay gap
- Unrestricted access to represent workers and the right to organise
- Adopt a national manufacturing and local content plan
- Create jobs and increase wages
- Introduce a shorter working week with no loss of pay
- Divert the war budget to fund social needs
- Nationalise the health system, NDIS and aged care
- Fully fund public education and abolish fees
- Introduce free early childhood education and care
- Take its hands off workers' superannuation
- Nationalise major infrastructure including Qantas and Telstra
- Prioritise a just transition to a renewable, zero carbon economy.

May Day is a day of international solidarity where workers express their solidarity with workers and trade unions around the world in their struggles.

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Guardian

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JOBKEEPER USED TO PROFIT THE CORPORATIONS, NOT HELP PEOPLE

The purpose of JobKeeper should have been to help keep the working class employed during a once-in-a-century pandemic that devastated the global economy. However, like all things the Morrison government does, the main aim is always to help big business.

A new report from corporate governance advisory firm Ownership Matters has estimated that $280mil in government funds were given to companies that were extremely profitable during the pandemic. Furthermore, $1.38bil in JobKeeper payments were paid out in the second half of 2020 to sixty-six of the top 300 companies on the ASX.

"The figures show that twenty per cent of all JobKeeper that was given to ASX300 companies went to organisations who were trading better on 31 December 2020 than at the same time in 2019," Ownership Matters director Dean Paatsch told news.com.au.

The beneficiaries? Investors. According to the *Guardian (UK)*: "the analysis [...] shows that someone who invested a dollar in each of a basket of JobKeeper companies in March last year would have all but doubled their money, receiving a return of 99.2 per cent. An investor who invested in the same way in companies that did not get jobkeeper would have made a return of 57.3 per cent."

While some companies, like Domino's and Toyota Australia have promised to return the money, others such as Harvey Norman haven't. In March last year, the sharemarket feel thirty per cent. However, Companies like Harvey Norman exceeded expectations, with those who had invested in the company since March last year receiving a return of 112 per cent plus dividends. These dividends will total $249mil, of which Gerry Harvey, the founder of Harvey Norman, will receive $78mil as he holds 31.4 per cent of the shares.

Writing for *The Canberra Times* Labour MP Andrew Leigh exposed the problem of JobKeeper:

"Over its year of operation, JobKeeper cost $83bil, and saved 700,000 jobs, most of them for six months. That equates to $118,000 per job – almost twice the average wage (including full-timers and part-timers) of $66,000."

Here, the Coalition's fabled economic managing ability is on display. The problem, of course, is not with Jobkeeper itself but the way it was implemented, with billions going to profitable companies instead of sectors that struggled, such as the arts, tourism, and hospitality. Countries with similar schemes managed their funds far more efficiently. In New Zealand, companies had to prove a downturn in sales of at least forty per cent before any subsidies were handed out.

This, unfortunately, is no mere accident. The bourgeoisie always make mega-profits in times of calamity; wars usually serve the capitalist class well in this respect. With Jobkeeper, the Morrison government was able to pretend that it cared for the working class by giving them a handout, all the while it was merely serving to line the pockets of the ruling class.

May Day is this Saturday. This is a day to remember the achievements and struggles of the working class and the power of working-class solidarity. As we take to the streets this Saturday, we must not forget this fight is not over, that the ruling class and its capitalist state are findings ways to exploit workers at every turn, even when they pretend to be a friend of the people.

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CPA Statement on May Day 2021

STANDING WITH WORKERS IN AUSTRALIA AND ACROSS THE WORLD!

The Communist Party of Australia stands with workers who, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, have taken to the streets in Australia and across the world in defence of their rights at work, civil and democratic rights.

May Day is a day of class struggle and internationalism. It is a display of class solidarity in opposition to the attacks by capitalist governments and employers on working people and in opposition to the downward spiral of living standards. Actions in Sydney and other cities are a militant reclaim of the 1st of May. It is the consolidation of workers' struggles against employers and the governments that support capital.

Workers are taking to the street demanding that their rights at work be respected by the Morrison government and multinational corporations using the pandemic as an excuse to attack wages and conditions further.

The right to strike is essential and bargaining rights including the right to bargain across industries that break away from shackles imposed by the employer sector on the organised working class through enterprise agreements.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been used as an excuse to further undermine wages and conditions for working people. It is also used to justify that workers will pay for the capitalist crisis. The Morrison government has failed the working class and their families while putting front-line workers at risk. The pandemic demands solidarity among the peoples. We demand the profiteering with the Covid-19 vaccine must stop for the wellbeing of humanity.

The removal of child care assistance, JobKeeper and the back to the past on JobSeeker mean workers go back to the same old past of misery and exploitation by the big end of town.

The CPA condemns the further casualisation of labour and the bailouts of corporations that have become wealthier during the pandemic.

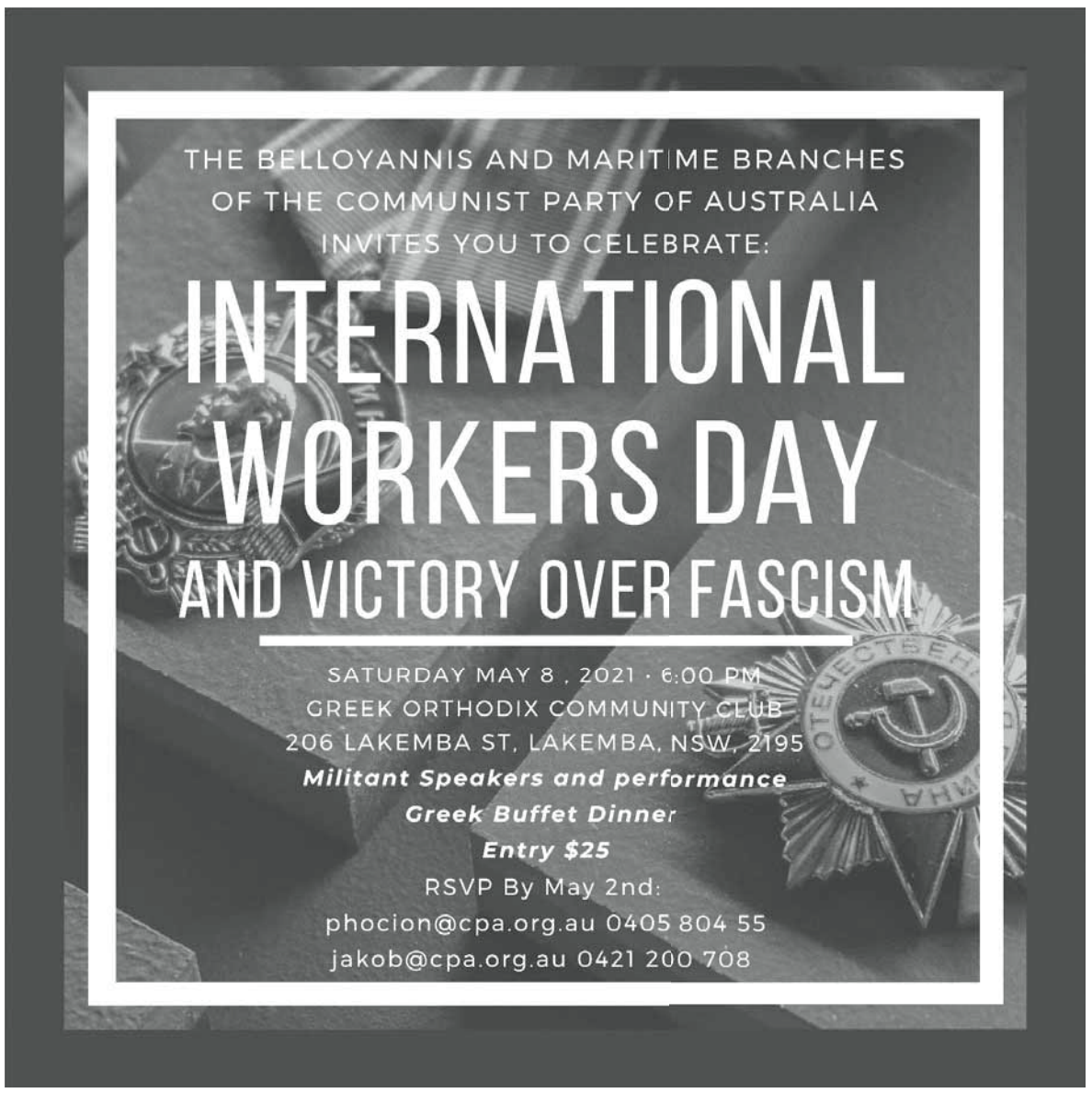
We strongly support workers taking strike action on May Day as part of a campaign to achieve these demands. The CPA is participating and gives its full solidarity.

