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BIG WIN FOR GIG WORKERS

Anna Pha

Gig workers had a ground-breaking win last month when the Personal Injury Commission (PIC) awarded the family of Xiaonjun Chen $834,000 in workers' compensation after determining that the gig worker was an employee.

Chen was killed when hit by a bus while riding his motorbike on a job for food delivery company Hungry Panda in Sydney.

The PIC found that Chen's injuries were incurred in the course of his employment with Hungry Panda – that he was an employee when he died. Hungry Panda, and other companies using a similar model to hire, claim the workers who deliver food for it are contractors, not employees.

Jasmina Mackovic from law firm Slater and Gordon said the decision was the first of its kind in workers' compensation.

Transport Workers Union (TWU) National Secretary Michael Kaine also noted it was the first case in relation to workers' compensation where a gig worker was found to be an employee – not a contractor.

"For too long, gig companies have been able to skirt the edges of our outdated industrial relations law which divides workers into two camps: one which receives hard-won rights, and one which is not entitled to any basic protections. Denying workers' rights has created an industry rife with underpayment, extraordinary pressure, injuries, and death," Kaine said.

Food 4 Riders Rally, Sydney, March 14, 2018. Photo: Unions NSW

COWBOYS

The gig model is built around underpaying workers and denying them the legal entitlements that other workers receive. It is a growing trend, increasingly becoming the business model for employers. In doing so, companies bypass the industrial relations system and all the legal obligations that employers are required to meet. It offers arbitrary and absolute powers over workers – and along with it, massive profits.

Gig employers have various modes of operation with one thing in common – they deny that the people who they hire are their employees. They claim they are not employers but are online platforms where service providers can be matched with clients seeking those services. For a more detailed outline of their operations and the TWU's campaign to organise them see *Guardian* #1888 (02/10/2019) and #1889 (09/10/2019).

These companies have expanded beyond ride share (eg Uber) and food delivery (eg Deliveroo) into home and office tasks (eg Airtasker), and NDIS and aged care (eg Mable). They continue to proliferate as a model of employment, undercutting minimum wages and working conditions while denying workers the other legal entitlements that benefit other workers under the industrial relations system.

Gig workers have no legal rights. They often work in dangerous conditions. If they speak out, they no longer have a job. The sector has become a major employer of visa workers – backpackers and students in particular – who are in an extremely vulnerable situation as they attempt to meet work requirements and survive. Wages can be $10 or less per hour, well below the legal minimum.

It is the most sinister, precarious form of capitalist exploitation in which employers make super profits out of bypassing the industrial system and all the obligations (albeit their inadequacies) that come with it. It also undercuts other employers who operate within the legal industrial relations framework and puts pressure on them to cut wages and working conditions of their employees in a race to the bottom. It puts legitimate businesses that cannot compete out of operation.

It denies workers any means to address serious health and safety issues. There is no means of dispute resolution. A worker taking strike action is in effect acting against their own interests. They are replaceable and will be replaced.

The lack of protections and accountability results in deaths and injuries with no redress to workers' compensation unless they have paid for it themselves. Without workers' compensation or other form of insurance it is a matter of taking their employer to court – unaffordable and too difficult for individual workers unless they belong to a trade union that can represent them.

Organising gig workers is difficult and motives driving employer adoption of this model of employment in pursuit of larger profits. There is a large turnover of workers.

HISTORIC AGREEMENT

The Transport Workers Union has campaigned hard to organise gig transport workers and win basic trade union rights and entitlements for them. It had a historic win against Foodora in 2018 in an unfair dismissal case involving Melbourne delivery rider Josh Klooger. The company was forced to pay millions in underpaid wages and non-payment of superannuation to its workers. It then left Australia!

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ANTI-PROTEST LAWS AFFECT US ALL

Earlier this month, NSW police bungled a raid on Blockade Australia activists in the Colo Valley, in Sydney's north-west.

Activists at the remote camp noticed two people wearing camouflage in bushland near the back of the camp, claiming that when the men were confronted they only said: "We've been compromised." Seven protesters were then arrested after attempting to prevent the men from leaving in a car that had come to collect them. Since then, an eighth person has been arrested and charged.

However, the lawyer for the protesters, Mark Davis, said he will argue that none of the officers identified themselves as police before the confrontation.

The overreach by NSW police has been widely condemned. Speaking to the exaggerated response, Human Rights Law Centre legal director, Alice Drury stated that "sending in 100 armed police officers to threaten and intimidate people planning a peaceful protest is alarming and disproportionate."

However, NSW Deputy Premier, Paul Toole, who is also the Police Minister, and the head of a police strike force targeting environmental activists, disagreed with this assessment, stating:

"This isn't peaceful protesting, these are people pulling stunts that put lives at risk and stop people trying to get [to] work and get their kids to school and police simply won't tolerate it [...]. [...] It is incredibly disappointing that they want to cause this inconvenience to good people who are just going about their business, especially given the hard times many have gone through in recent years due to the pandemic."

Using the pandemic against climate activists attempting to raise awareness against this global existential threat is deplorable, given how poorly both the federal and state Coalition governments acted over this period, only adding to the "hard times" experienced by the working class.

As reported in an earlier editorial (*Guardian – the Workers' Weekly* #2002, "NSW Parliament passes new anti-protest laws"), NSW parliament – with the help of the ALP opposition – passed anti-protest legislation in response to earlier actions by Blockade Australia which increased fines and extended punishment to include prison time.

NSW Greens MP motioned in the NSW Parliament calling for protest laws introduced in April to be disallowed. Speaking on the operation, Greens MP Sue Higginson stated:

"The police operation that is underway throughout NSW today in response to peaceful protesters is a clear warning of how far down the road we are towards a police-state [...]. [...]"Protest is fundamental to a democracy and plays a vital role in giving people a peaceful voice outside of law. Removing the right to peaceful protest is a dangerous and draconian step for NSW to take."

Supporting the Greens motion and condemning the operation, Paul Keating, Secretary, Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), Sydney Branch stated that: "the NSW trade union movement is united in its condemnation of this legislation from the Perrottet Liberal-National Government. [...] Our proud history is built around grassroots action, supporting the health, safety, wages and wellbeing of workers."

Indeed, the working class has made the gains it has because of the protests and industrial action it has been able to undertake in years past. These anti-protest laws have ramifications beyond climate activism and could well be used against the labour movement in its fight for better conditions and pay. We must fight back against these laws!

REPORT: *GUARDIAN* WELL RECEIVED BY CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

CPA Perth Branch

Carrying out the decision of the Central Committee that *Guardian* issue #2011 of Monday 20th June be distributed to building workers across the country, Party members mobilised in several party centres. The issue carried the front-page story of the promised abolition of the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC).

In Perth, party comrades greeted workers at Elizabeth Quay where several multi-storey buildings are under construction. On Wednesday at 6:30 AM and on Thursday at 3 PM workers responded well to the distribution by Party comrades walking away with their free copies of the Workers' Weekly. Some workers were well aware of the ABCC having been victims of charges and fines brought against them by these Coalition cops in the construction industry. For other, particularly younger workers, it was the first they learned about the ABCC and they gladly took the *Guardian* with them.

