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COVID CRISIS IN OUTBACK NSW: INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AT RISK

B Curphey

The COVID crisis deepened this week as New South Wales began recording over 800 cases a day, and regional Victoria went back into lockdown. State governments are scrambling to contain the Delta variant, but it doesn't seem to be working. Case numbers in both Victoria and New South Wales continue to rise, leaving many scared and frustrated.

In NSW, the issue is partly a factor of geography. New South Wales spans over 801,000 square kilometres and has the largest population in the country. But geography also seems to be providing a convenient smokescreen for the "out of sight, out of mind" approach of the NSW state government to some of its most at risk residents: Indigenous people living in remote communities in the far west of the state.

Recent data from the federal government shows that, as of the 15th of August this year, just twenty-nine per cent of Australia's eligible Indigenous population have received one dose of COVID vaccine, falling well behind the forty-seven per cent national average. For those who have received two doses, the number is fifteen per cent compared to a national average of twenty-five per cent. In western NSW, this number is an abysmal eight per cent.

Meanwhile, the virus is tearing through remote and regional communities in New South Wales with high Indigenous populations such as Dubbo, Broken Hill, Wilcannia, and Walgett. In the latter town, on Wailwan country, there are just four hospital beds to accommodate the town's 6,000 residents, of whom thirty per cent are Indigenous.

As *Al Jazeera* so succinctly phrased it, the outbreak in New South Wales is a "crisis within a crisis" for Indigenous Australians. Many remote communities in outback NSW are under-resourced and poverty stricken, and these problems are compounded for Indigenous inhabitants.

Chronic housing shortages, poverty and poor health outcomes make the virus particularly dangerous for the Indigenous populations in these remote towns. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that life expectancy for Indigenous people is around ten years lower than that of the rest of the Australian population and they are at higher risk of a number of diseases.

There is also a chronic shortage of housing in remote communities meaning that many Indigenous people in such communities live in crowded conditions, often with their entire extended family. Not only that, outback NSW is home to some of the poorest postcodes in the country, with some of the highest rates of unemployment. For example, just 93 km to the east of Walgett lies Australia's poorest postcode, Burren Junction, where the average income is $9,735 per year.

Dubbo Mayor Stephen Lawrence summed it up best when he said:

"Lockdowns mean different things to people living in a nice house in the city to those in the country living with large family groups in crowded housing estates."

Lack of access to adequate pandemic protections in remote NSW has implications far beyond its borders. Towns like Mildura, on the Victorian side of the Victoria-NSW border, fear that the "border bubble" may mean cases in NSW are able to cross the border. Although it is 300 km to the south, Mildura is the closest major town to Broken Hill (on Wiljali country), where the most recent regional outbreak occurred.

On Thursday, the *Sunraysia Daily* reported that the Mallee District Aboriginal Service (MDAS), would have unlimited Pfizer vaccines to vaccinate the Mildura community and surrounds in an effort to provide a buffer against the NSW outbreak. Similar efforts are ongoing along the border, with the Victorian government diverting more resources to regional centres.

It is no answer to try to contain the virus by putting a hard border between Victoria and New South Wales. Many remote communities in western NSW depend on Victorian border towns for vital supplies. Towns like Wentworth, on Barkindji country 30 km north of Mildura, depend on access to larger towns on the Victorian side of the border for healthcare and amenities that are unavailable or much harder to access in the outback. The border bubble is vital for the continued survival of remote communities. Such a measure would only compound the lack of access to resources in far west NSW.

Part of the reason for poor vaccination outcomes among Indigenous people in western NSW is poor messaging around the safety of vaccines. You don't have to look very far afield to see that this hesitancy has leaked into all sectors of the population. Over the weekend of 21-22 August, violent anti-lockdown protests erupted in both Melbourne and Sydney, with a vocal proportion of attendees voicing concern over the safety of vaccines. But in the outback, the problem isn't just hesitancy, it's a lack of resources, coupled with systemic racism, discrimination in access to healthcare for Indigenous Australians.

First Nations elders have been urgently calling on the NSW government for more nurses, PPE, resources for housing and isolation and above all, more vaccines. It took until Saturday 21, after NSW had recorded up to 670 cases per day, when seventy armed forces personnel were sent out to enforce lockdowns and oversee vaccination in these towns (for a discussion of the problems inherent in over-policing of COVID restrictions in working class communities see the editorial in *Guardian* #1973 "Working Class Over-Policed, While The Rich Enjoy Freedom").

But as one community elder in the town of Wilcanna, on Danggali country, has said, isolating at home makes no sense in the conditions that most of these communities face.

Long term resources and infrastructure are needed to address the underlying disadvantages that put Indigenous people at a higher risk of contracting the virus: more housing, more hospital beds and staff, better access to healthcare services, and better employment opportunities.

The Communist Party of Australia calls upon all state and federal governments, but especially the NSW state government, to act immediately to provide long-term structural support to remote and regional communities. Indigenous Australians are one of the most at risk groups in this pandemic. Outback communities urgently need healthcare infrastructure, adequate housing, PPE, vaccine supplies and healthcare staff. There is no quick fix in this situation. From Double Bay to Wilcannia, healthcare is a human right and should be made freely available to all. ✪

Isolating at home makes no sense in the conditions that most of these communities face.

3

Australia fails the Pacific islands

4

Stolen Generations, art & healing through truth

6

Djibouti Africa – its international significance

9

The next step in the building of socialism

Guardian
Issue 1976 30th August, 2021

BREAST SCREENING NOT SEEN AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE

The flow-on effects of NSW's current pandemic have revealed themselves in yet another way. Earlier this month, BreastScreen mammogram appointments across New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory have been postponed as centres have closed due to the Coronavirus outbreak. There is no indication when breast screening centres will reopen.

Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA) Director Policy & Advocacy Vicki Durston raised concerns about the impact this policy decisions would have stating, "We acknowledge that every effort needs to be made to keep communities safe but breast cancer won't wait for COVID, closing routine screening programs will delay early detection, diagnosis and potentially lifesaving treatment."

Professor Bruce Mann, Surgeon and BCNA Board Member also raised concerns about delaying mammograms saying, "When a person finds a lump or sees changes in their breast, assessments and tests are key to finding out whether it's benign or whether it's a tumour that could be aggressive and quickly become harder to treat. These assessments need to be done urgently to give women, and men, the best chance of recovery."

However, NSW and ACT governments have backed the decision with NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard stating: "It's a matter of weighing up relative risk to patients and staff." Sarah Mogford, Canberra Health Services executive director of cancer and ambulatory support claimed the decision was made for safety reasons. Mogford ensured breast screening reminder letters would continue to be processed, and those who cancelled appointments will be rebooked as a priority.

But Durston doesn't think that risk is being assessed properly, saying, "We want a balanced approach and we want BreastScreen considered as an essential service."

Durston is right: Mammographs should be treated as the essential service they are. While Mogford spoke to her government as being proactive on the issue, we have seen such efforts (e.g. reminder letters) not ensure pre-COVID results.

In 2020, BCNA's analysis of cancer notifications in Victoria found a ten per cent reduction of cancer diagnoses due to the impact of the COVID-19 restrictions – this included a temporary closure of BreastScreen Victoria services. BCNA is concerned that the same results could be seen in NSW due to these closures and lockdown orders.

The Radiation Therapy Advisory Group (RTAG) found similar results. RTAG states that between January and June last year, about 145,000 fewer screening mammograms were conducted compared to 2018.

It is not surprising that our governments don't see mammographs as a priority because women, in many ways, are still treated as second-class citizens. We have seen how the Liberal Party has responded to sexual assault claims within its own ranks by failing to act in decisive ways that support victims. The health of women in this country should not be sacrificed when many non-essential services are still running. If any place is equipped to handle mammographs in a COVID-safe way its our hospitals and clinics. Governments, at the state, territory, and federal levels, need to develop policy so that screening can resume as soon as possible, in a COVID-safe way, to ensure that women are healthy and cancer-free.

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TWENTY YEARS OF OCCUPATION OF AFGHANISTAN: CRASS IMPERIALISM AND A HUMANITARIAN DISASTER

The withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan has ended with the same Taliban forces taking over even larger parts of the country than they controlled before the occupation. The swiftness with which the US-installed puppet government of Ashraf Ghani fell discredits any excuse that had been presented to justify this war.

Twenty years of occupation has seen tens of thousands of Afghan civilian deaths and even more displaced, forty-three Australian military force deaths, 500 Australian veteran suicides, and cost the Australian people a war bill of more than $9 bill. The Australian public are left grappling to make sense of what is a classic example of crass and brutal imperialism.

The current US administration has declared that "nation building" in Afghanistan was never the aim. The primary declared motivation to invade and occupy Afghanistan was the US-led "war on terror." Former Prime Minister John Howard, who led Australia into this illegal war, has also publicly agreed. And yet today we have the Taliban, whose track record has been nothing but terrorism, declaring government in Afghanistan.

Al-Qaeda, and other linked and like-minded groups, also continue to operate. In fact, the US administration made agreements with the Taliban last year in the Doha talks, which included the release of captured Taliban, lifting of sanctions against them and ultimately has led to the current takeover by them. The Taliban in return has promised to not harbour any forces that might attack the US and its allies or damage their economic interests. How this plays out remains to be seen.

Not only is this fiasco a total foreign policy failure, the damage to entire nations and several generations of humans and the decades-long meddling in the internal affairs of Afghanistan are another crime against humanity by US-led imperialism.

The "war on terror" has provided an excuse to erode civil and democratic rights across western nations. Internationally agreed war legalities have been bypassed. This has heightened the threat of terrorism rather than reduced it.

The Australian government since 2001 has passed more than 70 bills that override the civil and democratic rights of its citizens. In addition, the very means by which Australia enters US-led wars is completely undemocratic, bypassing the Australian Parliament and hence the Australian people's aspirations. Both major parties, Labor and Liberal, have opposed any change to this undemocratic decision-making process.

While this is an unimaginable humanitarian disaster, there have been those who have benefitted greatly: the military-industrial complex and multinational corporations. The profits and share-prices of the likes of Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Raytheon, and Northrop Grumman have sky-rocketed in these same years.

The occupation of Afghanistan, supported by Australia, has been twenty years of pillaging and rapacious looting of the minerals and natural resources of the country.

The Communist Party of Australia joined other anti-war and progressive voices since the beginning of the invasion of Afghanistan to oppose it. The CPA opposes any military invasion of sovereign nations on the pretext of "war on terror." It sees the imperialist intervention by way of creating and funding both the Mujahideen and the Taliban as primary causes of trouble in Afghanistan.