The Communist Party of Australia campaigns for Health, Workers' Rights and Socialism. It demands that workers will not pay for the capitalist crisis. It congratulates the leadership of trade unions that in defiance of the status quo are taking to the streets on May 1.

The Communist Party of Australia sends its solidarity greetings to all workers in Australia and around the world, to all our fraternal Communist and Workers Parties' internationally.

Long Live May Day 2021!
Long Live Internationalism!
Long Live Peace and Socialism!

Central Committee Executive
May Day 2021



Find out more **www.cpa.org.au**

MAY DAY:
FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO STRIKE

Anna Pha

May Day 2021 is a time to take the struggle to the streets; to show the full strength and might of the working class; and take back the losses of recent decades. On this international workers' day, workers and their trade unions around the world will be taking actions for peace, democracy, and socialism.

In Australia, as in other capitalist countries worldwide, living standards have declined, trade union rights have been wound back, and precarious employment and poverty have increased. Penalty rates, working conditions, workplace safety, the eight-hour day, and job security are under attack and must be defended and improved.

RIGHT TO STRIKE

The right to strike is central to this fight, but industrial action or even the threat of such action has all but been outlawed and is punishable by massive fines. Trade unions are up against a barrage of anti-union, anti-worker laws, the most draconian of them in the building and construction industry where legitimate trade union activity can cost workers tens of thousands of dollars and unions hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars.

Employers have the power to hire and fire. They have the support of the government, which legislates in their favour and the state machinery. Individual workers are at the mercy of their bosses. The only strength and power that workers have are when united in their trade unions.

Employers and governments use every trick in the book to divide the working class, to break that unity. One of the methods has been the gradual erosion of the centralised award system of legally binding wages and working conditions, and the shift in focus to enterprise agreements and individual contracts.

UNION-NEGOTIATED INDUSTRY AGREEMENTS

Bargaining that extends across workplaces – pattern bargaining – has been outlawed. This puts workers in enterprises where they are industrially weaker such as those with few or no union members, at a disadvantage. Bosses can more easily drive down wages and working conditions.

Employers confronted by militant unions in highly unionised workplaces are under commercial pressure to drive down wages to the level of their competitors. With bargaining across an industry, that additional pressure in a race to the bottom is lessened.

The Communist Party of Australia is calling for union-negotiated industry agreements. They would further unite and strengthen the position of the working class in the face of a capitalist class constantly in pursuit of higher profits.

COALITION'S OFFENSIVE

Since it was elected in 2013, the Coalition government has picked up and run with the former Howard government's reactionary, anti-worker, anti-union agenda. It has:

- Entrenched casualisation as a business model
- Turned a blind eye to wage theft
- Ignored employers ripping off and injuring or killing workers
- Outlawed and criminalised legitimate trade union activity
- Increased penalties tenfold for breaking bad construction laws
- Slashed penalty rates for 700,000 low paid workers
- Facilitated tax rorts and cut the tax rates of the rich and big corporations
- Cut spending on public health, education and the NDIS
- Cut pensions and other social security payments
- Made one insulting, paltry increase in the dole
- Boosted an already bloated military budget
- Encouraged and subsidised the expansion of fossil fuels.

Not surprisingly, living standards have continued to fall for medium and low-income workers. Millions of workers have become the working poor, struggling in precarious employment, often with two or more jobs. At the same time, the big end of town is wallowing in record profits, particularly making huge gains out of COVID handouts from the government.

TIME FOR A WAGE RISE

The government has already used the cover of COVID to undermine working conditions and wages. Now it is on the move to balance the budget regardless of the consequences for the working class. It has cut back funding on a range of social services and still plans to pursue its anti-union legislation.

The cross-benchers stalled the omnibus bill with only the section on casuals being passed. This section set casualisation in concrete and benefits employers who shed permanent employees and replace them with casuals.

There is no doubt that the other anti-worker provisions of the bill will reappear and there are more regressive measures in the pipeline.

Workers cannot expect a real wage rise in the near future. The "economic recovery" will be put first, and it will not be a recovery for the people unless a united trade union movement and community stand up and fight.

The corporate sector expects more tax cuts in the future. Many workers will experience an increase in income tax as the low- and middle-income earner tax offset comes to an end. Low-and middle-income earners with a taxable income between $37,001 and $126,000, are in line for an increase in income tax payable of up to $1,080.

The minimum wage must be increased immediately to a living wage and all workers receive a real wage rise. Putting more money in the pockets of people who will spend it, is not only of benefit to workers, but also stimulates demand and results in job creation.

WORKERS MUST NOT PAY FOR RECOVERY

The government uses the cover of COVID to make workers pay for the capitalist crisis that is not of their making. It is also callously cutting the incomes and support services for the most vulnerable in society.

The cruel cuts to the NDIS are one example. The independent assessment scheme is nothing short of a humiliating and criminal attempt to slash funding. Like the Robodebt scheme, where social security recipients were expected to repay non-existent debts, the cuts to the NDIS hurt some of the most vulnerable people.

When the government underspent on the NDIS, leaving applicants out to dry, the government put the remaining funds into the general income pool to be spent on war machines and other items. Assessors have been told to slow the process down. People are having their packages reduced to a level that does not meet their needs.

There is a certain irony that the former Minister for Defence Industry and more recently Defence Minister, Linda Reynolds, is now the Minister overseeing the destruction of the NDIS. After all, the multibillion-dollar hikes on weapons expenditure have to come from somewhere if the budget is to be in the black.

The capitalist system is not interested in "wasting" taxes on pensioners, the aged or people with a disability. They can be thrown on the scrap heap, no longer seen of use to be exploited and create wealth for the big end of town. The idea of the dole being well below the poverty line is to create a desperate reserve labour force to compete with existing employees for too few jobs.

Higher social security payments would enable people to spend more, to meet their basic needs, and at the same time the extra demand for goods and services would stimulate the economy.

PUBLIC SECTOR-LED RECOVERY

The Communist Party of Australia is calling for a public sector-led recovery. Privatised services such as Telstra, Qantas, the Commonwealth Bank, other key infrastructure, and natural resources should be nationalised. They should be democratically run with a strong social charter. Their priority should be the provision of services for the people, not maximising private profits for their shareholders. Any profits that they did make would then flow to the government's coffers and could be used on social expenditure in the people's interests.

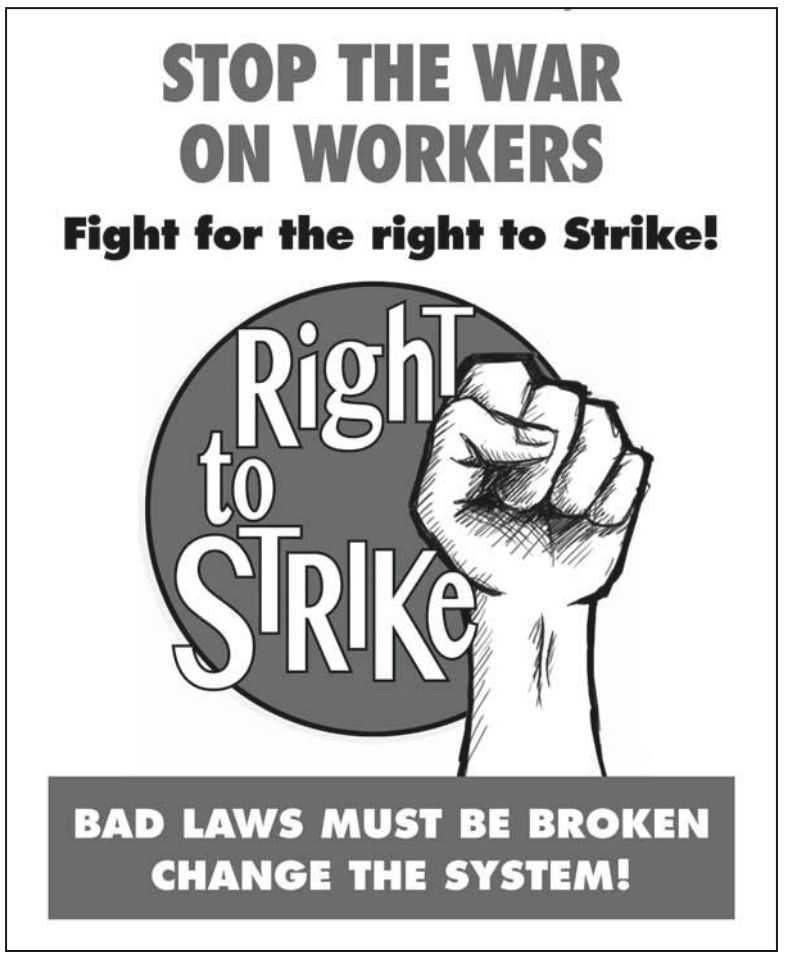
Job creation should be a priority with emphasis on developing a strong manufacturing sector – not manufacturing weapons – but public sector research and the development of renewable energy sources, pharmaceuticals, and other beneficial products. The former would be central to addressing climate change and a rapid and just transition to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions.