The CPA position is clear, the Albanese government must honour their electoral commitment and get rid of the ABCC once and for all. The CPA also calls for the Registered Organisations Commission (ROC) to go and for the government to legislate for an unfettered right to strike, abolish the right of entry permit system and guarantee access for union officials to the workplace. Also, a necessity for workers is industry bargaining to improve wages and conditions.

The Communist Party of Australia calls on workers to take to the streets in demand of their rights at work. ✪

BIG WIN FOR GIG WORKERS

Continued from page 1

Food delivery platform DoorDash and the TWU recently signed a landmark agreement setting out how Australia could ensure safety and fairness for gig workers. Door Dash and the TWU agreed on six core principles:

- Workers should not be prohibited from accessing appropriate **work rights and entitlements**;
- Workers must have **transparency**;
- Workers must have access to **dispute resolution processes**;
- Workers must have the opportunity to contribute to a **collective voice**;
- Appropriate resources should be allocated to ensuring industry standards are established and maintained, and to **driver education and training**;
- Three stage approach towards achieving **regulation** of the on-demand transport industry.

The detail remains to be nutted out and that is what will determine just how genuine DoorDash is, but it is a significant step in the right direction.

The payout to Chen's family is a great win for gig workers, but it still does not guarantee other gig workers their rights. Until there is legislation, and the sector is tightly regulated, courts will decide each case individually. The PIC relates to workers' compensation in NSW. There is no automatic flow-on for all gig employees.

WAY FORWARD

Workers cannot and should not be expected to know and understand the technicalities of employment and contract law. The gig form of exploitation is open to rampant and arbitrary abuse by employers, who are increasingly making the most of precarious employment such as body hire and gig labour.

The Labor Party promised during its federal election campaign to regulate the gig economy to stop rampant exploitation. The details remain to be seen. Workplace Relations Minister Tony Burke said, "No matter which way you look at it, the days of gig workers having no entitlements cannot go on."

ALL workers, regardless of how their form of employment is characterised by an employer, should be entitled to at least the minimum wage; sick, parental and carers' leave; penalty rates; overtime payment; allowances; and covered by unfair dismissal provisions. Same pay and conditions for the same work.

Employers should also pay for workers' compensation insurance, superannuation, and long service leave entitlements.

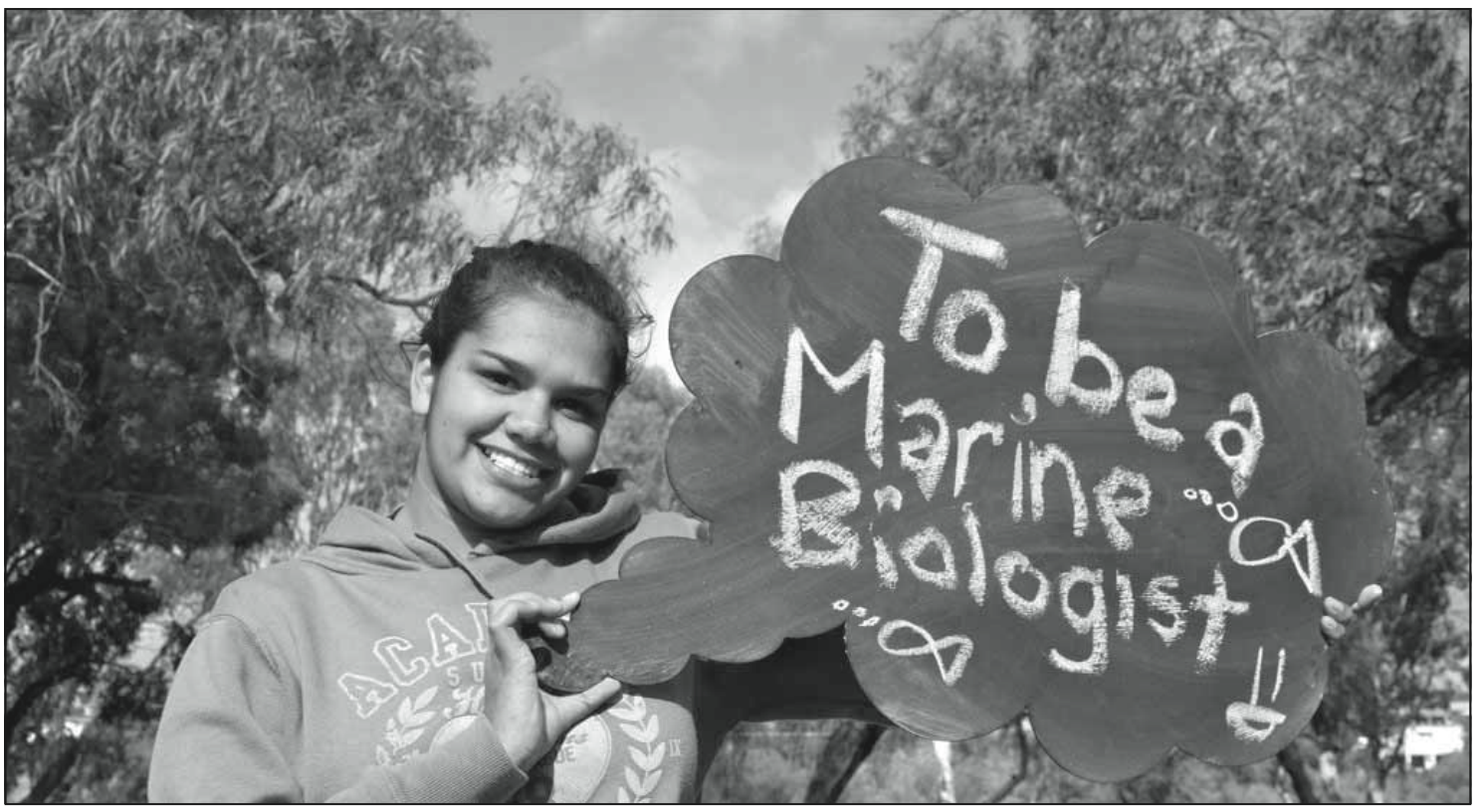
Essential are trade union rights including to join a trade union, the right to strike, to be represented by the union in the negotiation of enterprise and industry agreements – the latter requiring legalising. Without their union workers are powerless. ✪

NAIDOC WEEK

Ron Hall

National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) can trace its origins back to 1938 when at one of the earliest human rights protests anywhere in the world, First Nations people took part in a congress in Sydney which passed the following resolution:

> "WE, representing THE ABORIGINES OF AUSTRALIA, assembled in conference at the Australian Hall, Sydney, on the 26th day of January, 1938, this being the 150th Anniversary of the Whiteman's seizure of our country, HEREBY MAKE PROTEST against the callous treatment of our people by the whitemen during the past 150 years, AND WE APPEAL to the Australian nation of today to make new laws for the education and care of Aborigines, we ask for a new policy which will raise our people TO FULL CITIZEN STATUS and EQUALITY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY."



Loxton Fishing Competition NAIDOC Week 2011. Photo: ABC Open Riverland – flicker.com (CC BY 2.0)

Today, NAIDOC Week encourages all First Nations Australians to getup, stand up, and show up to celebrate the world's oldest continuing culture ...

Early in the 1900s, Aboriginal people consciously boycotted Australia Day (Invasion Day) ceremonies, but little notice was taken of their protest. Many felt they needed to be more active and visible. In 1924 the Australian Aborigines Progress Association was formed and became very active but after three years of police harassment the organisation was abandoned.