The Communist Party of Australia works with like-minded organisations, groups and individuals to oppose and bring to an end Australia's participation in the ANZUS treaty. The US-led wars of the 21st century should make this an absolutely necessary demand of any democratic-minded person. Australia should seek peaceful and political ways of engaging with other sovereign countries in the international arena, based on mutual respect, equality, and diplomacy.

The CPA demands of the Australian government:

- Immediately end the years-long detention of all asylum seekers in all on-shore and off-shore facilities.
- Provide permanent residency and citizenship to asylum seekers and refugees who are currently on temporary protection or bridging visas.
- Fast-track applications for asylum and residency to those fleeing the chaos in Afghanistan, especially all those Afghans who worked with Australian Defence Forces and may expect retaliation in the changed scenario.
- Properly investigate the war crimes of ADF personnel and bring the perpetrators to justice.
- Protect whistle-blowers and journalists who uncover such crimes, like David McBride, ensuring they are not persecuted and dropping the charges against them.
- End its cruel lip-service to war veterans with slogans of "freedom" and "democracy"; instead, take meaningful, concrete steps to alleviate the trauma, physical and mental, consequences of military service.
- Grant permanent residence or citizenship and access to family reunion to Afghan workers currently on temporary protection visas in Australia.

Australia and other invading partners must now assist in the reconstruction of the country.

In socialism,

International Department
Communist Party
of Australia
23rd August 2021

Special Appeal
Reds go Green

The *Guardian* is running a special appeal with the aim of raising $10,000 for solar panels. 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.

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UN IPCC REPORT: AUSTRALIA FAILS THE PACIFIC ISLANDS – PART 3

Anna Pha

The small, low-lying Pacific islands are often described as "the canary in the coalmine." The very existence and lives of their people are threatened by climate change. According to the Sixth Assessment Report (6AR) by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), they could be swallowed up by rising oceans this century if action to halt climate change is not stepped up.

Kosi Latu, Director-General of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), told the ABC's *7.30 Report*: "For us in the Pacific islands' region, the Report spells out shocking consequences starting with us first, if the world fails to listen to the warnings in the report. Contributing to less than one per cent of the world's total greenhouse gases, our Pacific islands are on the frontline, and amongst the most vulnerable, to the impacts of climate change."

"The first volume of the Sixth Assessment Report of the IPCC tells us the changes we are seeing today, are unprecedented over thousands to millions of years confirming that temperatures are higher than they have ever been in the last 125,000 years.

"This is our last chance, all of us must act now. We must call upon humanity, we must have the political will to act – everyone must make the changes needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions today," Latu urged.

"The grave risks of exceeding 1.5 ˚C above pre-industrial levels is spelt out in the Report – every additional increment of global warming increases changes in extremes. This includes the intensity and frequency of hot extremes, heatwaves, heavy precipitation, as well as droughts in some regions."

According to the AR6, what were once in one-hundred-year events will become once a year and more extreme events. On average, the world has already warmed by 1.1ºC since the pre-industrial era and sea levels risen by twenty centimetres due to human activity. If global warming is not limited to 1.5ºC. sea levels could rise by at least three metres. Deep and sustained emission reductions are required now to save humanity.

CLIMATE CHANGE HERE NOW

The AR6 does not mince words about the grim future that small Pacific islands face.

In its regional coverage it noted that coastlines are already receding, fresh water supplies are being polluted, fishing is affected by warming seas, and farming by climate change. The present drying trends will *likely* continue in the coming decades. Fewer but more intense tropical cyclones are projected. Small islands have warmed over the period of instrumental records. Temperature increases in the 21st century will further increase heat stress in these regions.

Continued relative sea level rise is *very likely* in the ocean around small islands and, along with storm surges and waves, will exacerbate coastal inundation with the potential to increase saltwater intrusion into aquifers. Shoreline retreat is projected along sandy coasts of most small islands.

PM SHRUGS OFF PLEAS

For decades the Pacific Islands have pleaded with the rest of the world to act. At the Pacific Island Forum held earlier this month, Pacific Forum Chair, Fiji Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama said: "Our children and grandchildren – those who are poised to face the worst consequences of inaction – will not and should not – forgive our continued inaction."

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison generated headlines in the region by eating during the official opening of Pacific Leaders' meeting. Such conduct is seen as extremely rude in many Pacific cultures. It is not the first time he has caused a stir or insulted Leaders.

At the Pacific Island Forum Leaders' meeting in August 2019, Morrison's response their pleas for Australia to reduce emissions was to put $500mil on the table – money transferred from another part of the aid budget – for adaptation and mitigation. Tuvalu's Prime Minster Enele Sopoaga, Forum Chair, said: "No matter how much money you put on the table, it doesn't give you the excuse to not to do the right thing, which is to cut down on your emissions, including not opening your coalmines. That is the thing that we want to see."

Australia is the largest economy of the Pacific Island Forum. Its other members are: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

There is considerable anger over the proposed opening of the Adani mine in the Pacific region. Coal mines should be closing and replaced with a just transition to renewables. (See *Guardian* #1975, UN IPCC Report: Australia's role") Small island states require assistance with mitigation, adaptation, renewables as well as Australia to cut its emissions.

Climate change is already having a serious impact on their economies, food (fishing and agriculture), fresh water sources, health, and infrastructure. More extreme and frequent weather events are occurring as sea levels rise; shorelines are eroded; fresh water sources are polluted; and oceans are becoming acidified and polluted with plastics and other material from industrialised nations. Rates of sea level rise on some islands are four times greater than the global average.

"OUR PACIFIC FAMILY"

Australia, as a wealthy economy in the region, has a specific responsibility to its neighbours. Its failure to tackle climate change, despite the many pleas of Pacific Island leaders for it to do so, makes a mockery of Prime Minister Scott Morrison's references to "our Pacific family."

A family implies responsibility and care for one another. The government shows none of these to its poor and struggling neighbours, some of whom have already seen islands disappear under water.

Australia, the largest per capita emitter of greenhouse gases in the world, has a responsibility to assist Pacific Islands. First and foremost is the closure of fossil fuel sector. That does not mean transferring the focus from coal to liquid gas. It means a rapid and just transition to renewables. Secondly, it should be providing all the technological and financial support the islands require for mitigation and adaptation, including development of renewable energy.

Australia must commit to sustainable development, eradicate poverty, and reduce inequalities in the region while pursuing the goal of zero net emissions or even negative emissions by 2050 at the latest but preferably by 2030. The next ten years are critical in preventing warming above 1.5ºC. This target is imperative to save these islands and prevent them becoming completely uninhabitable.

Already, Tuvalu is in negotiations with the UN about the relocation of its population.

The AR6 noted that the "consideration of ethics and equity can help address the uneven distribution of adverse impacts associated with 1.5ºC and higher levels of global warming, as well as those from mitigation and adaptation, particularly for poor and disadvantaged populations, in all societies."

"Mitigation and adaptation consistent with limiting global warming to 1.5ºC are underpinned by enabling conditions, assessed in this Report across the geophysical, environmental-ecological, technological, economic, socio-cultural, and institutional dimensions of feasibility. Strengthened multilevel governance, institutional capacity, policy instruments, technological innovation and transfer and mobilisation of finance, and changes in human behaviour and lifestyles are enabling conditions that enhance the feasibility of mitigation and adaptation options for 1.5°C-consistent systems transitions."

Australia has a responsibility to the small Pacific islands in the region to assist them with mitigation and adaptation, and where this becomes impossible to welcome their people to our shores. So far the government has acted irresponsibly and turned its back on our neighbours.

NOT GOOD NEIGHBOURS

Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and United Nations' former climate envoy recently joined Leigh Sales to discuss the AR6 on the *7.30 Report*. "Well, I am very aware of the heartbreak at the moment in the Pacific Islands. I have been there.

"I have been to Fiji, I have been to Samoa, I have been to the meeting of Pacific nations without Australia and New Zealand, the forum that they have on their own, when I was special envoy of the Secretary-General on climate change and I heard at that time a kind of anger but now it is quite clear that in the neighbourhood of Australia, you are regarded as not being good neighbours to the Pacific Islands because of the dependency still on fossil fuel."

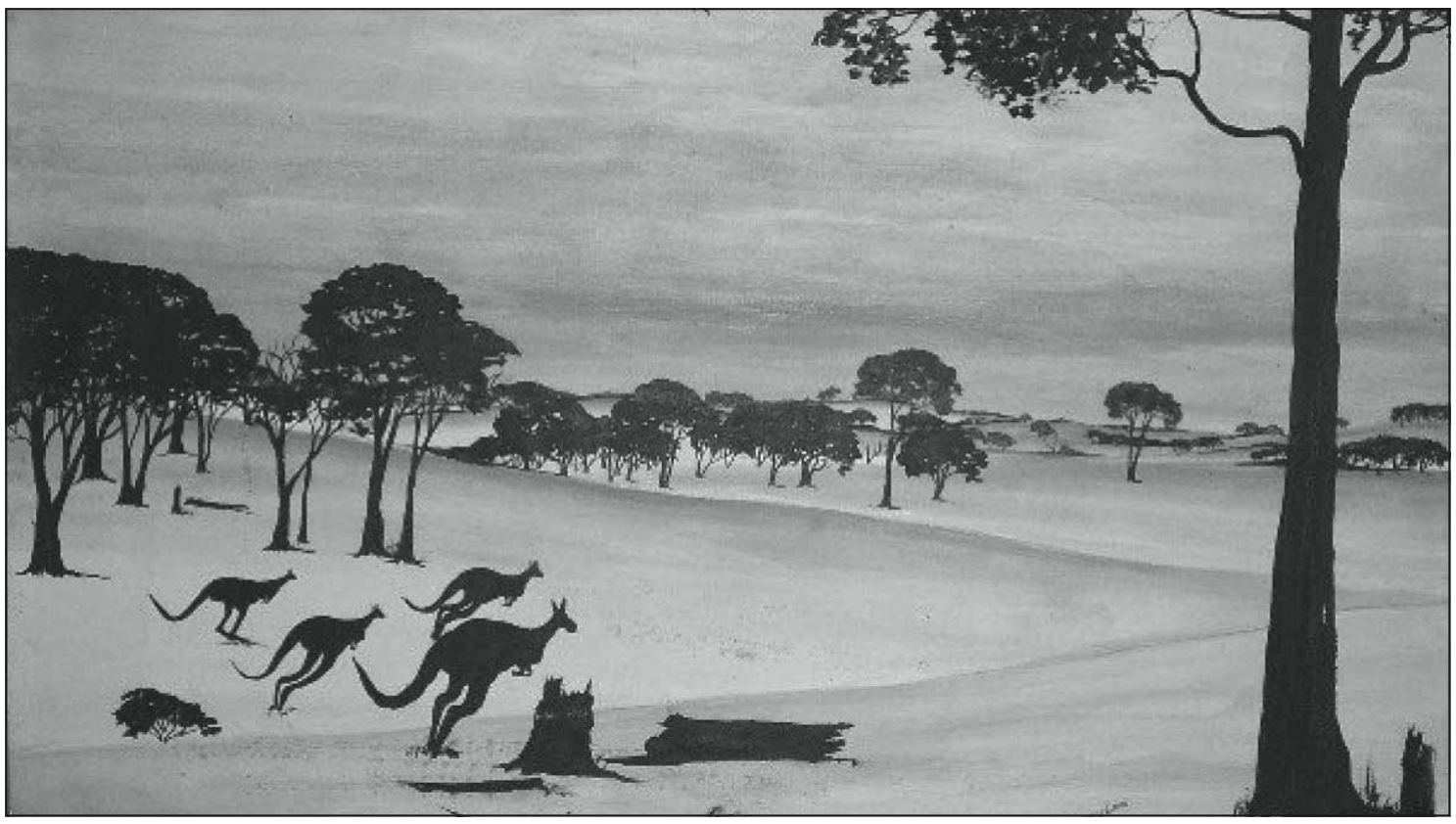
When asked "What will be the effect on Australia if it doesn't transition away from fossil fuel?" Robinson responded: "I think it will become a kind of pariah to be honest because this is so serious and what I am interested in, of course, is the climate justice dimensions because Australia has had a high dependency on fossil fuel and a lot of workers in fossil fuel, it is going to need a really significant, just transition and a significant just transition fund.