Not only would this create jobs, it would provide cleaner and cheaper energy for the people and also for industry. Sections of the private sector have already embarked on green programs, leaving the government behind. Fossil fuel subsidies to the private sector and fossil fuel energy generation must be phased out as quickly as possible.

JobSeeker should be increased by $100 per week and the age pension and other social security payments should also be increased to enable their recipients to live securely with dignity. This would be a recovery for the people.

By cutting out the tax rorts and subsidies for the rich and big business, the government could substantially increase overnight its revenue for use on social spending. The focus here should include public housing, increased funding for public education including fully funding universities and TAFE. The abolition of fees would provide access to higher education for many working-class people.

These are just some of the demands that workers should be fighting for to improve their living standards and those of their families and other members of the community. ✪



Special Appeal Reds go Green

The *Guardian* is running a special appeal with the aim of raising $10,000 for solar panels on the roof. The panels will not only make substantial savings in electricity bills but also put into practice our commitment to a sustainable future.

They involve a substantial cash outlay, but we believe that every measure we can take to reduce carbon emissions is important. It is not enough to preach "green." We must act "green"!

We are looking to *Guardian* readers and CPA members and supporters to assist us with this important project. Every contribution is appreciated, no matter how small or large. Send your contribution today. All contributions will be acknowledged in the *Guardian*.

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Send your contribution to 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010, email info@cpa.org.au or pay by PayPal on cpa.org.au

OP-ED: SCANDALS INC. – LNP COALITION

Eileen Whitehead

It must be something to do with our convict past: a country built upon shonky dealings, dog-eat-dog values, and capitalist ethics (that's an oxymoron)! So, by 2021, our political representatives have made non-accountability into a fine art.

How long has it been since we heard a Coalition Minister mention principles of responsibility, voluntarily reveal facts, or release documents? Does anyone in this government ever admit fault, let alone resign when found out in anything unethical? This government has made sure that the offices and institutions set up to ensure accountability have been degraded to such an extent that they are now impotent.

Let's look at the long list of 'shonky' dealings this government has been involved in so far:

The $423mil in contracts handed to Paladin, in 2017, for asylum-seeker security. What is Paladin? The company was registered to a beach shack on Kangaroo Island with just $50,000 in capital. Paladin received $1,600 per day for each asylum seeker, while guards were being paid $450 per month. The company was making $1.3mil profit per week. Although the company constantly breached its key performance indicators during its first year of operations, Home Affairs Minister Dutton had the government renew its contract several times.

In 2018, $444mil was given to the Great Barrier Reef Foundation – an organisation that, at the time, was just six staff and an annual revenue of about $10mil. No tender process, no plans, or specific objectives. Digging deeper, look at the companies supporting the foundation – BHP, Lendlease, Qantas, with connections to Rio Tinto, Shell, and Peabody Energy on its "Chairman's Panel." What could CSIRO, or the Australian Institute of Marine Science, or the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (with 206 full-time staff), have done with this money?

Better still is the $80mil purchase of water entitlements in 2017. Michael West Media discovered that most of this money ended up with a Cayman Islands company, Eastern Australia Irrigation (EAI), established by Energy Minister Angus Taylor. He was the founder of the Caymans company and both a director and consultant to its Australian Associate EAA, well before the controversial $80mil sale.

In the same year, the government paid Webster Ltd. (an agribusiness giant) $78mil for water entitlements associated with Tandou station in the Lower Darling – more than twice the sum recommended in a valuation it had commissioned, having made no assessment of the availability of water under the licences. It's highly likely there wasn't any water.

It's getting better! The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications' purchase of 12 hectares of land near the proposed Western Sydney Airport. $30mil for land valued at just $3million the year before. The Australian Federal Police are investigating! Case closed?

Then we have the Coalition's enhanced "delegated legislation," a mechanism whereby the government can allocate grants, bypass parliament, and obscure decisions from the public. In 2019 almost $2bil in grants across twenty programs were simply rubber-stamped. In 2020 and 2021, it became $5bil for each year. Hence:

The "Sports Rorts" affair, where public funds for sporting facilities went to electorates to suit Coalition preferences during an election year. I didn't see much in the mainstream media!

This imaginative funding in favour of the Coalition could be seen in the $3bil spent in the Urban Congestion Fund, where eighty-three per cent went into Coalition or marginal Labor seats. Seventy-five per cent of the $3bil spent via the Community Development Grants program, went to Coalition seats.

Eighty per cent of the $150mil Female Facilities and Water Safety Stream program (for women's changing rooms) became earmarked for swimming pools in eleven Liberal and National Party seats. Before the election, the Coalition made forty-one promises, which virtually exhausted the four-year program's funding – all with no tenders, no application processes, and certainly no guidelines.

Then we have funds, such as the Safer Communities – administered "at the discretion" of Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton – and many more, all to the benefit of the Coalition and its mates.

Much of this despicable behaviour can be put down to the fact that any discernible line between government and big business has disappeared. Policies become PR slogans. There is little to no action into the climate emergency because politicians – both Liberal and Labor – receive large donations from the mining corporations. The donations from defence companies has recently seen Morrison declare that Australia will begin to produce its own guided missiles under a $1bil plan to establish a new weapons facility with a global arms manufacturer. The private monopolies in areas such as electricity, roads, and water infrastructure and industries such as property development, gambling, and financial services – all big lobbyists and donors – rely on a friendly regulatory environment provided by their mates in Canberra. Big agricultural firms linked closely to National Party Ministers are defining water policy. We see our Environmental Protection Authority constantly weakened to appease the mining behemoths.

Our democracy and freedoms are being eroded while we become a nation of oligopolies. What is happening in our name is not in our interest. Scott Morrison has made secrecy the cornerstone of executive government: freedom of information has become almost impossible to obtain because the government has relentlessly cut funding to the Australian National Audit Office and to the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner by $14mil in the 2021 budget. Morrison's new Cabinet Office Policy Committee – with him as the only permanent member – is protected by cabinet confidentiality.

We badly need a new and independent national anti-corruption watchdog if we are to have any hope of knowing what is being done in our name. Morrison has stalled because it's the last thing he wants. Senator Jacqui Lambie, commenting – in her inimitable fashion on the proposed Commonwealth Integrity Commission – stated, "It isn't a watchdog. What the government has come up with is 'a lapdog with dentures.'"

The "scandals" listed here are just a few that we know about because the national audit office is badly under-resourced, independent media is underfunded, and the Freedom of Information system has been deliberately weakened. Unfortunately, we're becoming unshockable and apathetic instead of outraged. However, we can't let this attitude set in. We must remain vigilant and expose these shady actions of the government and win the working class in helping us take down these reactionary governments. ✪

REPORT: ABORIGINAL DEATHS IN CUSTODY RALLY – PERTH

Jen Blay

Thursday 15th April on the 30th anniversary of the tabling of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody report, hundreds gathered in Perth CBD to call for an end to the systemic violence and racism that have taken the lives of over 450 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody.

More than 470 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have died in the three decades since the Royal Commission handed down these recommendations. Indigenous people continue to be disproportionately incarcerated, targeted by law enforcement, and stonewalled by the government agencies meant to provide answers.

Families and loved ones of some of the victims delivered passionate testimonies about the pain, heartache, and betrayal they have experienced at the hands of a racist justice system. Deaths that could have been avoided if the 339 recommendations to reform Australia's justice system, including providing incarcerated Aboriginal people with adequate healthcare and improving the relationship between the justice system and Aboriginal communities, were put in place. Thirty years on, many of these recommendations have been ignored and little improvement has been seen in the treatment of Indigenous people within the justice system. How many more needless deaths will result from the reprehensible failure to act on the recommendations?