Despite repression, in 1932 a determined leader, William Cooper, formed the Australian Aborigines League and in 1935 drafted a petition to King George V requesting special Aboriginal electorates to send Aboriginal representatives to the federal Parliament. However, the federal Government declined to act because of a lack of constitutional authority.

On Australia Day 1938, an Aboriginal Day of Mourning, Aboriginal people staged a protest march through the city of Sydney, which followed by the congress that drafted the above resolution. A deputation led by William Cooper to Prime Minister Joseph Lyons requested a national policy for Indigenous peoples but again this was met with rejection as the Australian government lacked the necessary constitutional powers.

The Aboriginal Day of Mourning then became Aborigines Day and continued on the Sunday before "Australia Day" until a move to the first Sunday in July in 1955 to become more a celebration of Aboriginal culture than simply a day of mourning or protest. With the support of major Aboriginal organisations, state and federal governments and many church groups, the formation of National Aborigines Day Observance Committee (NADOC) took place in 1956.

CONSTITUTIONAL RESOLUTION OF 1967

With over ninety per cent of the vote, the 1967 referendum allowing the federal Government to legislate specifically for Aboriginal people, became the most successful in Australian history. Aboriginal people, who had been granted the right to vote in 1965 were able to fully participate. Much of this overwhelming success has been attributed to the campaigning of Faith Bandler who made a heart-felt appeal for a better Australia. In addition, inspired by African American protests in the United States, Neville Perkins, Australia's first Aboriginal university graduate, also made an impact through the freedom ride through outback New South Wales, highlighting the desperate needs of Aboriginal people, particularly in health, education and housing, as well as revealing the insidious discrimination that existed in many country towns.

In 1972 a federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs was formed as one consequence of the 1967 referendum and two years later in 1974 it was decided that a week rather than just a day was more appropriate to celebrate Aboriginal culture day – from the first to the second Sunday in July each year.

NADOC BECOMES NAIDOC

With an overdue recognition of the Torres Strait Islander people and their culture, 1991 brought the change to NAIDOC it is known today. During the 1990s the newly formed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), assumed management of NAIDOC until ATSIC was unceremoniously disbanded in 2004.

Today, NAIDOC Week encourages all First Nations Australians to getup, stand up, and show up to celebrate the world's oldest continuing culture, inviting all members of the community to take part in sharing the uniqueness of Indigenous culture, not just with Australians in total but with the rest of humanity.

Today, cultural events such as a flag raising ceremony, story-telling and Indigenous displays are features of NAIDOC Week and according to Narungga Elder, Dr Kevin O'Loughlin, the younger generation need to know the past to know where they are going in the future.

NEW MUTUAL OBLIGATIONS LOOM OVER JOBSEEKERS

E Lennon

Despite criticisms from social services advocates, the new employment service Workforce Australia will introduce a point-based system, which is already confusing and causing fear for many Australians.

Many are welcoming the news that penalties will be wiped as the current employment services program is scrapped. However, uncertainty is growing for the 792,000 people affected as Labor claims it is too late to stop the changes created by the Morrison government.

"It's actually too late to not have a points system at all," Employment Minister Tony Burke told Sky News.

"We want to make sure, and I'll be changing it over the course of the next week, to make sure that we can have a system that's designed to get people into work, rather than some media stunt to punish people."

What the Labor government fails to mention is why it is too late to stop these changes. Minister Burke has named several of his own criticisms of the service, including how a person studying full-time is still expected to do the twenty job applications per month to meet mutual obligations for the benefits.

Under the point scheme, undertaking full-time courses to get themselves job-ready doesn't reach the required amount. This means many people who are putting in dozens of hours a week to earn the benefits still won't be eligible. This includes people who are undertaking full-time English language studies. This cut and dry approach to people's complex and varying situations will put many people under immense stress to escape the punitive system.

"I have been to my job agency, but they don't know anything about it, and I've been trying to contact Centrelink and I just can't get through," Cherie Grant, an unemployed Melbourne resident told the ABC.

"I tried looking online [...] and [there was] nothing that seemed to clearly represent my status and what I would have to do."

Programs like Workforce Australia hold a sword above the heads of many people receiving benefits, including those who are vulnerable, and those who are in precarious situations. People seeking help from the government deserve more than a paper-thin safety net as the cost of living grows.

"We're going to have people trying to figure out how to navigate a new system at the same time as worrying about losing their payment at a time when costs are out of control," Kristin O'Connell, a spokesperson from the Antipoverty Centre told the ABC.

A numbers-based system cannot articulate solutions to helping individuals. Centrelink is a difficult system to navigate, and its workers are always preoccupied with rigorous and time-consuming protocols. Adhering to strict evaluations on whether someone is eligible to receive funds is the antithesis of tailoring assistance to people's needs. It is harmful and impersonal.

Australian governments do not have good track records with rolling out new technologies. It is likely many will be left outside of this confusing and inaccessible program. Labor says it's too late to stop this program, but it's crucial that they do. They need to reform Centrelink, increase the payment, provide more stability to our most vulnerable, reduce mutual obligations, get rid of work for the dole and stop outsourcing to private job agencies.

THE SYSTEMIC FAILURE OF CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES

Valentin Cartillier

CONTENT WARNING: Sexual assault, racial victimisation, child abuse, and suicide, involving minors.

An investigation conducted by the ABC has found that a staggering number of children placed under state protection are subjected to further abuse in the homes they are relocated to. More than 700 people from across the country have come forward as part of the investigation to speak about the failings of the child protection service – from the children who have gone through the system, to current and former government care workers, to school principals.

The investigation includes harrowing first-hand accounts from the victims, abused not only by the "carers" assigned by the government but some by government workers themselves. There is no shortage of stories of sexual abuse, self-harm, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide attempts, and racial abuse from survivors of the system. Former and current employees of child protection services have also spoken out about how their concerns were dismissed by senior workers. A current principal of a school in Western Australia revealed that, despite receiving reports from staff that over two-thirds of students had been abused in some way, the police and Department of Communities had failed to effectively act on them, even after repeated follow-ups.

This occurs despite the vetting process government departments put in place for potential carers. By the time the relevant department of child protection services has even acted on any reports, typically children have already been subjected to prolonged periods of abuse. To further compound the issue, protection services vary between the states and territories due to differences in funding and whether it's a rural or metropolitan area.

In Tasmania, the state's child sexual abuse commission of inquiry has found that their child protection service has repeatedly left teenagers at risk of homelessness to live in unsafe environments. Over-represented in this demographic are Indigenous teens. This is consistent with the ABC's findings that Indigenous children across the country are ten times more likely to be removed from their families. While department policy states that Indigenous children should be assigned to Indigenous carers this isn't always possible which means children can be left with care workers isolated from their communities.

Despite repeated attempts at various reforms, the problem is fundamentally a systemic one. Over 200 current and former child protection workers have stated that they risk, or have risked, being "performance managed" out of departments whenever they challenge how a child's case has been managed. They allege that management is more concerned with manipulating statistics and cutting corners than actually protecting children. There is a general consensus that nothing short of a complete dismantling and reconstruction of the system is necessary to confront how deeply ingrained the problem is.