"The European Union, as you know, recently established a just transition fund and a just transition mechanism for particularly coal workers in Poland and elsewhere and other countries are also, countries themselves are stepping up [...] the approach towards the Pacific Islands is also part of a climate justice by Australia.

"You cannot have that conduct [towards] neighbours that is causing such existential worry for Pacific Islanders." ✪

QUERYING CARROLUP: STOLEN GENERATIONS, ART AND HEALING THROUGH TRUTH

Richard Titelius



A 1949 artwork titled "Bounding for Home" by Barry Loo. The piece is one of several that Colgate University is returning to Australia.

Carrolup Native Settlement was established near Katanning in the Great Southern region of Western Australia in 1915 under the auspices of the *Aborigines Act 1905* – a WA act supposedly designed for the care and protection of Aboriginal people, but ultimately served for the removal of Aboriginal peoples from their country, to institutionalise and assimilate them into white society "for their own good." Carrolup was closed in 1922 and reopened in 1939, and run by the Department of Native Affairs. By 1944 there were 129 boys and girls held at the settlement under the guardianship of the Commissioner for Native Affairs.

On the 9th August, the Department of Justice belatedly held its sixth Aboriginal cultural symposium, delayed due to COVID restrictions during NAIDOC Week which talked about what happened at Carrolup.

The first speaker at the symposium was Tony Hansen, from the Carrolup Elders Reference Group within the John Curtin Gallery at Curtin University, the caretaker of the 122 artworks by the Carrolup Aboriginal child artists. In the 1940s, said Hansen, the Aboriginal children were taken from their families in the surrounding area from as far away as Kojonup on the pretext that they weren't attending school or their mothers weren't looking after them properly. The children were separated, segregated, isolated, and traumatised by this experience of being taken away from their parents. Away from their parents, they were discouraged from learning about their language, culture, and art. In 1946 Noel and Lily White took over the management of Carrolup, and Noel decided he would take the boys out on rambles through the nearby countryside and talk about and describe what they had seen. When they returned from these rambles, he gave them paper and pencils and asked them to draw what they had remembered and what they had seen. What the children ended up drawing were not the representations of landscape that white people might see but the way Aboriginal people see their country – imbued with social and cultural meaning. The children drew native animals, cultural activities such as corroborees, hunting, and cooking in settings among the rolling hills and bush around the Carrolup Settlement. The paintings reflected what the children remembered of their culture and way of life; it was a way of healing and coming to terms with being taken away from everything they knew.

British philanthropist Mrs Florence Rutter visited the settlement during this time. Upon seeing the calibre of the artworks, she decided she would bring them to the wider attention of the world. The money used to buy the artworks went back to the Aboriginal children for further art materials and their general welfare. However, in 1950 the association of the Whites with Carrolup ended. Soon after, the use of Carrolup as a place for Aboriginal settlement ended. It was converted into a farm school for older Aboriginal youth and later to a Baptist Church run mission until 1988.

The Aboriginal artworks acquired by Rutter went first to London and then to Colgate University in New York state, where they stayed mostly unknown until a chance rediscovery in 2004 brought their attention to the world. In 2013 they were returned to Curtin University.

The second speaker was Michelle Broun, a First Nations curator at John Curtin Gallery at Curtin University and also a Yindjibarndi woman. Her mother, Bigali Hanlon, had also been part of the Stolen Generations, having had her mother taken from her at Mulga Downs Station near Wittenoom. Broun's film, *Walking Tracks Back Home*, was screened which recounts her mother's experience of being taken away as a child to Sister Kates, a halfway house, where the lighter-skinned children were taken in an attempt to bring them up as white children. Hanlon recounts how being taken away from her mother, family, and language at four years old is like genocide. Once leaving Sister Kates, Hanlon returned to Mulga Downs Station and Wittenoom to try to find her family. At Sister Kates, she remembered being told she didn't have a family, which hurt her and made her more determined to find them once the institution could no longer hold her. When Hanlon's own mother found her in Wittenoom, she was overcome with joy that she spoke a language that Hanlon could no longer speak due to the white institutionalisation she suffered. The other legacy of Wittenoom, the asbestos mine, robbed Hanlon of the life of her father, who died of asbestosis.

During the symposium, both speakers reflected on how the institutionalisation of Aboriginal people in missions like Carrolup/Marribank and halfway houses like Sister Kates pushed many young Aboriginal people into the criminal justice system. It did this through the trauma and resentment built up while they were in these places – made to feel shame or ashamed of themselves, said Broun. In many of the prisons in the early days, there was no understanding of the loss of culture and language on the identity and dignity of Aboriginal people that we have today.

Eventually, there will also be increased understanding, empathy, and resources among the wider community, which will ensure increased participation, acceptance, and opportunities for Aboriginal people, leading to Aboriginal people being represented less in the justice system. It is one more gap that needs to be closed. ✪

The paintings reflected what the children remembered of their culture and way of life; it was a way of healing and coming to terms with being taken away from everything they knew.

THE FARCE OF BHP TURNING AWAY FROM FOSSIL FUELS

Valentin Cartillier

BHP, the world's second largest mining company, is selling off a lot of its global gas and oil assets to Australian outfit Woodside Petroleum. As a result of this merger Woodside shareholders will own fifty-two per cent of shares in the company, while BHP shareholders would own the other forty-eight per cent. This move is being seen by many as the mining giant moving away from fossil fuels and towards Woodside's predominantly natural gas and liquified natural gas (LNG) production.

However, Woodside is not entirely focussed on gas; they are currently engaged in searching for oil in Bulgaria and off the coast of the Congo, Senegal, and Ireland. So BHP's assets will not stop producing oil as a result of this merger, they'll just be doing it for other shareholders. For context, in 2019, the emissions produced by BHP totalled 567mil tonnes of carbon dioxide globally which were more than Australia's total domestic emissions that year.

The sleight of hand BHP and other major polluting companies are pulling is that they're cashing out on failing assets while trying to palm off the responsibility for past and ongoing damage to the climate on other companies. One should not forget that BHP will still be mining iron, nickel, and other products even after the merger.

These polluting assets must be decommissioned and these companies need to bear the brunt of the cost. Given the tremendous amount of profits these companies have reaped, it would also not be an unreasonable demand for them to protect the livelihoods of their workers during the transition to renewable energy.

If mining companies were truly invested in moving away from fossil fuels they'd be investing in renewable energy, not finding different ways to make gas or coal "cleaner." As was stated in *Guardian* #1972 "Major floods a timely reminder to humanity's greatest threat.", climate change is the single greatest threat to our survival.

A number of Australian unions have been campaigning recently pushing for a just transition to a renewable energy future. A new report on Australia's offshore wind potential has been in part funded by the maritime, electrical and manufacturing unions, and calls on federal and state governments to take immediate steps towards the development of an industry which has the potential to create thousands of jobs for workers currently working in fossil fuel industries.

As the writing on the wall becomes clearer and clearer, the tides are turning in the fossil fuel industry. But make no mistake, it is not out of benevolence, it is about their bottom line. ✪

NEW RULES SET TO TARGET MINOR PARTIES

N Woodruff

The Morrison Government has introduced a raft of bills that will make it more difficult for minor parties to enter the nation's Federal Parliament. The Electoral Legislation Amendment (Party Registration Integrity) Bill 2021 increases the number of members required to register a political party from 500 to 1,500. Non-parliamentary parties will have three months after the bill passes to get the extra 1,000 members needed to meet the new registration rules. This will directly impact the CPA's ongoing efforts to register The Communists to be eligible to stand in the Party's name in elections. The proposed changes stand in the way of a robust and diverse parliament that brings every perspective to Australia's democracy.

Katter's Australian Party and the Jacqui Lambie Network have spoken out against the changes and will oppose them in Parliament, calling it a tool for the political oligarchs of the Australian Labor Party and the Liberal-National Coalition.

Tasmanian Senator and Network Leader, Jacqui Lambie, has called on Labor to decide where it stands on this "power grab."

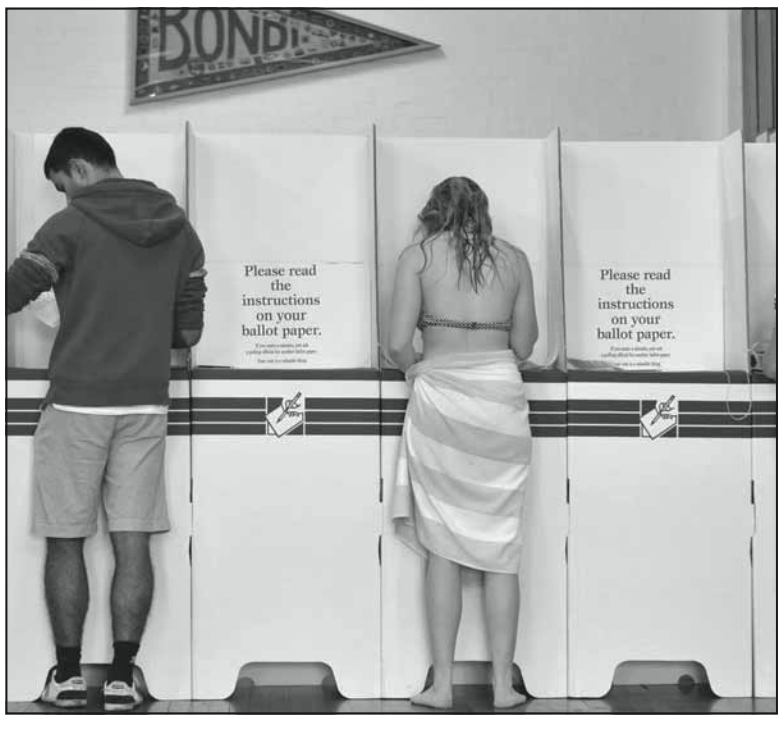
"When the big parties gang up to set the rules applying to the small parties they're competing with, they'll rig them, exactly like we're seeing now," she said. "We're not a two-party country anymore, and you can't just rewrite the rules to try and turn back the clock. It's a smackdown to the one in three Australians who don't support major parties."