A strong symbolic act was carried out during the rally with the destruction of a bust of Brother Keaney an ex principal who brutalised aboriginal children at Clontarf orphanage. Channel Nine reported this powerful political action as an act of violence.

There is a compelling need for both the Indigenous people and the working class to recognise the common enemy and to forge ties of understanding and solidarity in the struggles that lie ahead.

Enough is enough. The Communist Party of Australia stands in solidarity with the loved ones of all those killed in custody, and with all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as they continue their struggle for justice and systemic change. We call for the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the Bringing them Home Report.

This always was and always will be Aboriginal land, and our First Nations people deserve justice. ✪

THE END OF THE "ENDLESS WAR"? AUSTRALIA AND THE US WITHDRAW FROM AFGHANISTAN

Valentin Cartillier

After Joe Biden's announcement on 14th April that the United States army will be withdrawing from Afghanistan, Scott Morrison announced the next day that Australia would be following suit. Due to begin on 1st May this year, the complete withdrawal will be finalised by 11th September, bringing to a close the two-decade long, brutal imperialist war. This marks the end of the longest war in US history where 2,400+ US soldiers were killed alongside forty-one Australian soldiers, with tens of thousands more wounded. The cost on the Afghani people has been much greater: 65,000+ security personnel have been killed alongside an estimated 72,000+ Taliban members, and 38,400+ civilians being murdered in the crossfire. This does not take into account the wounded, the psychological damage of survivors, and the destruction of the country's infrastructure.

The financial cost of the war has also been astronomical; the US military has spent over $US 2.26 trillion over the course of the conflict. One doesn't need a particularly strong imagination to think of a better way that money could have been spent. Biden's announcements marked a definitive departure from the policy embraced by four successive US presidential administrations that placed strict conditions on determining how the US might leave Afghanistan. This naturally has caused some panic within the capitalist media and members of the intelligence forces who fear that the Taliban will recapture the country within the next few years.

HISTORY OF THE WAR

Most histories of the conflict begin with the US invasion after the 11th September attacks. However, the roots of the conflict can be traced further back to the Soviet - Afghan war, which also touches on parts of Afghanistan's forgotten socialist history.

The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), a Marxist-Leninist party, came to power in 1978, marking a new era.

Marilyn Bechtel, a journalist with the Communist Party of USA who visited Afghanistan in 1981-1982, reported that she,"saw the beginnings of progress: women working together in handicraft co-ops, where for the first time they could be paid decently for their work and control the money they earned. Adults, both women and men, learning to read. Women working as professionals and holding leading government positions, including Minister of Education. Poor working families able to afford a doctor, and to send their children – girls and boys – to school. The cancellation of peasant debt and the start of land reform. Fledgling peasant cooperatives. Price controls and price reductions on some key foods. Aid to nomads interested in a settled life."

She also saw the push back against the PDPA, recalling "the bitter results of Mujahideen attacks [...] in those years aimed especially at schools and teachers in rural areas."

In the post-1978 era, the Soviet Union increased its economic aid to the PDPA for social projects on a much larger scale. Under the new Afghan-Soviet Treaty, funding for infrastructure vastly increased, allowing for the construction of schools, health services including doctor's clinics and hospitals, mining projects, and agricultural development to flourish in the region. From December 1978, this aid was expanded to include military aid, in the form of troops, at the request of the PDPA, which was at that time combatting displaced warlords who were, according to Bechtel, "aided and organised by the US and Pakistan."

This military involvement would eventually be extend into a decade-long war, with Soviet troops fighting alongside the newly anointed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA), controlled by the PDPA, against the warlords and the Mujahideen. The Mujahideen were not a single organised group, but rather, smaller groups united against the DRA and Soviet troops. These groups were funded in large part by the US, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom (UK) as part of a Cold War proxy war, with the US and Saudi Arabia being the biggest financial backers. Some of the members of these groups would go on to form groups like the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, Osama bin-Laden being the most notorious veteran of this conflict.

After the Soviet withdrawal, the DRA was ousted, and a period of civil war ensued where the Taliban vied for power. While much more could be said about the politics of this period, the US military and financial support of the Mujahideen would eventually come back to haunt them on the 11th of September, 2001. Following this attack by Al-Qaeda, many of them still living or hiding in Afghanistan, then-President George W Bush demanded that the Taliban, who were by then more or less ruling Afghanistan, hand over bin Laden. The Taliban refused to extradite bin Laden without clear evidence of his involvement in the attacks. The US refused and instead launched Operation Enduring Freedom on the 7th of October, 2001 with the UK.

The *Workers' Weekly Guardian* has extensively covered various aspects of the war in Afghanistan throughout its duration. "Graves for US forces in Afghanistan" #1836, "US bases in Afghanistan?" #1593, "Zero troops in Afghanistan is the right number" #1578, "Death Squads in Afghanistan #1453 to name a few.

AUSTRALIA

Morrison, continuing the long history of Australia being the US military's lapdog, announced that the final eighty troops will be withdrawn from the region in line with the US withdrawal deadline.

During this announcement, Morrison stated that "Freedom is always worth it [...] Australians have always believed that." As he choked up reading out the list of the dead soldiers, one was left wondering how our "freedom" ended up in Afghanistan. Was giving up those lives in the name of another US imperialist war really "worth it"?

"Freedom" is just another abstract concept used to advance the US' geopolitical interests in the region which culminated in the wholesale murder of Afghani people and destruction of their country. Morrison also sidestepped the question of Australian troops committing war crimes while in Afghanistan by stating, "there will be time to talk about those things. Today is not that time." One wonders when, if ever, that time will be?

Assistant Defence Minister Andrew Hastie told military personnel, "the ADF's core business will always be the application of lethal violence in the defence of our values, sovereignty and interests. We should never forget that." Hastie, the Liberal MP, who entered Federal Parliament in 2015, previously served in the elite Special Air Service Regiment for five years, including deploying to the war in Afghanistan. He continued, "Mission focus is the foundation of victory. It keeps everyone driving towards a singular purpose."

Liberal backbencher Phillip Thompson echoed his colleague, warning, "we've gone a little bit woke over the past few years, and we can't afford to be doing that" Thompson, who is also a former soldier, stated "Our ADF shouldn't be left or right, they should be straight down the middle of what their job is, and their job is to defend our nation, our interests, our values, our sovereignty, but also when we go on operations, have an unapologetic aggression and violence to get the mission done." Thompson must have been getting his definitions from ASIO, as the ADF cannot be "left or right," it serves the geopolitical interests of the capitalist state.

WHAT NOW?

The withdrawal from Afghanistan poses the question of where the hydra of the US and Australian military-industrial complexes will turn their heads towards next.

While the troops are set to be fully withdrawn, there was no mention of the presence of US and Australian private contractors in the country. Here Biden is pulling a sleight of hand; he's not withdrawing from Afghanistan, he's privatising the war effort. According to the Congressional Research Service.

"For the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2020, US Central Command reported 43,809 contractor personnel working for the Department of Defence within its area of responsibility, which included 27,388 individuals located in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria."

18,000 of them will remain in Afghanistan. Contractors are regularly used alongside the regular army to help to train and mentor security forces, aid in construction projects etc. These contractors are still employed by the US military and can be used at their discretion.

Luna Oi, a Vietnamese communist, very astutely noted on the 15th of April on Twitter that "Odd coincidence that the USA is winding down in Afghanistan just as they're starting a cold war in Asia." Biden stated very clearly this is exactly what the US military would be doing in coming years:

"We have to track and disrupt terrorist networks and operations that spread far beyond Afghanistan since 9/11. We have to shore up American competitiveness to meet the stiff competition we're facing. From an increasingly assertive China, we have to strengthen our alliances and work with like-minded partners to ensure that the rules of international norms ... are grounded in our democratic values, not those of the autocrats"

The military industrial complex perpetuates itself on the model of endless war, hot or cold. It will never cease destabilising whatever region it sees fit for the economic expansion of the global north. It is the ultimate machine for ensuring the domination of capital and has no regard for human life to that end. The endless war will not stop with Afghanistan. ✪

WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!

COMMUNIST PARTY OF AUSTRALIA

MAY DAY 2021

30TH ANNIVERSARY OF ROYAL COMMISSION INTO ABORIGINAL DEATHS IN CUSTODY REPORT

By Valentin Cartillier and reviewed by Djarra Delaney, Quandamooka man and friend.