However, even if the departments for child protection were completely restructured this would only address part of the issue. As the various witnesses from this investigation attest, this problem is not simply the result of some government mismanagement but is reflective of the deeper socio-economic attitudes and divisions around class, race, and gender, within society at large. ✪

Photo: Nenad Stojkovic – flicker.com (CC BY 2.0)

Fight for the Future

This attractive new booklet is a call to action to save our planet and humanity.

It argues that humanity is at a crossroads. The insatiable drive for profits by capitalism is leading to irreversible and catastrophic climate change. Capitalist governments – and the giant corporations they work for – are refusing to act on the warnings of the great majority of the world's leading scientists.

A popular movement for change is growing around the world. It aims to dismantle the destructive policies that have led us to this uniquely perilous moment of human history, and to move toward a world system that gives priority to human rights and needs. The stakes in the bitter class war that is taking shape are immense and arise from the nature of capitalism. Capitalism is an unsustainable system.

The booklet insists that we must confront the reality that what we do now will forever alter the course of humanity and all life on Earth. Now more than ever we must fight for a better system. Our lives are more important than their profits.

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Write to: CPA books, 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010

The federal Treasurer delivered an address to Treasury staff last week, informing them that the government would oppose wage claims and use available legislation to attack campaign actions by unions. Here's how Jim Chalmers put it: "We've got to make sure that the labour market can deliver rising incomes in a sustainable way over a long period." But, of course, any wage rise will need to be fair, a word we will hear quite a bit in the coming months, "fair" being a term the Labor Party fills with hot air and floats over the raging sea of class contradictions whenever they're about to stick it to working people. On this Fair Planet, capitalists don't run the show. Instead, there is the verticality of wealth and horizontality of democracy. In this benign geometry, the polity bows to the general electorate and the vote of the millionaire counts for no more than that of the beggar.

A federal budget will be handed down on the 25th October, and a new "spending audit branch" has been set up in the Finance Department to identify the choicest cuts to deliver budget "savings," or as prime minister Anthony Albanese put it, "really put the breaks" on spending. Two predictions: High on the list of the most vulnerable to be targeted, the NDIS will be contracted out and privatised, with the remainder disposed of all together; welfare and family payments will be cut.

As the Prime Minister capered off to the NATO war room in Madrid with whatever his particular brand of cringing servility is, the crossbench Senators, who had their staffing allocation cut to a quarter of the previous parliament's, were planning some mayhem. The staffing cuts will make holding the government to account near impossible. Crossbench tactics include disrupting Senate procedures and the legislative agenda of the government. The first question to ask is, what does the government want to hide? Albanese will receive his instructions from the coalition of the killing: tyranny thrives behind a veil of secrecy.

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: The US Supreme Court's roll-back of Roe v Wade is a blow against women's rights to choose in terminating a pregnancy and people's rights more broadly. The following is an extract from a statement in *People's World*, paper of the CPUSA. "Today we mourn this horrific setback. Tomorrow and beyond, we organise. Everywhere – in our communities, unions, schools, places of worship, and workplaces. We must help build a backlash against the Right, one in the same spirit as the women who rebelled after Trump's election and helped take the House of Representatives away from the Republican Party in 2018; the millions who marched for Black Lives after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others; and the teachers, auto workers, and nurses who went on strike these past four years. As big as these movements were, the current situation demands a much larger movement, one that's more inclusive, broader, more militant. Civil disobedience is in order."

REPORT: QUEENSLAND COMRADES ORGANISE! THE CPA AND THE LOWER-NORTHERN QLD TOUR – PART ONE

Graham Holton and
David Matters

On Thursday the 23rd June, we arrived in Childers, the day commemorating the Childers Backpacker Tragedy. Sixteen young people were burnt to death at the Palace Hotel because the owner had flaunted housing safety regulations. It is now an art gallery that explains the preventable disaster. The site has become a symbol of how poorly itinerant workers are treated in Queensland.

One man told us his Italian uncle had set up a local newspaper in Bundaberg to help the Italian farm workers in the 1950s. Unfortunately, someone threw dynamite into the print store, destroying the presses and killing the owner. The farming areas north of Brisbane used to have strong Communist supporters in the mid-20th century.

We dedicated the morning to the township, asking locals what the country town's main problems were. High on the list was the treatment of South Sea Islanders, who have been exploited for generations. They are the cane cutters and fruit pickers who are poorly paid, have atrocious working conditions, and have housing problems. Rents are high, and housing caravan parks and hotel accommodation are limited. Many live in cars with their family. It is not just those on 457 Visas who have these problems, as it affects many families in this town. This exploitation of workers has been carried out by both the LNP and Labor governments. In nearby Maryborough, the show grounds were converted into a tent city to accommodate the homeless.

The cashless card is another problem, as it forces recipients to shop at big chain stores, not local ones. It further limits what items can be purchased, making the card owner child-like and needing parental care. The reintroduction of Robodebt by the new government is another worry.

THE TOUR'S BEGINNING

The tour started on Tuesday the 21st June, aiming to meet new members, talk to unions, and discover what problems currently exist in rural Queensland. We set up a discussion with two great people, Che and Lenin (yes, those are their real names!). A great afternoon, with both very keen on getting the *Guardian – The Workers' Weekly* distributed to work colleagues and stores in Nambour and Caloundra. These towns are a two-hour drive north of Brisbane. Nambour used to be famous for its sugar cane, but the farms are now unproductive owing to falling sugar prices and overseas competition. All those coastal towns used to have South Sea Islander workers in the 19th and 20th centuries. The whole area has a housing and accommodation shortage as Queensland governments have failed to invest in low-income housing since the 1980s.

Wednesday, we met Kyle and Louise. Louise's father was an old communist, so is very welcome to the Party. Kyle is a sub-contractor in the building industry whose bosses are continually not paying him for work or underpaying him. He took a pile of *Guardians* to distribute at his work site. Another problem is the local Neo-Nazis attacking workers and shouting racist abuse.

Thursday afternoon, we dropped into the Queensland Council of Unions in Bundaberg and left *Guardians* with the Secretary of the Queensland Teachers Union. We also spoke with a trade unionist named Scott on the local issues. Again it is housing, low pay, casualisation, and unsafe working conditions.

On Friday the 24th June, we visited another comrade in Biloela, and made contact with the Aboriginal Housing Committee. We also handed out pamphlets outside the offices of federal Member for Hinkler, who is a member of the National Party. This was a great beginning to our trip! ✪

Find out more about the

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Is "flexibility" a good thing? What are your "values"? Is that government a "regime"? Well it depends on who you ask in this fortnight's edition of Weasel Words!

FLEXIBILITY

/ˌflek.səˈbɪl.ə.ti/

When it's not being a weasel word, flexibility is a very good thing indeed. A useful property of wiring, car panels, cats, and contortionists. With people, it can be a good thing to be flexible. For example, if you're planning a dinner, it's nice to hear someone tell you that they're flexible because it means that the time and the food is up to you. Result!

Flexibility can be a good thing at work, too – it's great when someone you're working with can do a variety of things to get the job done.

Used by employer groups, however, "flexibility" means lower wages, more work, more unpaid overtime, and sometimes even less safety – all things which – by some strange coincidence! – mean more profits for employers. The flexibility bosses ask for only ever goes one way.