Katter's Australian Party leader, Robbie Katter said instead of trying to be a better government, the Coalition are trying to eliminate the competition. "It demonstrates a weak and insecure government that's not focussed on being a productive Government," he said. "Minor party politicians and independents will speak up on every issue they see fit, whereas major party MPs will always toe the party line."

Most minor parties are volunteer-run and do not have the resources to recruit 1500 members within three months, especially before they have the publicity of an elected member. This bill is an attack on the political freedom of Australians and a further encroachment of corporate dollars in the democratic process, buying out both sides of politics and shutting out opposition.

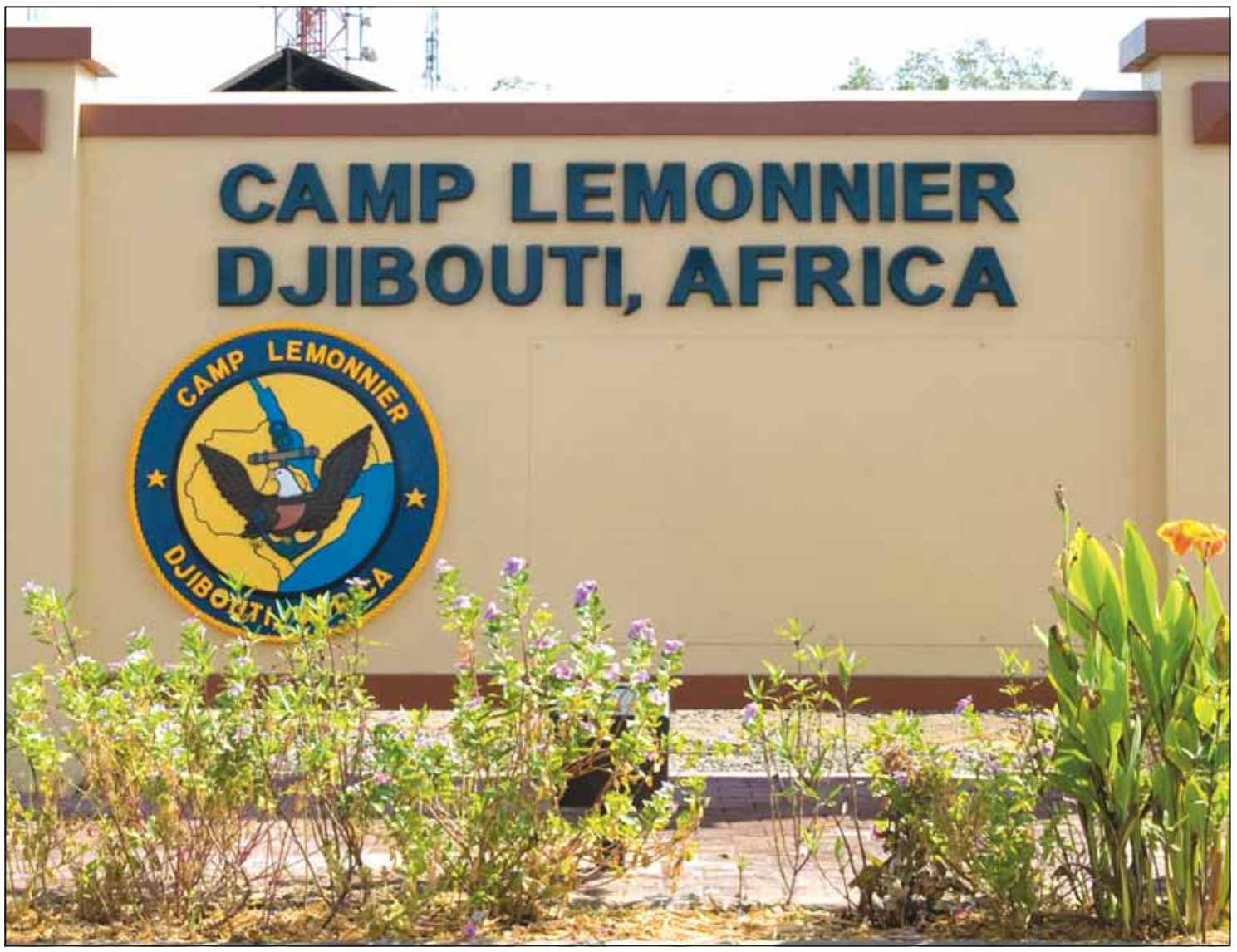
The bill is currently before the House of Representatives and is yet to pass the Senate. ✪

Join The Communist via our secure online form at cpaforms.wufoo.com/forms/join-the-communists



DJIBOUTI AFRICA – ITS INTI

Eileen Whitehead



The Republic of Djibouti is located on the African shore of the Red Sea, at the southern entrance of this important waterway that passes through the Suez Canal, in Egypt. Djibouti is a country of modest size but geopolitically significant, especially when its proximity to Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya and Uganda, is considered. Moreover, it is part of a greater geopolitical configuration as a member of the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD).

Djibouti has a singular strategic dimension with obvious interests to the US. It controls, with Yemen, the Strait of Bab-el-Mandab, the minimum width of which is 30km and through which passes ten per cent of world trade. Nearly 19,000 ships used the strait in 2020. The Bab-el-Mandab overlooks the entrance to the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. Not far away, two other gulfs, that of Oman and its Arab-Persian counterpart, linked by another strait, Hormuz.

This geographical advantage explains why so many international powers have installed military bases in Djibouti. France (a colonial power that remained influential) and the US gained a foothold there in 2002, followed by Japan in 2011, then Italy in 2012. The latest arrival, right on its Silk Road, China obtained its base in 2017. We also can't forget to list the EU anti-piracy operation Atalanta, which has been in place since 2008, or the German, Spanish, and Dutch soldiers to whom Djiboutian soil is not unknown. For Japan and China, it is their first overseas base, while for the US, it is their only ***permanent*** military base in Africa. These bases are all sources of rents and other expenses on the local market (rental of housing, commercial purchases, etc.). According to the source, the total annual amount of base rents varies, a sign of insufficient transparency, but it is not less than US$128mil.

As you can imagine, such a strategic position for Djibouti does not only attract military bases, it also attracts the attention of certain economic operators. Thus, seduced by the port prospects of the country, which has become the main corridor for Ethiopian traffic since the Ethiopian-Eritrean war of 1998, Dubai Ports International, renamed Dubai Ports World, forged links with the local dictator, Ismail Omar Guelleh, and in 2000, was entrusted with the management of the country's only international port and airport. From this partnership, two new ports were born, on the Doraleh site, on the outskirts of the capital, Djibouti-ville: a container terminal and an oil terminal. There is also a dry port, closer to the old port of Djibouti, near the presidential palace.

Another partnership has followed, this time with China, which has been generous in non-concessional loans to the state. Port developments, including a multipurpose port at Doraleh to replace the old port, the reconstruction of the Djiboutian portion of the railway connecting the capital to its Ethiopian counterpart, Addis Ababa, and a drinking water supply from Ethiopian territory, are the main projects that have emerged with Chinese blessing. Djibouti also owes China's Exim Bank around US$1.5 bil.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DJIBOUTI

How did Djibouti get to where it is today? Since its independence from France in 1977, Djibouti has only known two presidents – Hassan Gouled Aptidon and Ismail Omar Guelleh, who succeeded his uncle Aptidon in May 1999. Guelleh was Aptidon's chief of staff who had charged him with national security in the aftermath of independence. State power thus passed from an aging uncle to his nephew, a former policeman in the colonial administration. So much for the values and principles of democracy.

From 1977 to 1992, a one-party system reigned in both law and practice, and this situation is ongoing. Thus, even with the creation of its constitution in 1992, Djibouti has not gained democracy. Elections were never free nor democratic since the election of Guelleh in 1999. Additionally, the presidential election in 2021 did not meet basic democratic standards. The opposition boycotted the ballot, and Guelleh could not even generate alibi candidatures, except for that of someone identified as one of his extended family members. Therefore with no opposition, he was elected with a total vote count of 97.44 per cent.

With its newfound independence, it was pertinent for the US that formal diplomatic relations with Djibouti began, resulting in the only enduring US military presence in Africa at Camp Lemonnier – established by formal agreement in 2003 – with access to Djibouti's port facilities and airport. The US Agency for International Development's (USAID) Food for Peace programme maintains a warehouse for pre-positioned food assistance commodities in Djibouti, which serves as a hub for rapid response in parts of Africa and Asia. Also, International Broadcasting Bureau facilities in Djibouti transmit Arabic-language programming, and Voice of America Somali Service broadcasts to the Horn and the Arabian Peninsula. By allowing the US military to set up its base in 2001 (as part of its "war on terror"), it became the first major superpower tenant in Djibouti. Staying in Djibouti costs the US US$63mil annually which – combined with revenue from France's military base – enabled Djibouti to stabilise its economy, as the rent base accounts for eighteen per cent of its GDP.

THE BATTLE FOR INFLUENCE IN DJIBOUTI

However, since the turn of the century, a new competition has developed for local loyalties in Djibouti from China, which is increasingly building its relationships across the continent.

In 2017, China's People Liberation Army (PLA) opened its first overseas base in Djibouti. This grey concrete complex sits on a prime location next to one of Djibouti's main ports and is just a 15-minute drive from the US military base.

One (anonymous) AFRICOM official stated that the physical PLA presence in Africa is becoming a long-term strategic concern for America. "They (China) have upped their game, in plain language, and ultimately they are offering things that our partners want, that our partners need, in places, we have concerns we are being out-competed."

President Xi Jinping made it clear at a high-level summit in Beijing last September that he's pursuing a "comprehensive strategic and cooperative partnership" with Africa. It includes a US$60 bil package of aid, investment, and loans to Africa.