This article contains a discussion and analysis of a subject that First Nations People might find distressing. It also contains the names of deceased persons.

The 15th of April marks the 30th anniversary of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) report. Far from improving the lives of First Nations people, the situation has only gotten overwhelmingly worse. Over 470 Indigenous Australians have died in custody since the report was released, and some of the recommendations are yet to be implemented. Protests happened across the country to mark the anniversary of the Royal Commission and drew attention to ongoing injustices that have shown no signs of abating. See *Guardian*, "Stop black deaths in custody rally – Sydney," #1957. Five Aboriginal people have died in custody in the last month in Australia.

The RCIADIC contained a total of 339 recommendations to prevent and address Aboriginal deaths in custody which a group of leading Indigenous and social academics have suggested are "misleadingly positive", "have the potential to misinform policy" and are "largely worthless." These criticisms were penned in an open letter by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University, signed by thirty-two academics and one institution – the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research.

One of the findings from the original 1991 Royal Commission was that more Aboriginal people were likely to die in custody partly because they were incarcerated at disproportionate rates. The proportion of people in prisons who are Indigenous has doubled from fourteen per cent in 1991 to almost thirty per cent. Meanwhile, Indigenous Australians make up just three per cent of the Australian population. Indigenous Australians still represent the most incarcerated people on earth, with 2285 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people incarcerated per 100,000 adult population.

Recommendations like recommendation 339, which read in part "political leaders use their best endeavours to ensure bi-partisan public support for the process of reconciliation and that the urgency and necessity of the process be acknowledged." This has given rise to criticisms that the report is largely symbolic and lacks concrete solutions. One of the issues with vague recommendations is the government's ability to implement them partially and take credit for taking heed of the report. It is difficult to say definitively what "the process of reconciliation" is supposed to look like without consultation with First Nations people, and therefore it is difficult to see how, if at all, this will go any way to reducing the numbers of Indigenous deaths in custody.

Teela Reid, a lawyer and Wiradjuri/Wailwan woman sharply draws attention to the historical and structural reasons that continue to perpetuate this problem. She wrote in her article "Aboriginal lives ought to matter not only when we die, but while we are alive," that:

"Aboriginal people deserve peace, not the perpetual pain families of victims now must endure. The systemic erasure of Aboriginal lives, languages and law from our own land is the product of a society founded on genocide. Killing Aboriginal people has always been a by-product of the colonial project; it started with massacres, it persisted with the missionaries, and the remnants of this violent past are manifest in the mass incarceration of Indigenous peoples."

Deaths in custody are inextricably bound up in white Australia's ongoing settler-colonial program and will continue to occur if these structural issues are not addressed. Silence over these matters is complicity.

Alison Whittaker, a Gomeroi poet and legal researcher from Gunnedah in NSW, in her article in *The Conversation*, has also denounced this injustice. Since the 1991 RCIADIC not a single person has been convicted over any of the 470+ deaths in custody. She points out that the officer involved in the death of George Floyd in the US has been charged with third-degree murder, whereas in Australia, the death of David Dungay Jr, a Dunghutti man, has been met with no legal ramifications.

Even the only legal avenue that is open to many families – the coronial inquest – is severely flawed. Whittaker argues that the inquest is a forum that sidelines families, treating their testimony as largely irrelevant if it allows them to be heard at all. This is because an inquest is designed not to place the legal blame on some person – that is a separate proceeding – but only to come to the limited conclusion of how a person died. Even this limited form of justice is sometimes denied when the inquest finds that a death in custody was accidental, even though it was preventable.

The opposition Labor government recently announced a $170mil plan to reduce the number of Indigenous people going to jail. However, as three decades have clearly shown, no government has displayed any degree of competency in handling this issue, let alone all the other issues that plague First Nations People in this country. A Royal Commission has very little use outside of providing comprehensive data on a particular matter. This data has clearly demonstrated how utterly incapable the government is at dealing with these issues. This is glaringly obvious when analysing how the ACT has enacted the recommendations.

The ACT government proudly boasts that it has "implemented ninety-three per cent of recommendations from the Royal Commission" and set up numerous indigenous courts and electoral bodies but, in the same breath, the Attorney-General of the ACT, Shane Rattenbury admitted that "During 2020, First Nations people in the ACT were imprisoned at a rate nineteen times that of the non-indigenous population. This is unacceptable." What is perfectly clear is that the RCIADIC recommendations, even when implemented, do very little to improve the lives of First Nations people. This is not an isolated failure, in fact it gets worse at the national level. A 2018 report by Deloitte Access Economics stated that only around sixty per cent of the royal commission's 339 recommendations have been fully implemented. Not only do the recommendations not work when mostly implemented, they're not even being fully implemented in the first place.

This leaves us with the extremely complex issue of what to do in light of these policy failures. The debates between indigenous people surrounding prison reform vs abolition can be found in the *Guardian* article "Discipline and punish: The over-representation of First Nations People in the judicial system" #1946. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) released a media statement on the 9th of April with ten demands.

They call for:

- The replacement of internal police and prison inquiries with independent investigative bodies to lead inquiries into deaths in custody.
- The reallocation of public funding away from the expansion of the prison industrial complex and violent, punitive policies.
- Use of those funds for better funded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led, grassroots solutions within their communities.

For NATSILS, the key to genuine structural change is "excellent schools, community healthcare and healing programs by and for our people to be funded nationally, and within states and territories." Improvements to the infrastructure of communities better equips future generations to exercise their self-determination. These measures address the immediate problems faced by indigenous communities while laying the foundations for political autonomy from the white settler-colonial state.

The self-determination of First Nations people is one of the first and foremost conditions for emancipation. It involves the concrete ability of Indigenous communities to determine the way they take care of their cultural, social and economic needs. Self-determination cannot meaningfully or concretely exist as a subsection or extension of the already existing bourgeois state. An effective right to self-determination would enable Indigenous communities to root out the structural causes of police violence against them. Importantly, it would demand the autonomy to exclude the police from their communities and to administer their own law and justice on their lands. ✪

The self-determination of First Nations people is one of the first and foremost conditions for emancipation.

CHAUVIN MURDER TRIAL: RACIAL VIOLENCE IS NOT JUST A US ISSUE

Bree Booth

The defence rested this week in the murder trial of Derek Chauvin, the Minneapolis police officer who knelt on George Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes during an arrest in May 2020, resulting in Floyd's death. Floyd was arrested on suspicion of passing a counterfeit $20 bill. On Thursday, Chauvin refused to testify in his own defence, and the defence rested their case. The jury returned a verdict after just ten hours of deliberation on Tuesday - guilty on all charges.

George Floyd's death sparked mass protests against ongoing police brutality and racial injustice in the United States. The brutal arrest and killing were captured by a bystander in a video that has been so widely circulated many are wondering aloud why there needed to be a murder trial for a murder which everybody saw. The movement quickly spread worldwide, including to Australia, where hundreds gathered around the country to march in Indigenous-led actions against ongoing violence against Indigenous Australians. One of the key issues here was ongoing deaths in custody. This week marked the 30th Anniversary of the Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Since the report was issued in 1991, more than 470 Indigenous Australians have died in custody.

The mainstream Australian media is becoming increasingly US-centric. Whether or not this is a deliberate attempt to divert attention from our own national issues, this has been the unfortunate result. Chauvin's trial has been reported on by almost every major news network in the country. Because this issue is so central in our national consciousness, it is important that we now focus on the links between what is happening this week in the United States and what happens here in Australia every day.

For every op-ed asking "could it happen here?" the answer is resounding, and it is obvious: Indigenous activists have been consistently mobilising to drive the point home that not only can it happen here, it does – every day. Systemic violence towards black and brown people is not unique to the United States but is central to the logic of industrial capitalism. Racist rhetoric teaches white people to fear the non-white other while obscuring the reality that our oppressors are not racial minorities but the bourgeoisie, whose accumulation of wealth and constant drive for endless growth crush the working class under their oppressive weight.

In *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin argued that at the turn of the twentieth century capitalism had "grown into a world system of colonial oppression and of the financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of the population of the world by a handful of 'advanced' countries." Capitalism depends for its profits and growth on a class of people whose labour can be cheaply exploited. But we can sometimes forget in our analysis that this class has historically not exclusively been the white working class who can demand from the state certain conditions on their labour. More often, the brunt of capitalist exploitation has fallen on racial minorities, whom the white working class has been taught to fear.