VALUES

/ˈvæl·juz/

"Values" is kind of a neutral term, meaning simply things that are important to a person or a group. We can say of someone that "accuracy is one of her values." We could say "politeness is a value in Japan," for example.

One thing a lot of weasel words have in common is acting as a way to say something without saying it out loud, sometimes called a "dog whistle." The term "values" does this when used in a weasley way. We need only remember when former Prime Minister John Howard spoke of "private school values", saving himself the bother of admitting that he was on the side of parents who didn't want their kids mixing with migrants and/or working people.

Speaking of migrants, the Liberals did a lot of public fretting about them fitting in with "our values."

During the dog-whistle-happy Howard years, there were some efforts to specify "Australian values," in an attempt to get more mileage out of being tough on non-Anglo Aussies. Values proposed back then included "mateship" and "democracy" as though nobody in another country has ever stood by their friends or wanted a say in running the place where they live.

REGIME

/reɪˈʒiːm/

An oldie but a goodie, a regime is simply a government of which you disapprove – That's all! The shape or size of the government doesn't really matter, nor does how they got into power; if the media outlet talking about them disapproves, they're a regime. Keen observers will have noticed that the Chinese government has gone from regime to government to regime again, depending on how Washington, Canberra, and NewsCorp feel about the CPC. Meanwhile, the military dictatorships in Thailand and Egypt get to be governments, not regimes, because – for the time being – the US has no interest in trying to undermine or replace the Thai and Egyptian regimes, sorry, "governments."

VALE MAX HUNT

1923 – 2021

Peter Mac

For nearly four decades, Max Hunt worked quietly and with utter dedication and reliability for the Communist Party of Australia, including wrapping and posting copies of *The Guardian – The Workers' Weekly* every week. That's the way most comrades in Sydney remember him. However, his involvement with the CPA goes back eighty years – an amazing testament to his commitment to the working class and the Party.

As an eighteen-year-old, Max joined the Royal Australian Air Force in 1941 and the next year joined an RAAF Party branch. He participated in a successful campaign against a RAAF officer's policy of punishing Max's entire unit for the misdemeanours of individuals.

Max helped organise a victory march in Cairns in 1945. After the war, he participated in a federal election campaign for CPA candidates and did organising work for the Party. He took part in the Chifley government's short, intense but unsuccessful campaign to nationalise Australia's banks before working in heavy industry factories and finally joining the Postmaster General's Department in 1947. True to form, he maintained his political work. He helped form a credit union and welfare committee for postal workers and was elected to the state executive of the Postal Workers Union and the NSW Trades and Labour Council.

Max believed in good communications between workers. CPA journalist Craig Ryan commented: "For Max, friendliness [was] both a strong personal inclination and a political imperative." Max himself observed: "As a communist, it is absolutely necessary to be tolerant, sincere and comradely. I tried to be friendly to all who wanted to talk." Max believed that even "groupers", members of the rabidly anti-communist "industrial groups" who were active at the height of the Cold War, could be brought to a better position by personal influence, and that workers with opposing points of view "would work together in a friendly way on the job and in bodies like the Welfare Committee".

When Max retired from paid employment in 1980, he commenced working for the Socialist Party of Australia (now CPA), and he was still active in Party work until approximately ten years ago. Max always maintained an intense interest in Party activities, and when comrades came to visit, he would always ask them about the Party.

Caring for veteran comrades is important Party work, and until he died last year, a group of Max's comrades and friends would visit him and talk with him about the Party. Connie Villano, one of Max's comrades, has written her impressions of those visits as follows:

"Maria and I started visiting Max when we were told that a well-respected comrade was living in a nursing home south of Wollongong. We started visiting him over the years, and we would catch the train to the nursing home where he lived. Initially, we didn't know him very well but over time that changed. A special rapport and friendship developed between Max and us. It was beautiful. Every time he would welcome us with open arms. We were always made to feel welcome. We all loved the social contact, and we all thrived on it. Every visit was filled with great conversation.

"Max had a lifelong interest in politics and in the Communist Party. In his younger days, he used to travel around the state, selling the Party paper and talking about politics to people in the country towns. His interest in politics never waned. Even in his later years in the nursing home, he was keen to know who the current president of the Party was and things such as when the next Party Congress was on. He liked to receive the *Guardian* at the nursing home. On our visits to see Max, Donna McLaren's name came up frequently in conversations. Max had a great friendship with Donna and always spoke highly of her. We felt he had the utmost respect and admiration for comrade Donna.

"On one visit, Max showed us a small souvenir of the Kremlin, the Soviet version of Parliament House. He travelled in the Soviet Union and told us that going there was one of the best things he had ever done. Having served in the Australian Air Force during World War II, he liked old aeroplanes from the War, and he had pictures of historic aircraft in his room. He enjoyed talking about old aeroplanes to others who were interested in the history of aviation. Our friendship with Max enriched our lives, and it was a great honour knowing him."

The CPA and CPA NSW State Committee were saddened to hear of his passing. The Party extends its condolences to Max's family.

"For Max, friendliness [was] both a strong personal inclination and a political imperative."

OP-ED: CALLS FOR DRUG POLICY REFORM INCREASE NATION-WIDE

Part 2

N Stallon

Drug law reformists around the country are calling on both the new Labor government as well as their state governments to reform drug laws. In particular, there are calls from different groups to both legalise recreational cannabis and decriminalise "personal possession" amounts of all drugs.

While legalisation allows for the legal possession and use of drugs without penalty if regulations are complied with, decriminalisation simply removes criminal penalties for the possession and use of small amounts of illicit drugs. Often, criminal penalties are replaced with fines.

Drug law reform organisation Unharm has just launched a "Tell Albo: Legalise Cannabis Now" campaign. This comes as Legalise Cannabis WA's two MPs recently introduced a bill to decriminalise cannabis in WA.

Mark McGowan has responded by vowing to never legalise cannabis, despite being an MP when WA first decriminalised cannabis in 2004, before being repealed by Barnett's state Liberal government in 2011.

This is not the first time a state or territory has debated the decriminalisation or legalisation of drugs. In 2019 Queensland's independent economic review body recommended extensive drug reform, finding that decriminalising drug use and legalising cannabis and MDMA use could reduce prison populations by thirty per cent and save $300 million in prison costs each year.

In 2018, a NSW special commission into ice addiction recommended that the state decriminalise the possession of all drugs, as well as increase the number of medically supervised injection rooms and increase funding for rehabilitation.

The report's author, Dan Howard, recently criticised the NSW government's lack of action, prompting NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet to concede that there are "competing views" in his cabinet over the inquiry and that a response can be expected shortly.

Earlier this month, New South Wales Attorney General, Mark Speakman, claimed that NSW drug policies are "clearly not working". Speakman proposes a divergence scheme that would give police discretion to issue up to two fines of $400 to an individual caught with small amounts of illegal drugs.

The fines could be waived if the person caught with drugs undertook counselling or health intervention. Such a scheme has even won the support of former NSW police commissioners Mick Fuller and Andrew Scipione.

Critics claim that the choice to issue a fine instead of giving a court attendance notice should not be left up to police discretion for fears of discriminatory sentencing.