For years, China has been expanding its military ties in Africa through extended peacekeeping missions, military personnel training, and the China-Africa Peace and Security Initiative forum. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said in 2017 that the Djibouti base was part of ongoing efforts to help bring peace and security to the region. He added that the base would help China fulfil its international obligations and promote economic and social development in Djibouti.

The US, naturally, views the base with unease, given its proximity to Camp Lemonnier and Djibouti's main container port,

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ERNATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

which is the primary source of supplies to sustain the 4,000 US personnel on the base. Ninety-eight per cent of the logistics support for Djibouti, as well as Somalia and East Africa, come through that port. Therefore access is essential, and its loss would be a devastating blow to American interests and operations.

Wake Forest University Assistant Professor Lina Benabdallah, whose research focuses on China-Africa relations, observed a spreading lack of trust between Washington and Beijing which is taking on a global dimension. She commented that "China has been operating (in Africa) for the better part of two decades now and has been doing so in a very smart way, with really close networks and connections that have been in work for several years." She warned that America viewed China's investment program as a front for a more sinister motive of establishing a military footprint worldwide. Pot calling kettle black?

DJIBOUTI POLITICS NOW

Guelleh is now 73 and has enjoyed twenty years of unchallenged power. He has had plenty of time to end the recurring violations of human rights and restore public freedoms, and set up the independent joint national electoral commission provided for in the framework agreement signed with the opposition in 2014. Such a body is provided for by the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, signed and ratified by Djibouti, and would have ensured a transparent election and provided real candidates with real projects, but he chose a fifth electoral masquerade and a fifth illegitimate mandate.

Unemployment is massive, affecting 60.5 per cent of 15-34 year olds. Poverty has gone from 41.1 per cent in 1996 to 79.4 per cent in 2012. Access to running water and electricity is inadequate, and the level of education is poor. The health system cannot cope, with malnutrition and diseases, such as malaria, choleriform diarrhea, chikungunya fever, etc., rife. And now there is the COVID-19 pandemic. The Human Development Index (HDI), published each year by the United Nations, does not contradict this situation: the country was ranked 171/189 for 2018.

In 2006, in a report on the country, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) noted: "Djibouti is a rich country but Djiboutians are poor." But Guelleh prefers to govern through poverty and force. He has a stranglehold on the country's resources and absolute control over state power. In 2004, a note from the diplomatic mission of the US stated:"Djibouti is less a country than a commercial city-state controlled by a man, Ismail Omar Guelleh." He has become one of the richest presidents in Africa, yet he is still feted by imperialist world powers. In February 2021, a few weeks off his fifth electoral masquerade, he made an official visit to France, where President Macron said how "attached he is to democracy and African youth," receiving him as a worthy and legitimate head of state.

Djiboutians do not intend to resign themselves to the fate inflicted on them by this man and his associates. They know that salvation is in their hands. They know that a national leap is needed to achieve this. There is no lack of resistance fighters who have been educated by the struggle. The words "Hope does not die, cannot die" are heard in the hovels in Djibouti-ville and in the interior regions, and they are growing louder. Djiboutians want to end the deadly links between international militarism and local nepotism. They believe that a true Republic of Djibouti – without Guelleh – democratic, inclusive and prosperous – is possible. ✪

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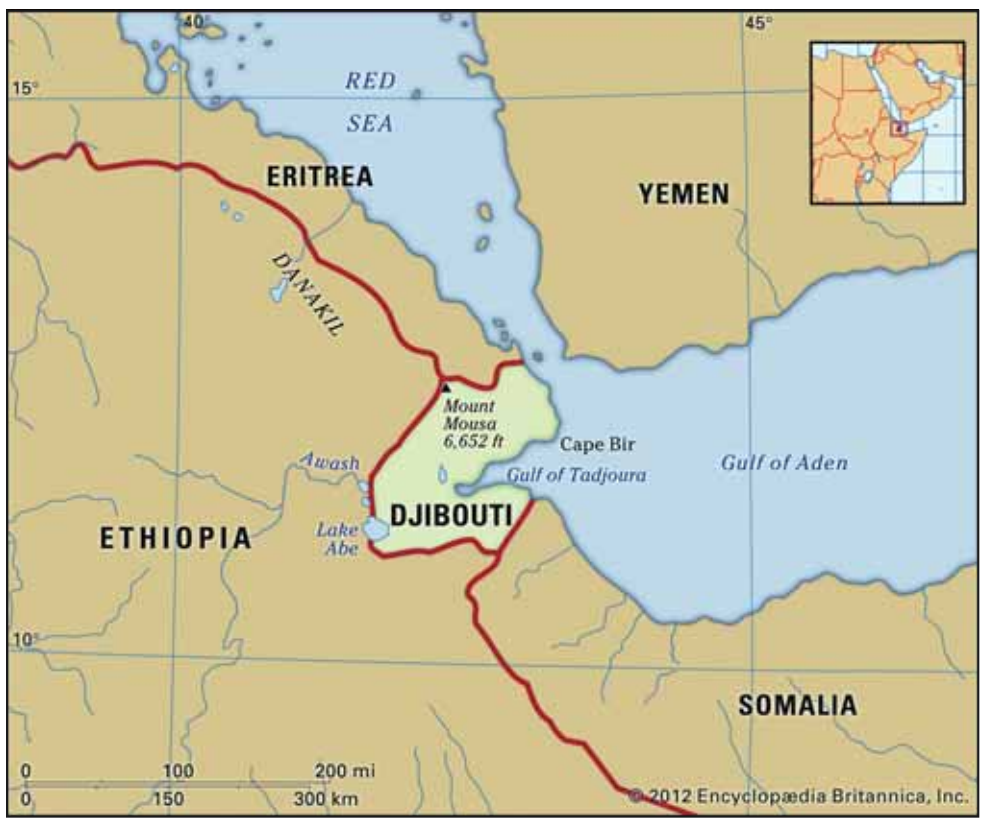
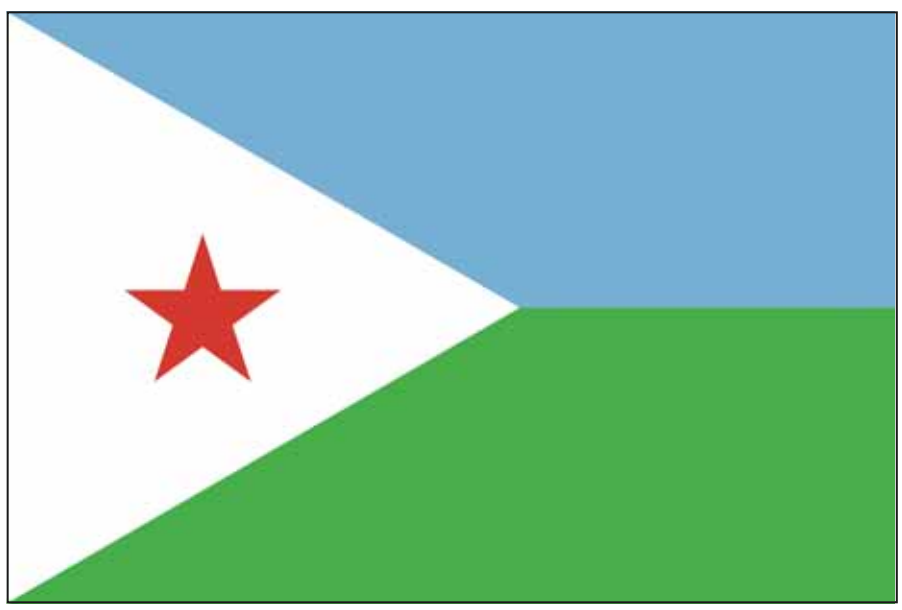




MOTHER TERESA AND THE POLITICS OF POSTAGE STAMPS

Graham Holton

On the 12th of August 2021, the United Nations (UN) issued a postage stamp bearing a photo of Saint Mother Teresa for use at the UN Postal Administration (UNPA) at the UN headquarters in New York City. The stamp features an engraved-style portrait of Mother Teresa, with the quote: "Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love." Mother Teresa's image has graced many stamps worldwide, including a commemorative one issued by the United States Postal Service (USPS) to celebrate her canonisation. India and Albania later followed with their own commemorative stamps. According to the former UN Secretary-General Javier Pèrez de Cuéllar, "She is the United Nations. She is peace in the world."

This is a puzzling comment to be made on such a controversial figure. What then is the political reason behind the issue? For the UN to issue a stamp celebrating the life and charity work of Mother Teresa is of great political importance to the Catholic Church. Obviously, the UNPA is using her popularity for high stamp sales, but there is something more important, in that the stamp portrays the saint and the church in a very positive political image. A far cry from what the British-American journalist Christopher Hitchens reveals as a "cult of death and suffering."

What is the reality behind this "saintly" woman, whose carefully crafted image is known around the world for her Missions' aid to the poor? Political philately argues that images on postage stamps are not just pictures that bear the name of the country and the value of the postage paid. They are political statements. All postage stamps are legal documents bearing political messages. To forge postage stamps is a legal offence, as it defrauds the government of its charges. All stamps bear an image, which may be the head of state, such as the Queen in the UK, or portray government policies, such as the environment, education, health, and the presentation of a country's history manufactured for public consumption. A map indicates a country's claims to territories. In Australia, stamps have been issued to stake its claims in Antarctica. Maps on stamps have led to wars, or at least border conflicts, such as the recent Bolivian stamp with a map showing Bolivia's claim to the region lost to Chile during the Pacific War (1879-1883). Other stamps may show a country's major cultural religious festivities, such as Christmas and Easter. In Australia, stamps are not issued to celebrate Jewish, Muslim, or Hindu religious holidays.