In a "postcolonial" world, the exploitation of labour has been pushed offshore to the countries of the global south. Big corporations in the wealthy developed nations of the world outsource their production to developing countries where labour costs are much cheaper, increasing their profit margin. And yet, the colonial legacy of violence remains. The "financial strangulation" which Lenin referred to is maintained by overt force against the colonised. Frantz Fanon put it most eloquently in *The Wretched of the Earth* when he said, "In the colonial countries, on the contrary, the policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct action maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle butts and napalm not to budge. It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force."

Racial minorities, we're taught, are fundamentally different to "us," and therefore, the state which upholds "our" values do not have to listen to them. They can be exploited, killed, brutalised, and oppressed without consequence.

We see the consequences of this racialised violence in the fact that Indigenous Australians, who make up just three per cent of our population, represent fourteen per cent of the prison population. We see it in the fact that over 470 lives have been lost in custody and countless others destroyed, all in the shadow of a Royal Commission into deaths in custody. We see it in the United States where hundreds of African-American people, particularly young men, are killed at the hands of the police, but where their killers are almost never brought to justice.

The reasons why a state might choose to hold a four-week murder trial for a murder that was so widely publicised is just as telling as the reasons why a state might not bring a case to trial at all. It has been said that this particular trial was a strategic attempt to keep up the appearance that the state is taking action on this issue and to offset simmering tensions in the community. If this is the case, we mustn't be fooled. Much more work is needed, especially at home in Australia, to bring real and lasting change on the issue of racial justice.

A trial or an inquest, as is held when a person dies in custody, is held up as a tool of justice, but Gomeroi legal scholar Alison Whittaker argues that they can also be sites of "administrative violence." Families of the deceased are often sidelined in the process - they cannot represent or advocate for their loved one in the same way that a legal representative might. They do not have a sense of autonomous control over the direction of the proceedings.

Although the coroner is supposed to be independent, an inquest into a death in custody is essentially an instance of the state investigating and reflecting on its own processes. There is no room in this analysis for the kinds of justice families are often looking for. Indeed, the report of the Royal Commission found that inquests "merely reflected the inadequacies of perfunctory police investigations and did little more than formalise the conclusions of police investigators."

This silencing is strongly felt by families, both inside the courtroom and outside of it, whose loved ones have been killed at the hands of the police. In June last year, George Floyd's brother, Philonise Floyd, unable to find justice from his own government, called on the UN to intercede on his brother's behalf. "When people try to raise their voices to protest the treatment of black people in America, they are silenced." This is what it took to bring International attention to the issue and to generate the pressure to bring this case to trial.

As we mark the passing of the 30th Anniversary of the Deaths in Custody Report this week, and as we watch the trial of George Floyd's killer draw to a close, we recognise that these are not isolated incidents. They are not unique within the countries where they happen and they are not unique to the countries where they happen. Racist violence is a product of the imperialist expansion of capitalism and it is baked into the culture of colonial nations. One guilty verdict does not put an end to the struggle – it only marks the beginning. ✪

Find out more about the
Communist Party of Australia
web **www.cpa.org.au**

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MYANMAR?

Jan Dieles

The situation in Myanmar is complicated.

Such a statement should be entirely obvious. Yet, the fact (or rather, an immense bundle of facts) it represents is pointedly glossed over by mainstream media coverage.

We are given a picture where there is a pure and straightforward struggle happening in Myanmar, between good and evil – Aung San Suu Kyi, her party, and allies; and the military (known as the Tatmadaw), respectively. In certain senses, this interpretation is close to reality: the Tatmadaw is certainly irredeemable from any angle, and Aung San Suu Kyi is the figurehead of the existing mass movement against their rule. But there are considerably more forces at play which should make us consider our attitude more carefully.

What are we Australians being asked to think or do about the situation in Myanmar by our bourgeois media? The answer is twofold. Firstly, we are being primed to accept or support a possible future US-backed intervention in Myanmar and accept the threat of such a thing as normal. Secondly, we are being told to interpret this conflict in terms of the new Cold War the US wishes to conduct against China.

Are either of these reasonable? Are either of these acceptable? No, and no. It should be quite obvious that answering a flat no to these questions is correct and in no way contradictory to a firm position of condemning the Tatmadaw and its coup, at least in the Australian context. Yet, the public discourse surrounding the issue is so deliberately stunted that, somehow, this is not obvious.

The area that is now Myanmar has been home to many ethnic groups, cultures, and states for centuries. In stages over the course of the 19th century, repeated British invasions eventually led to its complete incorporation into British India until in 1937, it was declared the separate colonial territory of Burma. The British rule of Burma was especially cruel even by British standards. When Japan invaded it during WW2, many in the independence movement sought to leverage the Japanese occupation in order to guarantee freedom from the British Empire. While the British briefly regained nominal control after the war, their colonial institutions had been sufficiently weakened, and the independence movement sufficiently advanced that complete independence was won by 1948.

Aung San, the father of Aung San Suu Kyi, was recognised as the figurehead of this independence movement. A crucial achievement in the lead-up to establishing independent Burma was the Panglong Agreement, reached between Aung San's government and representatives of some of the ethnic minority peoples who constitute a considerable amount of the population and territory of Burma (the exact statistics are hotly disputed). This agreement lay the basis for ethnic minority self-determination and autonomy within the state.

However, Aung San was assassinated in 1947 before he could see the country's independence realised. Within a year, civil war broke out, and disagreements over the principles and implementation of the Panglong Agreement became a major factor in escalating tensions, resulting in the formation of many ethnic minority rebel armies and a sharp increase in Burman/Bamar ethnocentric ideology in the military. The military took over in a 1962 coup and ruled without restriction – that is, over the areas not held by the dozens of warring rebel groups, including to this day – until limited democratic reforms were won starting in 2011. The coup of February this year has undone these reforms in one stroke.

The Tatmadaw dictatorship has carried out massive human rights violations against all the peoples of Myanmar, but the ongoing genocide against the Rohingya people and the consequent refugee crisis have gained the most international attention.

Aung San Suu Kyi became a major figure during the anti-military uprising in 1988, becoming the leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD). She was repeatedly arrested by the military government, spending the majority of the period 1988-2011 under house arrest. Over this period, she became an almost mythical figure both within Myanmar and the Western media.

However, many were disappointed (to put it very charitably) by her performance after coming into office as State Counsellor in 2016 after a landslide NLD victory in the 2015 election. Particularly egregious was that she not only refused to acknowledge or condemn the military's genocide against the Rohingya people, she even spoke in their defence at the International Criminal Court in 2019. While some claimed that this is solely the result of coercion by the Tatmadaw, this explanation weakens the logic of the myth surrounding her as their fearless, principled opponent. Furthermore, she began to develop neoliberal-style reforms that would open the country up to exploitation by foreign companies – the number one interest of the US in Myanmar.

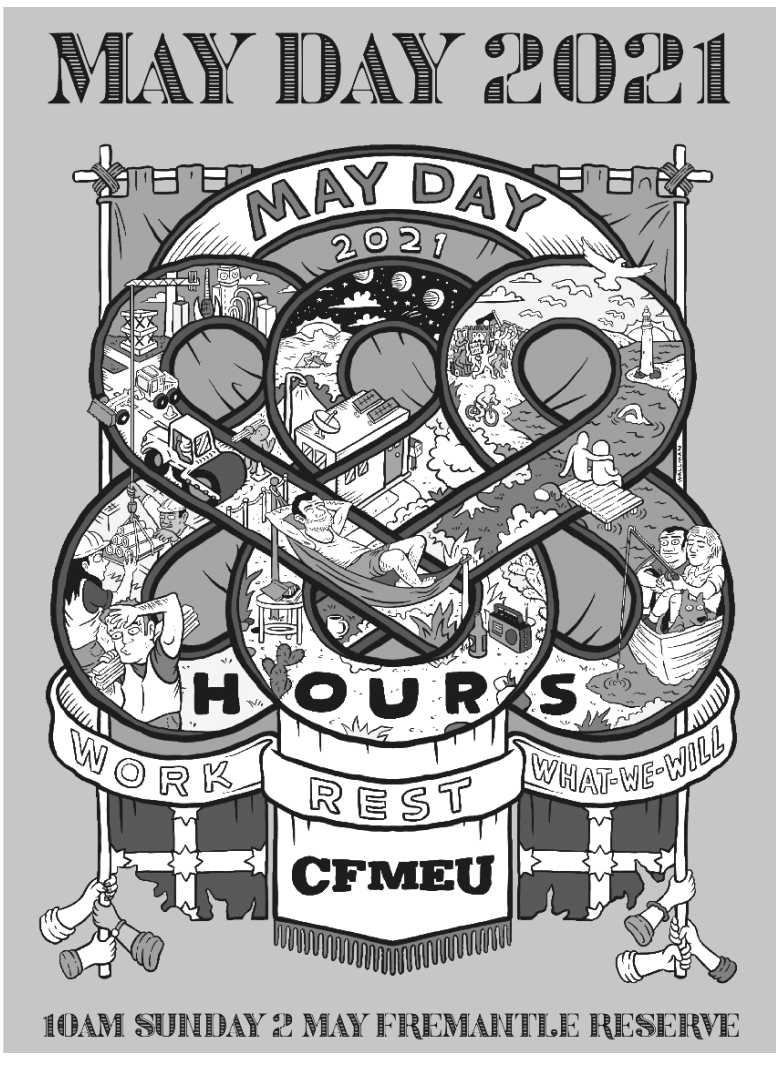
This brief rundown of a thin slice of the history is here an exercise in futility. These few snippets do not even begin to tell the whole story, and that itself is really the only point that can be well made here.