Yet, the NSW Greens Cannabis Legalisation Bill introduced to the NSW upper house in 2021 has not been adopted. A similar bill was recently introduced to South Australia's legislative council by the SA Greens.

Meanwhile, Fiona Patten of the Reason Party has introduced legislation to the Victorian state parliament that proposes the decriminalisation of all drugs. Patten believes that drug abuse should be treated as a health issue, rather a criminal matter.

However, in 2021 the Victorian Labor Party intervened into a two-year State Parliament inquiry that was expected to recommend legalising cannabis in Victoria, watering it down at the last minute.

While Legalise Cannabis Australia narrowly missed out on unseating Pauline Hanson in QLD, newly elected Greens Senator David Shoebridge told Sydney Criminal Lawyers that the Greens would prioritise legalising cannabis nationally if they held the balance of power in the Senate.

With Labor's twenty-six senators needing the support of either the twelve Greens senators or the Coalition to pass legislation through the Senate, such an event is not impossible.

While most states and territories have ignored inquires and bills recommending the decriminalisation of drugs, after first legalising the recreational use of cannabis in 2019, the ACT has recently agreed to decriminalise small amounts of commonly used illicit drugs, making it the first Australian jurisdiction to do so.

The proposed bill, introduced by Labor backbencher Michael Pettersson, won the support of the ACT Labor-Greens coalition government after a parliamentary inquiry into the proposal.

The bill will see people found with "personal possession" amounts of illicit drugs including methamphetamine (ice), MDMA, LSD, cocaine, and heroin face fines rather than criminal charges.

The ACT government is also considering legislation to allow MDMA-assisted therapy to treat PTSD, and psilocybin to treat depression.

ACT Health Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith said the ACT was leading the country in drug policy. While the government will continue to work to stamp out the supply of illicit drugs, it recognised that drug use is a health issue, and that criminalising drug use neither helps addicts nor reduces drug use.

This view is backed internationally by the experience of Portugal, where the decriminalisation of "personal possession" quantities of all drugs over twenty years ago has resulted in more people accessing treatment and a decrease in problematic use, drug deaths, and prison populations while not increasing drug use.

The bill was introduced by the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) in 2000, who stressed that drug users should not be treated as criminals regardless of the type of drugs consumed.

Instead, the PCP stressed the importance of decriminalising drugs while expanding the national and free public network for the care, treatment, and social recovery of drug addiction and strengthening the fight against drug trafficking and associated money laundering.

The PCP stated that this policy was not an endorsement of drug use, but allows the state to handle drug use in a non-repressive manner while promoting public health, deterring addiction, and freeing up police resources.

The US state of Oregon also decriminalised all drug possession in 2020, while the federal Canadian government has announced a three year trial of drug decriminalisation in the province of British Columbia.

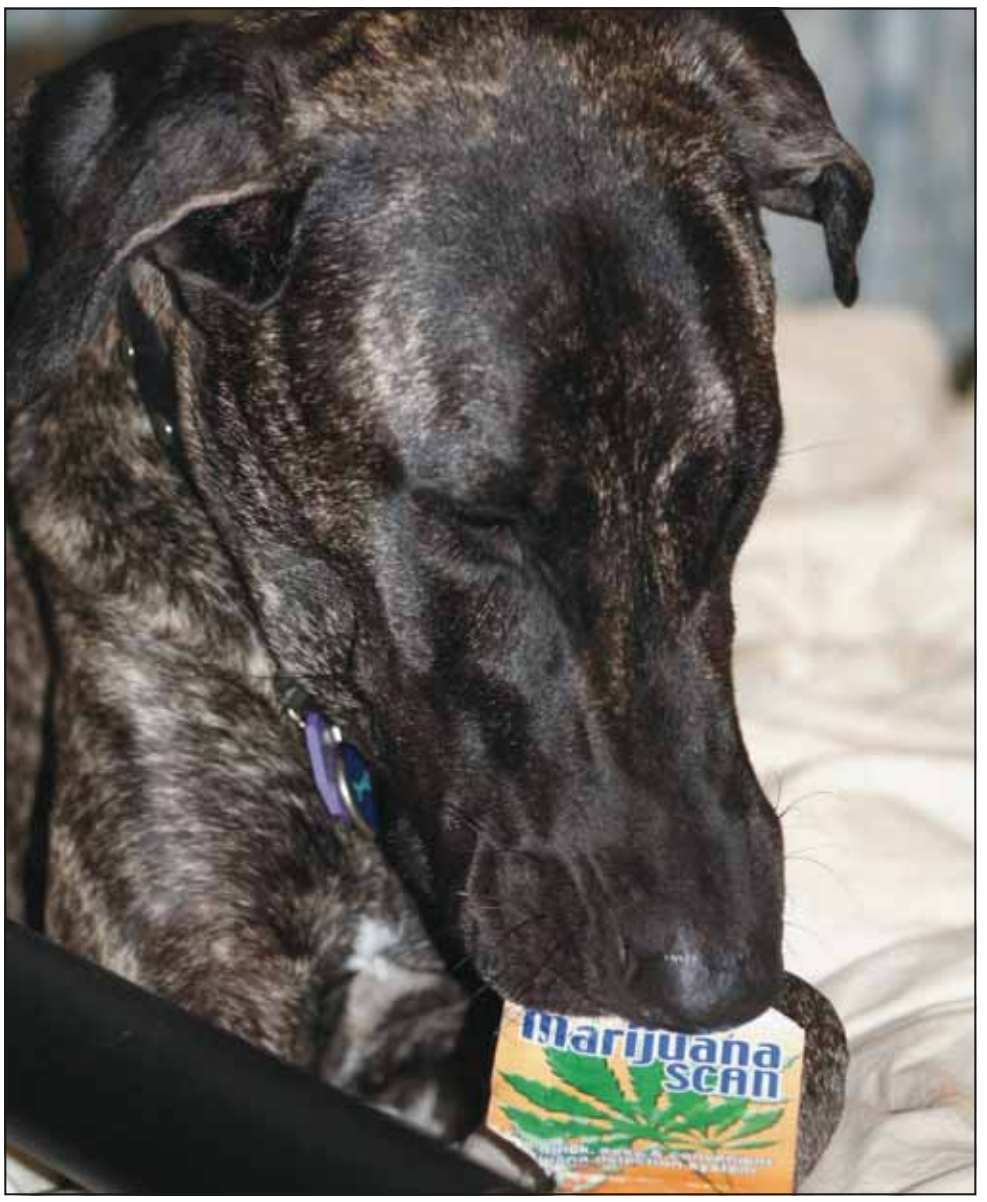
Punitive drug laws harm workers. Like roadside drug testing, workplace drug tests examine a person's saliva or urine for the presence of drugs, rather than active impairment. This is a particular burden to workers who drive or operate heavy machinery for work, as using drugs such as cannabis the night before may return a positive result long after consuming or experiencing impairing effects.

Since 2015, drug testing has been mandatory for all building contractors working on building sites financed by the federal government.

But it is not only workers who drive or operate heavy machinery that risk falling afoul of Australia's drug laws. Provided a worksite has established a comprehensive workplace drug and alcohol policy, workplace drug testing is legal in all Australian worksites.

Legally justifiable reasons for drug testing employees are extremely broad and go far beyond health and safety concerns. Examples given by Drug-Safe Workplaces include "the improvement of workplace productivity" and "maintaining employee integrity".