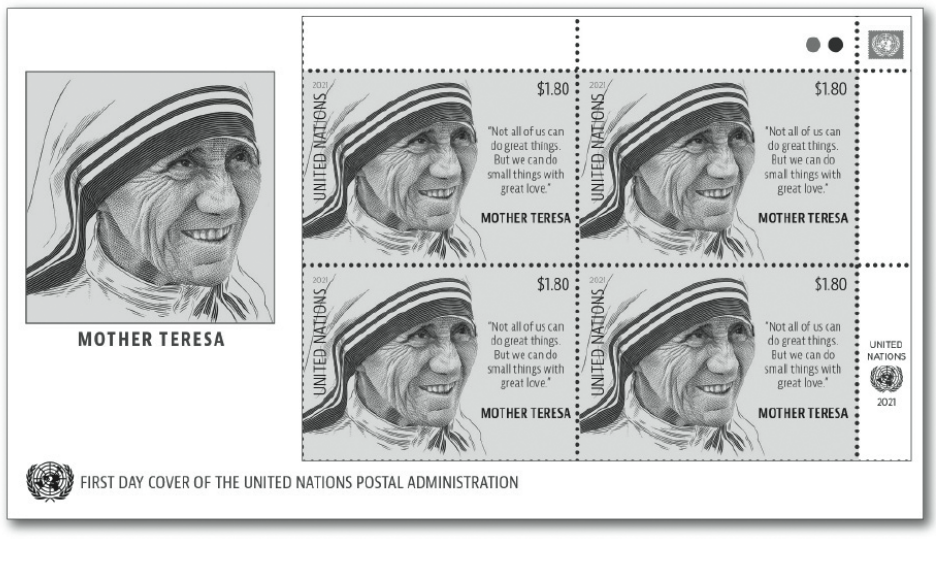
Mother Teresa, Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, was born in Skopje, Macedonia. She moved to India when she was eighteen years old, to help the poor of Calcutta (Kolkata). Through the Roman Catholic Missionaries of Charity, she aided the orphaned, the poverty-stricken, and the ill. In 1962 she received the Ramon Magsaysay Peace Prize from the Philippines government. Her international fame began in 1969, when the British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge filmed a documentary on her called, *Something Beautiful for God*. Muggeridge converted to Catholicism after witnessing a miracle at the Mission.

With this fame flowed tributes and monies. Pope Paul VI gave Mother Teresa the inaugural Pope John XXIII Peace Prize in 1971, and in 1976 she received the *Pacem in Terris* award. Three years later she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, "for work undertaken in the struggle to overcome poverty and distress, which also constitutes a threat to peace." In her Nobel lecture, Mother Teresa called abortion "the greatest destroyer of peace today. Because if a mother can kill her own child – what is left for me to kill you and you kill me – there is nothing between." In 1973 Prince Philip presented her the Templeton Prize, worth £34,000, and in Boston, she accepted the Good Samaritan award. More countries and organisations joined the international parade granting her more and more awards, prizes and accolades, such as the Albert Schweitzer Prize. In 1982 Mother Teresa was appointed an honorary Companion of the Order of Australia.

These awards and prizes brought much largesse, little of which went to alleviating poverty, as Mother Teresa saw poverty as something beautiful to witness. Her global income donated by people like, Princess Diana of Wales, the Reagans, the Clintons, and Yasser Arafat, would easily have outfitted several first-class clinics in Bengal, but she refused to do so. She even refused to provide basic medical treatment to patients suffering incredible pain. On camera, she described how one patient lay dying in great pain from incurable cancer: "You are suffering like Christ on the cross. So Jesus must be kissing you." Mother Teresa went to the best clinics in Europe for her heart problem.

The wealth of Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity has never been officially released, but it is in the millions. The testimony of Susan Shields, who worked for seven years as a disciple of the Charity, says that the sisters were forced to plead poverty to ensure enterprises continued to supply goods, services, and money. "The flood of business was considered to be a sign of Mother Teresa's congregation." The money "rolled in and were deposited in the bank," with little attempt to improve "the lives of the poor." Shields discovered that $50 mil had been deposited in the Charity's bank account in New York City.

The wholesome image of Mother Teresa created by the Catholic Church is an important political tool used to spread the power of the church. Of all the international accolades bestowed upon the little nun, the most prestigious honour was her sainthood, the greatest reward issued by the church. Canonisation is a major political statement, creating an image of what the church stands for. In 2016, Mother Teresa was canonised by Pope Francis at St Peter's Square in Vatican City, making her one of the 898 saints created so far by this pope. As a comparison, the Vatican canonised only 679 saints between 1588 and 1988. Pope Francis has created more saints than any pope of the twentieth century. Pope John Paul II, who made 482 canonisations, was quickly canonised after his death. His canonisation was based more on his political achievement, turning Poland against its Communist Party, than any saintly behaviour. The church has been politically active against communism around the world since the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939).



The Missionaries of Charity has raised millions from donations. After her death, the money ended up in the Vatican Bank, and was not spent on alleviating poverty in India. Other allegations include poor medical treatments and religious evangelism.

Mother Teresa had numerous other allegations against her. In 1994 Hitchens and Tariq Ali wrote *Hell's Angel*, which draws on the account by Aroup Chatterjee, who lists several faults he witnessed in the Missions in Kolkata, comparing the observed conditions to that in Nazi Germany's Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. He "never saw any nuns in the slums." The nuns in the institute simply washed used needles and then reused them on other patients. The mayor of Kalkota, Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya said that sisters of Charity "had no significant impact on the poor of this city." Hitchens argues in his 129-page essay, *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice*, that Mother Teresa was nothing more than a fraud, and a religious ultra-reactionary fanatic and fundamentalist. He accused her of not being a friend to the poor, "She was a friend of *poverty*." She did not work "to alleviate poverty," but to increase "the number of Catholics." Mother Teresa told the world she had a direct line to God's mind, yet she had deep internal conflicts over her belief in God and the efficacy of prayer. "Where is my faith? Even deep down," she wrote, "there is nothing but emptiness and darkness."

Hitchens argues that the Vatican found her activity and outspokenness, "useful in two ways – a first as an advertisement for the good works of the Church to non-Catholics; and second as a potent of moral suasion." This morality is inveighed against abortion and contraception.

We can judge a person by the company they keep, and for Mother Teresa, she befriended many powerful leaders and ruthless dictators and attacked those who strayed from the church's fold. In 1981 she travelled to Haiti to spin a positive image to the hated Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier and was duly awarded the *Légion d'honnier*. Yet, she went to Nicaragua and admonished the Sandanista revolutionary party, the FMLN. Mother Teresa visited Cardinal Archbishop of Managua, Miguel Obando y Bravo, who received a stipend from the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), an indication of where she and the church's loyalties lay.

When a new Pope takes office and sits upon the throne of St Peter, he must declare an oath to maintain the wealth of the church. It is extremely hard to estimate the total accumulated wealth of the Catholic Church. The *Hustler's Digest* estimates its net worth at US$15 bil, others that it is more likely US$10 billion. Either way, the church is ranked amongst the richest companies in the world.

The church's icon for compassion had accumulated a large sum of money. The *New York Times* revealed that despite her Charity being one of the world's richest organisations, she failed to reveal where the money was spent. The Italian journalist Gianluigi Nuzzi in his *The Original Sin*, claims Mother Teresa had "by far the most cashed-up account" in the bank. All of which is tax free.

All these accusations were well known to the United Nations before issuing a stamp that celebrated the saintly Mother Teresa. All stamps must go through a process to determine whether the image on a stamp is acceptable in the way it portrays the UN. Her image is useful, not just in raising money from stamp sales, but as a political statement of what the UN and the Catholic Church stand for. This stamp tars the UN with the nefarious activities of the Missionaries of Charity, its misuse of funds, and its shabby treatment of patients. What a shameful political image for the UN. ✪

Mother Teresa even refused to provide basic medical treatment to patients suffering incredible pain. On camera, she described how one patient lay dying in great pain from incurable cancer: "You are suffering like Christ on the cross. So Jesus must be kissing you." Mother Teresa went to the best clinics in Europe for her heart problem.

CHINA'S COMMON PROSPERITY – THE NEXT STEP IN THE BUILDING OF SOCIALISM

Casey Davidson

President Xi Jinping has announced the next steps in resolving inequality in China following the monumental achievement of eradicating extreme poverty and reaching a moderately prosperous society. In a recent public meeting, it was announced that the next long-term goal would be to work towards "common prosperity" for all Chinese citizens by confronting income distribution, preventing financial risks, and strengthening the socialist market economy. The accomplishments of the Communist Party of China (CPC) have been celebrated throughout the Global South and have put Western governments, including Australia and the US, to shame in terms of their ability to achieve long-term prosperity goals. As conditions for Chinese citizens are predicted to surpass those in the West, considerations for a socialist future must be examined thoughtfully and earnestly.

CHINA'S PROSPERITY "WRITTEN IN THE GENES"

Although Western media prefer to portray Xi's announcement as some kind of strategy to boost consumer demand, or a ramping up of "authoritarian" measures, the Chinese government are essentially addressing the next primary contradiction in their society; that being income inequality. This is only now possible given that previous primary contradictions have been resolved, that of the need to eradicate extreme poverty, achieved through the liberation of productive forces unleashed at the beginning of the Reform and Opening Up period embarked on four decades ago. While Cong Yi, Professor at the School of Economics at Tianjin University of Finance and Economics described "common prosperity" as "written in the genes" of the CPC, additional details and methods for achieving it have just been revealed.

Of note at the meeting was the distinction to achieve "common prosperity" – affluence shared by everyone (which may still have elements of wealth inequality), as opposed to egalitarianism – which creates a level of equality, but pays insufficient regard to how prosperous the society is; a reference to the tumultuous cultural revolution in the late '60s and early '70s.

INCOME DISTRIBUTION MEASURES

Top officials of the CPC including Xi discussed strategies to fend off major risks to people-centred development and stable financial development in the first stages of achieving "common prosperity." A major focus will be on income distribution, concentrating on four main areas: increasing earnings for low-income earners, expanding middle-income earners, adjusting excessive incomes, and prohibiting illicit incomes or monopolistic practices. Morgan Stanley Investment Research analysts have affirmed China's "effort to rebalance the economy toward labour, tackling social inequality with redistribution, social welfare, taxes and inclusive education to increase the middle-income group's share of the economy."

A clear example of the implementation of this policy has been the crackdown on privately-owned tutoring industries, which have been ordered to remove previously acceptable foreign investment. Additionally, some private tech companies such as the Didi ride hailing app, Boss Zhipin search app, and Full Truck Alliance freight app have been suspended on the same grounds. Chinese billionaire Jack Ma received international attention following the cancellation of Ant Group's $37bil Initial Public Offering (IPO) after the risks it would have exposed to their financial markets.

STRENGTHENING SOCIALISM

In addition to income distribution, the top leaders at the meeting announced aims to strengthen the socialist market economy. Yue Su, principal economist at The Economist Intelligence Unit described how "privatisation will likely slow in public services such as education, care for the elderly or medical care, with authorities at the very least becoming more strict in monitoring prices and affordability." Affordable housing, protection of intellectual rights, and exploring more ways to earn incomes legally were also high on the list of priorities in achieving this goal.

ACTION OVER RHETORIC

Black Agenda Report journalist and co-author of *American Exceptionalism and American Innocence* Danny Haiphong recently highlighted how the so-called "progressives" in the US Democratic Party talk about wealth inequality, whereas government officials in China actually do something about it.