To develop an informed view on the internal struggle within Myanmar, we must presuppose enough relevant shared knowledge on the country at hand. This goes the same for any country – Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, so on. Yet the mainstream media in our country is always trying to compel us to accept a particular interpretation, which, even more ridiculously it's always one that includes the presumption of our right to judge, interfere, invade.

Can Western news outlets be faulted just for not giving a complete picture of the subtleties of Myanmar? No, because to achieve such a thing is well outside the scope of any newspaper article. The fault is utilising these limitations to push simple answers that are deeply harmful. Again, these are: Western intervention, up to and including military intervention, might be a good choice; and we (read: the US) represent what is good, and China represents what is bad in this situation, as in all others.

In line with the Cold War mentality, all conflicts in the world are indirectly explained as US vs China, and so the false claim is put forward that China supports the military coup in Myanmar. This is a complete fabrication only justified by the fact that China refuses to respond in the same way as the pro-US interventionist camp and instead continues to apply the same principles it does to all countries, including multilateralism and non-interference. China is also wise to the US' real intentions for Myanmar. Further complicating the picture, separatist groups in Taiwan have begun aggressively promoting anti-China propaganda in Myanmar. This includes some networks under the banner of "Milk Tea Alliance," which has also become active in Australia.

It would be a mistake to conclude that a US military intervention is certain or even likely to materialise, but its threat is being used as a tool, and this must be opposed. The working people of Myanmar, not anyone else, will be the ones to win freedom for Myanmar. ✪



MAY DAY IN MELBOURNE 2021

May Day is celebrated as international workers day across the world.

This year, after being held online during the height of the pandemic in 2020, May Day 2021 is back on the streets.

MAY DAY EVENTS

AT THE 8HR MONUMENT

On Thursday 29th of April at 5pm, Victoria St. opposite the Trades Hall Council.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY EVENT

Also on Thursday 29th of April at 6pm at the Trades Hall.

MAY DAY MARCH AND SPEAKERS PLATFORM

On Sunday 2nd of May, assembling at 1.30 pm, outside Trades Hall and beginning the march through the city at 2pm, then returning to the Trades Hall for further speakers.

Any other activities for May Day will be notified as required.

SILENCE OVER THE PACIFIC: JAPAN'S RADIOACTIVE DUMPING GROUND

Casey Davidson

Ten years after the Fukushima nuclear disaster, Japan's government prepares to release radioactive wastewater from the power plant into the Pacific Ocean. While the West remains problematically quiet on this matter of international environmental concern, countries in the region such as China, South Korea, North Korea, as well as notable international environmental organisation Greenpeace, have strongly condemned the decision. Many Japanese citizens have taken to the streets with concerns not only for the short and long-term environmental effects but also for the local fisheries industry.

In March, the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Protection Agency (ARPANSA) marked the tenth anniversary of the Fukushima accident. However, it has been completely silent on the announcement of the toxic water being released. Nothing has been reported from the Morrison government on the issue, and barely a word from the Murdoch press.

This stands in strong contrast to the condemnation of environmental issues in neighbouring China, such as smog from factories polluting major cities. And although China has been reliant on coal to provide electricity to its immense population, the push towards sustainable alternatives has been exceedingly effective and significantly reduced its carbon footprint. *Global Times* columnist Li Qingqing argues that "for many Western elites, their so-called environmental concern ... is just an ideological tool for them to suppress rival countries."

Curiously, Western institutions would ignore the dumping of 1.23mil tonnes of water with radioactive properties, particularly Carbon-14, which has been linked to causing physical and mental defects as well as stillbirths and childhood deaths – and has a half-life of 5700 years. Li explains that "Japan's radioactive wastewater may remain dangerous for thousands of years and may even cause human DNA changes." It will also affect marine life across the Pacific, even as far as the coasts of the United State and Canada.

Professor of Marine Conservation Biology at the University of Alaska, Rick Steiner has expressed his embarrassment as an American and an environmental scientist that his government has not stepped up and weighed in on this issue, warning that "we are all downstream." The move to dump it in the Pacific Ocean will not only affect Japan, and so should be of concern for nations across the world.

The private company at the forefront of this issue is the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) which constructed and operated the Fukushima nuclear plant which exploded after a 9.0-magnitude earthquake triggered a tsunami and flooded the reactors in 2011.

Steiner described that although some may argue it was just an accident, engineers should have been able to envision a potential hazard by the location of the auxiliary generators. When the generators were down, they were unable to pump the cooling water, which led to the explosion and the leaking of radioactive materials, and the evacuation of more than 150,000 people.

Regardless of the extremely dire consequences of poor engineering, including the spending of trillions of dollars, and tremendous environmental impacts, TEPCO has remained responsible for the clean up. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has made a statement that "the water disposal method is both technically feasible and in line with international practice." According to Japanese Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso, the treated radioactive water is "okay to drink."

China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian has responded, "As for [his] remarks that the water is okay to drink, why doesn't he take a sip first?" Director of the Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs in China, Ma Jun, insists that TEPCO has lost its credibility and does not deserve the public trust.

It is concerning that the reason for the release is related to running out of storage space, rather than adequate data provided to the international community. The research on the water quality is based on studies conducted through TEPCO, however Sun Yuliang, a nuclear expert at Tsinghua University in Beijing, suggested that the decision should depend on an authoritative scientific assessment to determine whether the processed radioactive water meets international standards for release.

TEPCO continues to pay reparations to Japanese workers in the fishing industry, although the move to dump this wastewater

will again affect the already tainted reputation of their produce, as consumers will be unlikely to choose to buy seafood from around Fukushima. Concerned citizens are fighting back by taking to the streets and petitioning to stop the release. According to a poll of 31,035 on Yahoo Japan, 41.5 per cent disagreed with the plan.

As Australia is a nation with a vested interest in a clean Pacific, it is irresponsible to remain silent on this issue. It may take the rest of the century to deal with the Fukushima disaster, but the alternative could be much worse. If Australia remains critical of environmental problems elsewhere, it makes no sense to ignore this decision purely because Japan is consistent with Western political views.

Steiner believes that the global community can no longer afford to dump waste in the oceans in the same way they did in the 20th century. He suggests "we need to set aside geo-political arguments and come together to find realistic decisions as an international community" and that "we all have a collective responsibility for a global raising-of-our-standards for reducing pollution and reducing climate change." ✪

LULA CLEARED TO RUN AGAINST BOLSONARO AFTER SUPREME COURT RULING

Former Brazilian president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is clear to run against Jair Bolsonaro in next year's presidential election as the Supreme Court upheld a verdict annulling his corruption convictions.

The majority decision came on Thursday after Supreme Court Justice Edson Fachin determined in early March that the lower federal court where Lula was tried had lacked jurisdiction.

The defeat of the subsequent appeal by Brazil's top prosecutor was branded historic by Lula's lawyers.

"This is another Supreme Court ruling that re-establishes the credibility of the justice system in our country," they said in a statement.

The ruling appeared to have rattled Bolsonaro, who said that "Lula is now a candidate for 2022" even though the former trade union leader had yet to announce his candidacy.