While the position of Australian common law is that drug-use must have an impact on a worker's ability to perform their workplace duties, or must impact the business of the employer to justify dismissal, the Fair Work Commission (FWC) has ruled that the unlawful use of prohibited drugs in the workplace is a valid reason for dismissal.



"I passed a drug test for work, and my dog destroyed the evidence."
Photo: Levy – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

This law is regularly used to summarily dismiss workers self-medicating cannabis, an illicit drug that is now legal for medicinal use despite entry barriers such as difficulty finding a doctor willing to prescribe it and high price for medicinal products.

In 2015, the Federal Court endorsed a FWC decision that overturned the reinstatement of a Sydney Harbour ferry master who tested positive for THC after driving a ferry into a wharf pylon. The worker admitted to using cannabis the previous night as pain relief for a shoulder injury, however denied that he was impaired at the time of the incident.

The Court found that the employer's "zero tolerance" drug and alcohol policy was relevant and appropriate under the circumstance.

In a similar case, the FWC upheld the dismissal of an Ensign derrickhand who was summarily dismissed after failing a first drug test, despite passing a second test that Ensign claimed was "diluted".

It is completely legal to consume excessive amounts of alcohol outside of work hours so long as you are not under the influence or impaired at work. The law must not be moralistic with workers' careers and livelihoods when it comes to drugs. Similar standards should apply to drug use, regardless of the type of drug consumed. If workers are not actively under the influence or impaired while at work, drug use outside of the workplace should not be penalised.

While drug use can have negative effects on individuals, communities, and society, the war on drugs was started to disrupt and break up progressive communities.

"You want to know what this [war on drugs] was really all about? The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the anti-war left and black people," John Ehrlichman, Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs under US President Richard Nixon, told journalist Dan Baum in 1994.

"By getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalising both heavily, we could disrupt those communities."

Treating drug use as a criminal issue rather than a health issue is a failed policy that does far more harm than good. It is time that politicians listen to health experts instead of the police. Albanese's new Labor government must heed the growing call for reform.

Drug use must be treated as a health issue, and not a criminal issue. Cannabis must be fully legalised for recreational use. The possession of personal amounts of all illicit drugs must be fully decriminalised.

Repressive and punitive policies such as the use of drug sniffer dogs to perform searches in public spaces and drug tests that do not test impairment must be ended.

We must have drug policies that properly address public health concerns. This includes legalising quality testing of recreational drugs, expanding medically supervised injecting facilities, increasing funding for medically supervised opioid substitution therapy, giving honest education about the risks of drug use, and providing free and easily accessible drug treatment and rehabilitation programs.

REPORT: WORLD BEYOND WAR – GLOBAL PEACE WAVE

Eileen Whitehead

Photo: Jonathan Brown – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Over the weekend 25-26 June, people all over the world joined up to protest the continual wars around the globe. Naturally, because of the time differences I wasn't able to watch it all, but saw the start in London at 9 PM WA time. The Brits held a very symbolic protest in front of a large statue of Field Marshal Montgomery which stands in front of the Department of Defence in Whitehall. Speakers, singers, guitarist all gathered to speak or sing about the need for peace and warned about NATO and the latest escalation by Lithuania in blocking Kaliningrad.

At 10:30 PM we visited Morocco where a very articulate Sahrawi woman, now living in Barcelona, sang and told us of the violent displacement of her people who have been living in refugee camps over forty years.

At 11 PM the Peace Wave went to Chile and South America, speaking Spanish, which is when I went to bed! I was up bright and early on 26th June to hear Naek Flores from Guam speak about the way the US treats his people. In his words Guam is not part of the US – it's owned – and the people of Guam are constantly anxious.

At 9 am Australia entered the debate with Alison Broinowski at Bondi Beach and Annette Brownlie in Brisbane, who referred to the First Nations people and the importance of the Uluru Statement of the Heart to produce a more peaceful nation overall. She asserted our need to control our foreign policy to include human rights rather than the rule-based order imposed on the world by the US. We need to collaborate with peace activists and tackle climate change, which will be the real security threat in the future, and **now** we also want freedom for Julian Assange.

Alison introduced the Australian presentation with its first speaker – Jordan Steele-John who spoke about promoting peace for Australia and the wider region and the need to push back the tide of violence. Then came a clip of Paul Keating at the National Press Club emphasising our need to reassert ASEAN and focussing on our relationship with China. On the proposed eight nuclear submarines, he quoted a Chinese saying – "a handful of toothpicks on a mountain!" He reiterated that, had we spent the last twenty-five years closer to Indonesia rather than entering Iraq and Afghanistan with the US, our security would be stronger.

Jo Vallentine emphasised the importance of the Uluru Statement of the Heart and the need for us to respect our Pacific neighbours. "Our treatment of asylum seekers is appalling and the living standards of our own First Nation people a disgrace. This addiction to militarism must cease and we must cease to be subservient to anyone and claim our sovereignty – Friend to all, enemy to none."

Then came a humorous ABC clip *Australian Defence Policy Explained* by Rob Sitch in *Utopia*. Nick Deane followed this stressing that climate change makes peace between nations imperative adding that we must free ourselves from the American eagles' talons and demand peace. *Dance up the Sun* performed by a Sydney choir followed.

Professor Lowe spoke about climate issues, pointing out that Afghan lost one-third of its forests and fauna due to the war; Iraq suffers radiation pollution; Vietnam's chronic deforestation with mangroves taking up to a century to recover. The enormous military spending steals from social needs and reduces what should be spent on fighting climate change.

Sam Wainwright spoke strongly for STOP-AUKUS WA, rejecting the push for confrontation with China. There has been a 130 per cent increase in military expenditure since 2001. The next ten years are essential to protect humans from global warming.