Haiphong compared the standards of the US with China by emphasising how "political leaders such as Bernie Sanders and the 'Squad' (Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, and Rashida Tlaib) [...] do little to challenge their colleagues and the corporate executives who control DC politics. Hard-hitting statements replace real political action. Loyalty to the Democratic Party stands in place of loyalty to the people. Poverty and hardship has grown, yet these 'progressive' politicians have not met the moment. The millions who support them are being led into the graveyard of social movements, the Democratic Party, rather than the struggle for socialism – a movement that must be led by the ideas and actions of the people themselves free of control from the capitalist parties." There is no doubt the Republican Party holds back real progress, but it is essential to understand that the opposing party also offers little to nothing in terms of economic prosperity for the US working class, while claiming to represent them.

PROSPERITY MEASURES IN AUSTRALIA?

The same can be said of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) when looking at their track record. Continued privatisation of public assets, union busting, and poorer work conditions, as well as rhetoric without action have all happened under their watch. They do not represent a truly liberatory government, and in fact, create a predicament where the working class feel stuck in choosing between bad or worse. Even if the Australian Greens were able to acquire more power through the electoral system, at best they promise to 'make billionaires and big corporations pay their fair share of tax to tackle income inequality.' Rarely is it mentioned the impact that private monopolies have on reinforcing class society in perpetuity.

Without a people-centred government, Australia's unemployment and insecure employment rate continues to grow, while the rich and elite continue to get away with tax evasion and ripping off workers. In addition, the Liberal Party spends as much time acting as a puppet government for the United States as it does representing the interests of our own bourgeoisie, and sometimes at their expense. This is why the Australian working class should support the move towards independence, both from the Commonwealth as well as the US alliance. At this stage, Australia's ability to achieve adequate wealth distribution and improved prosperity for the working class is not possible under the current capitalist system.

FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY

As living conditions improve for the working class in China and deteriorate in the West, it is becoming somewhat absurd to describe Western nations as "free" and "democratic," while describing China as "authoritarian." The ability to participate in the building of your nation, the option to make things better for your children's futures, and a government built on years of kept promises create happier, more collaborative and proud people. This allows them to be political - to be empowered and to be influential. In comparison, with poor and worsening living conditions, coupled with a stalemate government, the people in Australia barely sense empowerment for change. A democratic nation is more than the ability to tick a box every three years.

SOCIALISM: A NECESSITY FOR PROSPERITY

As Haiphong expressed about the US in response to Xi's new reforms, "The socialist Left must build a political force, an organisation that can lead the people in this historic and correct struggle for wealth redistribution. In this, they would have a friend in China. Solidarity should thus be extended with China against US aggression. The Democratic Party's leadership over progressive politics is the thing that should come under harsh condemnation and criticism." The government should not be a servant to business interests, but should require businesses to sacrifice profits in order to meet development goals, as they do in China. Therefore, Australian workers should also turn their attention away from condemning China, to condemning their own government, and seriously consider the many benefits of working towards a socialist society to genuinely improve prosperity for all people. ✪

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CORONAVIRUS UPENDS WORLD OF WORK, OPENS WORKERS' EYES TO UNIONS

Mark Gruenberg

In the months since the coronavirus pandemic was officially declared in the US on 13th March, 2020, the nation's world of work has turned upside down – and, it seems, hundreds of thousands of workers have had their eyes opened to the need for protections unions offer.

First, the statistics:

Among US workers who remained employed, the proportion working from home doubled from twenty-two per cent in 2019 to forty-two per cent in 2020, the Labor Department reports. The catch is most of those workers are in white-collar occupations with access to computers and other ways of easily working without an office.

Blue-collar workers, especially working women, were much worse off. Millions lost their jobs entirely as their employers shut down, in restaurants, hotels, leisure and hospitality, the performing arts, home health care, and the like. Joblessness in hotels, motels, and restaurants shot up to almost thirty per cent. Unite Here reported that at the worst point in the pandemic, more than ninety per cent of its members had been laid off.

Sometimes the two types of workers had been in the same household.

A common scenario: Pre-pandemic, a working woman, union or not, would go off to her office or her classroom. A woman child care worker – often a worker of colour – came to care for her toddler, at pay averaging US$11-$12 an hour. The toddler's older sister went off to elementary school to be taught by a woman teacher, usually a union member, after a woman school bus driver transported her to the school building.

Then the coronavirus closed the school and the office. Both kids were at home, and so was their mother. The teacher kept teaching, via Zoom and Skype, but from her home. Mother worked from home via computer while also monitoring the kids, including the student. The bus driver wound up transporting not kids but hot school lunches to kids who qualify for them.

But guess who got laid off? And who hasn't been hired back, yet?

"Child care is now a full-time job for (working) mothers," Brookings Institution economist Lauren Bauer told the Associated Press. And the mothers tried to put in full workdays at home, but millions couldn't, she said. They were spending at least eight hours a day on child care.

Tens of millions of people who wanted or sought jobs, in the US and worldwide, couldn't find them, the International Labour Organization (ILO) reported. The coronavirus had forced millions of businesses to close. "Unemployment numbers reflect only a small proportion of the jobs lost. Many people who wished to have a job became inactive because they could not see any opportunity to search for a job successfully," or couldn't search due to coronavirus restrictions, it said.

One big negative: Up to forty per cent of teleworkers and workers at home are now classified as "independent contractors" of one form or another worldwide. That means, in the US, no regular jobless benefits, no workers' comp, and the worker must pay both the employee's and the employer's share of Social Security and Medicare payroll taxes.

US teleworkers who are independent contractors – including those forced to telework by the virus – also don't have the right to organise. The Protect The Right To Organise (PRO) Act, comprehensive labour law reform, would make millions of them "employees," with that right, and with Social Security, Medicare, jobless benefits, and workers' comp, too.

Other millions of employed workers took pay cuts, ILO added. Working hours declined by 8.8 per cent worldwide last year, and are projected to drop another three percent this year, with the largest loss (4.7 per cent) in high-income nations such as the US Those hourly cuts meant income cuts too: $3.7 trillion in 2020 for workers around the globe. ILO didn't have an estimate for this year's losses.

Hundreds of thousands of US workers realised that while GOP Oval Office occupant Donald Trump considered them "essential" and ordered them back to work, their bosses considered them disposable. If they caught COVID-19 on the job, the bosses thought, so what? Personal protective equipment (PPE) was in short supply, even for unionised workers, as National Nurses United quickly made clear.

For "essential" production workers, the nadir came in Iowa. Bosses at a pork plant not only defied county health officials who demanded it be shut until it was safe to work, via masks and physical distancing. They also did nothing when the virus broke out – except to set up a betting pool on how many workers would get sick and how many would die. The ultimate answers were 1,000 and six. The bosses were fired. One worker's family is suing the firm.

In the US, many workers responded to manifestations of the coronavirus threat by realising that if bosses didn't care for them, they'd have to unify, stand up and fight back. And that meant unionising or turning to their unions to organise joint action against the virus.

"This pandemic amplified" positive public views about unions," AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka told CNBC earlier this year. "It showed how helpless workers are without a union. They couldn't even get PPE and unions were able to get it for them."

And the essential workers became visible when, in non-union shops, notably Amazon, they stood up for their rights, especially their right to be safe on the job, and were illegally fired for doing so.

The firings at the Amazon warehouse on Staten Island, NY, were so outrageous, and Amazon's reasons so flimsy, that New York Attorney General Letitia "Tish" James is investigating. "It is disgraceful Amazon would terminate an employee who bravely stood up to protect himself and his colleagues," James said when announcing the probe in spring 2020.

"At the height of a global pandemic, Chris Smalls and his colleagues publicly protested the lack of precautions Amazon was taking to protect them from COVID-19. Chris Smalls was fired. In New York, the right to organise is codified into law, and any retaliatory action by management related thereto is strictly prohibited [...]. This action was also immoral and inhumane. The office of the Attorney General is considering all legal options," said James.

Lack of virus protection was also one reason workers at Amazon's Bessemer, Ala., warehouse, which employs 5,600, first called the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU). "The equation changes when you are talking about your own life and the lives of your family members," RWDSU President Stuart Appelbaum later explained.

Amazon labour law-breaking and intimidation eventually defeated the RWDSU, but not before the world learned how the coronavirus endangers workers in Amazon's warehouses. Meantime, a National Labor Relations Board administrative law judge ruled against Amazon, threw out the election returns, and ordered a rerun. Amazon is appealing the decision.

It's not just Amazon. Organising drives occurred at high-tech firms. Other workers, still on their regular jobs and menaced by the coronavirus, are calling unions to discuss organising. They range from forklift operators to grocery workers, health care workers, retail workers, and fast food workers. Workers in all those fields walked out in "protected concerted activities" last year, to use labour law's phrase. Why? Low pay, lack of virus protection, or both.

Meanwhile, National Nurses Union (NNU) members staged dozens of informational picket lines when hospital bosses either wouldn't provide PPE against the virus or locked it away where the nurses couldn't use it. A typical example: A one-day unfair labour practices strike on 26th July by NNU nurses at the privately owned Community First Medical Center on Chicago's Northwest Side.

The key causes were management's refusal to bargain on mandatory issues: Short-staffing which violates Illinois law, and lack of PPE during the pandemic. The virus killed three nurses there last year. The lack of PPE led NNU to call the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in to inspect it. It found violations and has fined the hospital US$13,000.

The ILO expects such impacts from the virus and its danger will continue to reverberate among workers, in the US, and around the world. It's calling on governments to step in and protect workers against bosses who don't protect them against the virus.

"When the world was brutally hit by the pandemic, wide swathes of the world's workers turned almost overnight to home work as a way of protecting both their jobs and their lives," ILO concludes. "There is no doubt that home work is likely to take on greater importance in the years to come. It is thus time for governments, in cooperation with workers' and employers' organisations, to... ensure all homeworkers move from invisibility to decent work."

People's World

PM'S INDEPENDENCE DAY SPEECH: AN EXERCISE IN DECEPTION

Brinda Karat
CPI-M right

An Independence Day speech, more so one which marks the beginning of the year of the 75th anniversary of India's independence would surely have merited a reiteration of the values which won us our independence. But not for Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In his 88-minute-long speech, there was only a cursory reference to the freedom struggle and its heroes. [...]

MISSING WORDS

It is more what the prime minister did not say which sounded loud and clear. Except for extending greetings at the beginning of his speech to those who "love India and democracy," in the rest of his address, the following key words were prominent by their absence, not used even once: constitution, democracy, secularism, equality, unity, pluralism, justice, workers, unemployment, inflation. Also missing were the words friendship, peace, good relations.