"Look what Brazil's future is going to be, with the kind of people he'd bring into the presidency," the president said during a live address on Facebook. "You can all draw your own conclusions."

The verdict came as the far-right leader faces intense pressure over his handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Supreme Court voted 10-1 on Wednesday to allow a senate investigation into his management of the crisis, with impeachment also a growing threat.

Indigenous leaders have also formally requested that the International Criminal Court investigate Bolsonaro, alleging that the president has committed crimes against humanity.

More than 365,000 Brazilians have died of Covid-19, which was notoriously described by Bolsonaro as "a little flu."

By contrast, Lula has described the Covid-19 pandemic as "the biggest genocide in our history" and warned that "Brazil will not withstand it if this man continues to govern in this way," describing the president's approach as "imbecilic."

Lula was jailed in 2018 on corruption charges stemming from Operation Car Wash, an investigation which targeted Brazilian business leaders, politicians, and wealthy individuals.

His imprisonment meant that he was barred from standing in the 2018 election which was won by Bolsonaro.

But recordings leaked in 2019 appeared to show collusion between the chief prosecutor in the case and judge Sergio Moro, who was then appointed as justice minister in Bolsonaro's first cabinet.

Polls ahead of the October 2022 election have predicted a tight contest, with some already showing Lula in the lead.

Morning Star ✪

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RAÚL CASTRO PASSES BATON TO NEXT GENERATION

W T Whitney Jr

Former Cuban President Raúl Castro retired from his last major public office this weekend, standing down as First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba at its eighth congress.

Castro had first come to worldwide notice in 1953, when he, his brother Fidel, and other young rebels attacked the Batista dictatorship's Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba.

In his report to the congress this weekend, sixty-eight years since the Moncada raid, Castro spoke of the "historic generation" and the handover to "new generations" of Cuban Communists.

"I have the satisfaction," he declared, "that we are handing over the country's leadership to a group of prepared leaders, hardened by decades of experience as they moved from the base to maximum responsibilities, committed to the ethics and principles of the Revolution and socialism."

Delegates to the Eighth Congress voted Monday on new members of the Communist Party of Cuba's Central Committee, its top leadership body between congresses. Elected to succeed Castro is current Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, who will now also serve as the party's new first secretary. Salvador Valdés Mesa will serve as second secretary.

The eighth congress took place April 16-19 at the Conventions Palace in Havana. Because of precautions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, only 300 delegates representing 700,000 party members attended. In 2016, a total of 1,000 delegates were present at the Seventh Congress.

This year's congress coincided with two anniversaries: Cuba's Bay of Pigs victory 60 years ago over US-sponsored counter-revolutionaries and Fidel Castro's declaration of the socialist nature of Cuba's Revolution.

Provincial Party Committees met on March 4 to elect delegates to the congress. Gathering on March 15-20 in their own localities, delegates discussed and "introduced significant modifications" to documents intended for debate at the congress.

In opening remarks on the congress's first day, José Ramón Machado Ventura, the outgoing second secretary of the party's Central Committee, said, "The party is a guarantee of national unity and the synthesis of the ideals of dignity, social justice, and independence of generations of patriots."

Raúl Castro, fulfilling his final duty as first secretary, presented the congress's main report on opening day. With 11,971 words, it ranged widely. Castro highlighted contributions of the armed forces (he had previously headed Cuba's military), the tourist industry disaster due to COVID-19 travel disruptions, the challenges of managing the pandemic, the "re-ordering" economic changes and conversion to a single currency, the US economic blockade, US interventions in Latin America, European complicity with the blockade, and Cuba's solidarity with other socialist countries and with Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Puerto Rico.

He noted achievements such as the new Cuban Constitution of 2019, legislation and administrative actions to improve the "functioning and organisation" of governmental agencies, success in responding to the pandemic, domestic development of five anti-COVID vaccine candidates, and resistance to "a resurgent [US] economic blockade." He applauded "27,000 new Party members and growth of the Young Communist Union."

Castro reviewed recommendations expected from key commissions holding forth at the congress. Doing so, he criticised "excess bureaucracy," "the dangerous phenomenon of corruption," demands by "some professionals" to enter the private sector, subversion of "the socialist principle of a state monopoly of foreign trade," "inadequate policies of social communication," and more.

He recommended "greater dynamism in putting the economic and social model into effect," consolidation of investments, strengthening the state sector of the economy – "indispensable for sustaining a socialist economy" – and "a real shift in mentality toward support for increased national production, especially food production."

Castro insisted party members "have to erase the dangerous notion, reflecting paternalism and egalitarianism, that Cuba is the only country where one can live without working."

Referring to the "guidelines" on the economy approved by the previous party congress, Castro reported that this Congress would maintain 17 of them, modify 165, dispose of 92, and add 18 new ones.

The former president also remarked that "unity of the immense majority of Cubans and the work and ideals of the Revolution has been our basic strategic weapon for successfully confronting any threat or aggression." He called for revitalising the Communist Party's work with mass organisations and "defense of the Revolution at the base, in factories, on farms, in neighbourhoods, in the struggle against crime and lack of social discipline."

The rest of the congress's first day and the entire next day were devoted to three commissions deliberating separately. Each would discuss, alter, and approve a set of draft resolutions previously considered by provincial party committees.

Former Cuban President Raúl Castro.

The Economic and Social Commission reviewed draft resolutions on continuing implementation of the Guidelines for economic and political change approved by the Seventh Party Congress in 2016. That commission divided into three work teams. Another commission had to do with party functioning, ideological work, and ties with the Cuban people. A third commission dealt with members of the party referred to as "cadres."

On the third day of the congress, leaders of the three commissions presented three sets of results from their meetings to a plenary session. In each case, resolutions had been discussed and approved, and final approval by the congress itself was being sought.

Prime Minister Manuel Marrero Cruz headed the first commission, which considered aspects of implementing the previously established guidelines. Reporting to the plenary, he discussed commission findings and asked for approval of resolutions to fix deficiencies. These included recommendations to strengthen economic management, especially in the state business sector; solve structural economic problems; consolidate the recently-introduced initiative of monetary and social-service reordering; continue the development of science, technology, and innovation; bolster social justice under new conditions; improve people's living conditions, and make consumer goods more widely available. The congress gave unanimous approval.

The party's second secretary, José Ramón Machado Ventura, presided over the commission on the party functioning. He too, presented discussion results and asked for approval of resolutions. They centered on: strengthening ideological consensus, tying the party to the masses at all levels, reaching out to new generations, thinking and acting on behalf of the country with "commitment, firmness, creativity, and intelligence," relying on the most advanced revolutionary thought, Cuban and universal; growing the party, and strengthening ties to the Union of Young Communists and young people in general. The delegates' approval was, again, unanimous.

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, leader of the commission on cadres, likewise submitted the results of discussion to the congress. He too, asked for and received approval of resolutions. Their main themes included: consolidation of the role of leadership formations and organisations at the party's base; greater ideological grounding; streamlined processes for selecting and developing cadres; adding efficiency to work with youth; staying strong against corruption; investigating modes of leadership and interaction with cadres; development of a system for preparing cadres; and reinforcement of cadres' social image.

Endorsing the election of Díaz-Canel to succeed him, Castro said, the new leader is "not the fruit of improvisation but of the thoughtful selection of a young revolutionary who has all that is required to be promoted to higher positions."

And though he is vacating the top leadership position in the party, Castro gave no signal he was stepping away from the struggle to build socialism in Cuba. "As long as I live," he said, "I will be ready with my foot in the stirrup to defend the homeland, the revolution, and socialism with more force than ever.

People's World

ATTEMPTS TO TOPPLE, KILL BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT FOILED

Xinhua

The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) said Saturday that it had detained two members of the Belarusian opposition who were plotting a military coup, including assassination, against Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.

US and Belarusian citizen Yuri Zyankovich and Belarusian citizen Alexander Feduta met secretly with so-called "Belarusian generals" at a Moscow restaurant to discuss details of the coup scheduled on May 9, when a Victory Day parade will be held in Minsk.

With the involvement of Belarusian and Ukrainian nationalists, the radicals planned a "colour revolution" with measures including assassinating Lukashenko, seizing radio and television stations, and shutting down electricity to hinder the actions of law enforcement.

Before the meeting in Moscow, Zyankovich went to the United States and Poland for consultations, according to the FSB.

After documenting the secret meeting, Russian security agencies detained the conspirators and handed them over to Belarusian counterparts.

Global Times

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