The missing words become more obvious in contrast to the brief speech made by President Ram Nath Kovind in his customary address on the eve of independence. He referenced some of these concepts: "India – home to the plurality of traditions – the biggest and most vibrant democracy – we acknowledge that we still have a long way to go in realising the dreams of those who won the freedom for us [...]. Our Constitution neatly summarises those dreams in four words: Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. We must strive for more equality in an unequal world, more justice in unjust circumstances [...]. In the spirit of "unity in diversity," we as a nation are following the right course. The president also thanked the "global fraternity" for the help they extended to India during the second wave, a point which was ungraciously ignored by Modi.

The marked difference in the tone and tenor of the two speeches may not have any deep political implications given the authoritarian nature of the present government, but it certainly shows up the prime minister's alienation and distance from the ideals of the freedom struggle and the unfulfilled promises of independent India towards the working people of India.

COMMEMORATING COMMUNAL DIVIDE?

This was further highlighted by his announcement that "India will commemorate August 14 as 'Partition Horrors Remembrance Day'" in the memory of all the victims of partition. Partition was one of the greatest of tragedies inflicted by the British on India in tandem with the communal forces acting in the name of religion whether Muslim or Hindu. There is no doubt that it was horrific with the loss of over a million lives. But if one is to remember such a tragedy in the life of a nation, the pledge would surely be to ensure that the politics of communalism and the promotion of sectarian religious identities built on hatred for "the other" which led to the terrible violence during partition would never be allowed to raise its head again. But far from this, the real objective was made clear enough by the plethora of statements made by BJP leaders from its president J P Nadda to general secretary and RSS functionary B L Santhosh, targeting "appeasement" politics as being responsible – appeasement being the BJP code word against minorities. Clearly the call to remember the victims of partition is geared to recreate the divisions and hate based politics which led to the division of India.

As is known, the RSS from its inception worked towards strengthening the British strategy of divide and rule. It was V D Savarkar, the BJP icon and revered ideologue, who developed the concept of Hindutva, of Hindu rashtra, and of nationality based on religion describing Hindus and Muslims as being two different nations. In his presidential address to the Ahmedabad session of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1937, he said: "India cannot be assumed today to be a unitarian and homogeneous nation, but on the contrary there are two nations in the main; the Hindus and the Muslims, in India." In 1940, at the session in Lahore, Jinnah repeated this theory of two nations based on religion advocating a division of India. [...]

It is an affront to the memories of those killed, raped, orphaned, rendered homeless and destitute in the partition related violence, that the ruling party should today commemorate the tragedy by promoting the same kind of politics which enabled the British to act as they did leading to the division of India. [...]

CONTEMPT FOR PEOPLE'S SUFFERING

What is the vision of the Prime Minister as far as the interests and well being of the people are concerned as reflected in his speech? On every issue he ignored reality and made the most astonishing claims in a display of contempt for people's suffering magnified during the pandemic. For example, he claimed: "we are making sure that no person or no class should be left behind in the development journey of society" – this when inequality in India has reached obscene levels and further intensified during the pandemic. As Oxfam's *Inequality Virus Report* shows "India's 100 billionaires have seen their fortunes increase by [approx. AU$242bil] since March 2020, enough to give every one of the

138 mil poorest Indian people a cheque for [approx. AU$1,759] each." [...]

SILENT ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

There were references to women. But not a word against the increasing violence against women, the horrendous cases of criminals being supported by his own party led governments such as in Hathras or more recently in the heart of the capital where the police locked up the parents of the *Dalit* [lowest caste] child victim to pressure them to withdraw their complaint. This was the occasion for the prime minister to strongly condemn violence against women and to ensure justice to women but he remained silent.

RECYCLING SCHEMES

What he did say in the form of promises was more or less a recycled version of what he had said in 2019 and 2020.

Here are some examples:

The grand announcement of "PM Gati Shakt" – a [approx. AU$2 tril] infrastructure investment. The same amount and the same project had been announced in the Independence Day speeches in 2019 and 2020.

The PM stated "good news to share today" that the Sainik Schools (military schools), administered by the defence ministry, would admit girls. In fact the decision to make all Sainik Schools co-educational by 2021-22 was announced by the defence ministry back in October 2019.

"I am announcing the National Hydrogen Mission today with this tricolour as a witness," the prime minister said. However, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced this mission during her budget speech in February.

The plan to fortify rice with iron and vitamins before distributing it in ration shops and at schools for the mid-day meal scheme announced by the PM was also announced by then food minister Ram Vilas Paswan in 2019, and a pilot project has been in progress for over a year now."

PEGASUS AND "NON-INTERFERENCE"

But perhaps the most ironic, or one could call it shameless, was the statement on governance made by the PM. He said "We want such an India where the governments do not interfere in the lives of the citizens [...]. For the all-round development of the nation, it is essential to end the unnecessary interference of government and government procedures in the lives of people." But what about Pegasus, Mr Prime Minister? What about the use of malignant military-grade spyware against your opponents – this government spied on more than 161 targeted individuals, including Supreme Court judges and opposition leaders, a whole session of parliament was washed out because of the adamant refusal of the government to answer a simple question – has any agency of the government bought and used Pegasus and then in his speech the prime minister speaks of stopping "unnecessary interference." The hypocrisy is quite astounding!

CONCLUSION

It is India's tragedy that when we begin the celebrations of the diamond jubilee of our glorious freedom struggle, our government comprises of leaders whose ideological forefathers had been in diametrical opposition to the values which won India her freedom, the values of unity, pluralism, secularism and the fight for economic and social justice. The prime minister's speech reflected this reality.

People's Democracy

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

Editor: Franc Stregone

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TIBET'S PROGRESS A POWERFUL MESSAGE FOR WESTERN NAYSAYERS

The Tibet Autonomous Region celebrates the 70th anniversary of its peaceful liberation this year, a triumphant moment for its socialist system and governance that delivers a powerful message to Western politicians who fail to acknowledge its enormous progress.

In 1951, the Agreement of the Central People's Government and the Local Government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet, known as the 17-Article Agreement officially proclaimed the peaceful liberation of Tibet.

That liberation, together with the epochal democratic reform in 1959, has helped Tibet cast away its regressive, autocratic, and isolated past to embrace prosperity and an open future.

Nearly 3.65 million people live in the region, up 21.52 percent from 2010. Over 86 percent of the population is Tibetan.

Tibet's average life expectancy increased from 35.5 years in 1951 to 71.1 years in 2019.

The region has more than 1,700 sites for Tibetan Buddhist activities with 46,000 monks and nuns. In an effort to preserve traditional Tibetan culture, the state and the region have invested over 5 billion yuan (770 million US dollars) in the renovation of cultural relics. Tibetan opera, Gesar, Lum medicinal bathing of Sowa Rigpa have been included in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List.

Having eradicated absolute poverty, Tibet is in an accelerated drive of economic development with modernised infrastructure.

Tibet's achievements should be sufficient to prompt certain individuals in the West to drop their fixation on the Shangri-La myth, which idealizes eternal theocratic rule and a spiritual world, and sees any modern development as worthy of condemnation.

Over the past 70 years, leaving the dark ages behind, Tibet has replaced the cruel, feudal serfdom system with a socialist system, exercised regional ethnic autonomy, and carried out reform and opening-up along with the rest of the nation.

As a region that occupies an important place in the nation's security paradigm, Tibet receives significant attention from the central authorities, and massive assistance from other provinces to boost its development. The central budget has funded key infrastructure projects in the region, including railways and airports.

In order to maintain lasting stability and sustain development, Tibet steadfastly opposes secessionist plotting. The 14th Dalai Lama and his followers, supported by Western anti-China forces, have over the years continued attempting to promote "Tibetan independence" by provoking incidents that jeopardize peace and stability in Tibet.

These political exiles, as well as certain Western politicians and organizations, have launched a misinformation campaign targeting Tibet. They call liberation "repression" and demonise China's policy in the region. Their cries of "cultural destruction" and "genocide" do not carry a shred of truth. Their frequent accusations regarding ethnic, religious, democratic and human rights issues are in fact driven by the idea of "Tibetan independence" to meddle in China's domestic affairs.

These narratives concerning Tibet reflect either sheer ignorance or hegemonistic thinking tied to imperialist aggressions in the region in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Since the 1980s, Western forces have played an active role in the outbreaks of unrest that have taken place in Tibet.

China, with its ironclad resolve to safeguard national sovereignty and ethnic unity, will never allow the meddling hands attempting to play the "Tibet card" to turn the tables. And any secessionist attempts, which go against history and the common will of various ethnic groups in the region and the whole country, are doomed to failure.

Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, people in Tibet now live moderately prosperous lives, which would have been unimaginable before the region's peaceful liberation. They are sure to create an even brighter future through unity, a modernisation drive and continued support from the central authorities.

People's Daily

PALESTINE: ISRAEL BOMBS GAZA & TACKLES PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS

Israel's fighter jets attacked several positions in the Gaza Strip after the Hebrew army cracked down on a peacful demonstration by hundreds of Palestinians, who were protesting near the border wall the strip.

The bombings hit the regions of Nuseirat, the Al-Shati camp, the Hamas-affiliated base of Arin, and the Al-Firuz towers neighboring areas, but according to witnesses, no one has been injured or killed during the airstrikes.

However, the crackdown on protesters near the border wall has been one of the most aggressive since 2019.

Palestinians were marching to commemorate the 52nd anniversary of Al-Aqsa Mosque fire in 1969, when an Israeli citizen caused a fire that destroyed the oldest parts of the temple.

So far, Gaza's Health Ministry had reported 41 injured people, including a 13-year-old child who was shot in the head by Israel Defense Forces (IDF) troops.

Last May 21, Israel was forced to suspend bombing raids on Gaza due to increased international pressure. On that occasion, the airstrikes lasted 11 days and caused 232 casualties, including 65 children.

Despite the truce signed between Israel and Hamas, the attacks on Gaza and the West Bank civil population have not stopped. On the contrary, bombings and crackdowns on peaceful demonstrations continue to be part of Palestinians' daily life.

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Communist Party of Australia
www.cpa.org.au cpa@cpa.org.au

Head Office (Sydney)
74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010
phone: 02 9699 8844 fax: 02 9699 9833 email: info@cpa.org.au

General Secretary
Andrew Irving
andrew@cpa.org.au

Party President
Vinnie Molina
president@cpa.org.au

Media
guardian@cpa.org.au
amr@cpa.org.au

Adelaide Sally Mitchell sa@cpa.org.au 0413 762 435
PO Box 56, Royal Park, SA 5014

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

Canberra act@cpa.org.au

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

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

Newcastle newcastle@cpa.org.au

Perth Elly Hulm perth@cpa.org.au 0419 812 872
PO Box 98, North Perth, WA 6906

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

Sydney District syd.dist.comm@cpa.org.au 02 9699 8844 Surry Hills (head office)

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

Wollongong wollongong@cpa.org.au