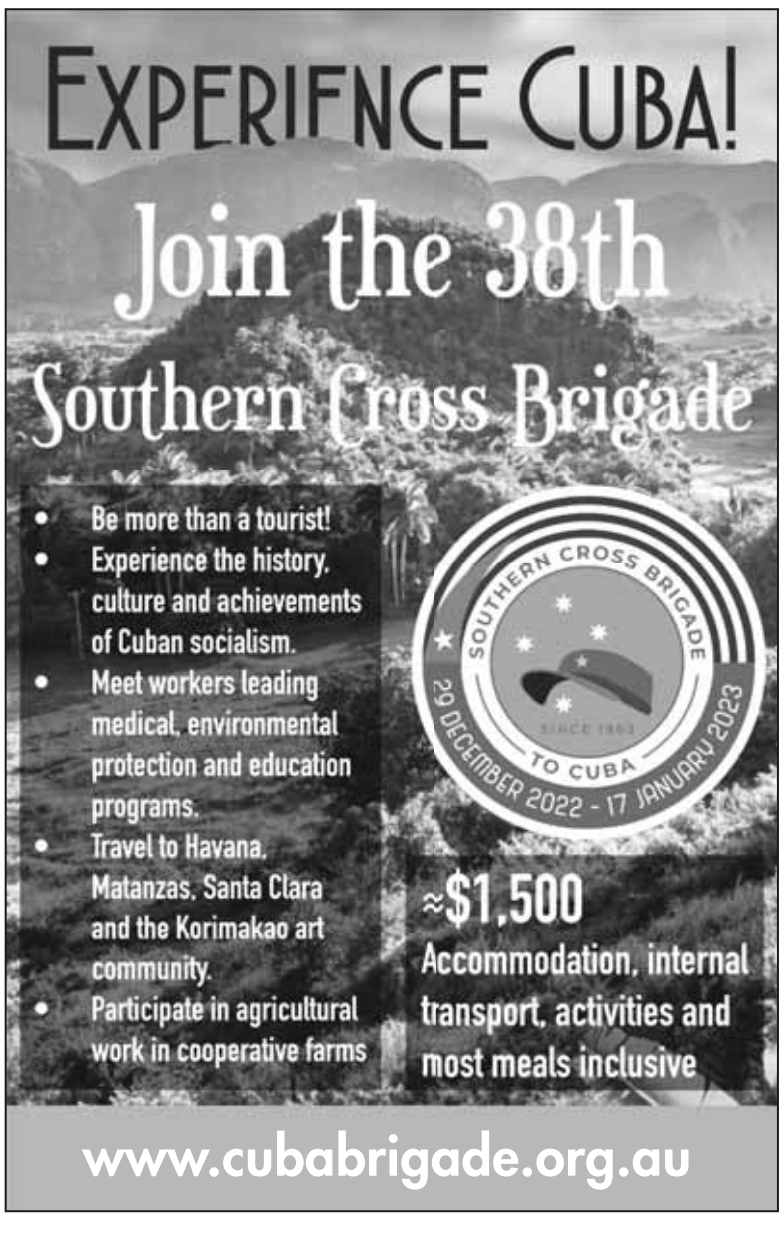
Albert Palazzo called for an alternate defence policy for Australia. We need a reallocation of money into areas more suited to our interest and place in the world, with a redefining of our alliance with the US. Nuclear has no place in defending our interests, and in an increasingly dangerous world we must prioritise these.

He was followed by Thomas Mayor, Dean Parkin, and Craig Comelin, from the NT: all speaking of the importance of the Uluru Statement.

Margaret Walters ended the Australian segment with a song "Come People for Peace" and an anti-AUKUS protest.

Liz Remmerswaal chaired the New Zealand segment which also included choirs and speakers – Linda Hansen, Matthew Robson. Deirdre McMenamin, Clare Woodham, and Matt O'Branain. Part of the film *Ithaka* supporting Assange's release was shown and the segment finished with Soka Gakkai International singing "I am the One."

The Wave then went to Japan and I went for breakfast. ✪



IRAN AND ARGENTINA SEEK TO ENTER BRICS

Iran has formally applied for membership in the BRICS, according to Iran's Foreign Ministry.

On 27th June, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said Iran's entry would bring additional value to all emerging economies group members, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

The Foreign Ministry spokesman said the BRICS bloc, which he called "a very creative mechanism with extensive aspects" has already been consulted about Iran's membership application.

Khatibzadeh said that BRICS member countries represent thirty per cent of the world's GDP and forty per cent of the global population. In this sense, he added that Iran's entry would bring additional value to the bloc.

On the occasion of the XIV BRICS summit hosted by China, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said Friday via videoconference that his country was open to sharing its capabilities and potential with the group.

For its part, Argentina has also requested BRICS membership. President Alberto Fernandez expressed his country's willingness to belong to the group, "a platform with enormous capabilities," he said.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the bloc's influence and relevance could be boosted by welcoming new members.

teleSUR ✪

Something to say? Write to the Editor!

CLASS STRUGGLE AND MUTUAL AID: SOLIDARITY OR CHARITY?

Kimball Cariou

Photo: Michael Swan – flickr.com (CC BY-ND 2.0)

Throughout many decades of class struggle, socialists and other radicals have long understood the importance of providing assistance to working people. While our focus is on demanding adequate programs from the state – to the point that we advocate state power for the working class in order to guarantee sufficient support – we also support efforts to provide for the immediate wants of people in need.

However, a historical and class-based analysis of such approaches shows that while "mutual aid" can be a useful tactic when it is concretely tied to the struggles of working class and oppressed people, it too easily becomes derailed from a class struggle focus and deteriorates into a form of "left-branded" charity.

Shortly after noon on 5th June, 1935 – three days after their historic journey began in Vancouver, Canada – the On-to-Ottawa Trekkers scrambled off a freight train at Golden, British Columbia, a railway and farming village in the Rocky Mountains. The previous day, Relief Camp Workers Union leader Arthur "Slim" Evans had sent a telegram from Kamloops to a local communist, giving their time of arrival and a simple request: "Please prepare food and welcome for one thousand."

As related by Ronald Liversedge in *Recollections of the On-to-Ottawa Trek, 1935*, with just twenty-four hours of notice, the "little white-haired woman" contacted by Evans found supportive farmers to donate a huge supply of beef and vegetables and organised a volunteer crew to cook stew and bake bread for everyone. The memorable dinner gave a huge lift to the Trekkers in their struggle for "work and wages" before they were halted on 1st July by a violent police riot in Regina.

Despite that attack, the Trek did achieve its main objectives. A few months later, the Tory government of R.B. "Iron Heel" Bennett was defeated, the hated "twenty-five cents a day" work camps were closed, and the labour movement was launching successful campaigns to win social reforms like unemployment insurance.

Fast forward to the early 1980s. As the last few dozen surviving Trekkers planned activities to mark the 50th anniversary of 1935, Canada was in the grip of a new capitalist recession. Unemployment and poverty skyrocketed, while the labour and anti-poverty movements called for improved unemployment insurance, massive job creation and other urgent measures. But at the same time, another "alternative" emerged: "temporary" food banks to help millions of people facing hunger.

Schooled by decades of class struggle, some Trek veterans warned that food banks might have a very different outcome. Neoliberalism was rapidly becoming the gospel for ruling classes across the capitalist world. Far from being scaled down when the recession ended, the Trekkers (and the Communist Party of Canada) warned that the food banks would become permanent as governments eagerly tried to shed any responsibility for social welfare policies.

Some dismissed these warnings as exaggerated. But food bank drives quickly became a fixture of Canadian society, a tool to help governments ignore demands for increased social assistance rates or higher minimum wages. What began as a noble experiment in human solidarity was almost instantly turned into a never-ending exercise in charity.

The concept soon expanded to other social problems. As governments squeeze public education spending for example, annual appeals are issued to donate towards the cost of classroom supplies. Sometimes these campaigns simply widen the gap between rich and poor. In Vancouver for example, fundraising campaigns in wealthier neighbourhoods allow "west side" schools to spend millions on the latest computers and other technology, while Parent Advisory Committees at "east side" schools raise a few hundred dollars at bake sales.

In essence, the last several decades have seen a steady erosion of income redistributive measures, while budgets cut taxes for upper-income earners and corporations. Governments are not "downsizing" as we sometimes hear because spending on police forces, the military, and other repressive elements of the capitalist state has increased.

As the percentage of budgets allocated for low-income housing, social assistance, and public education declines over time, the results include mass homelessness, growing hunger and poverty as well as limited access to crucial programs such as childcare and employment insurance.

More and more, working people are questioning the insanity of this process. Why do governments fail to tackle the social disparities that make life so difficult for the people who do all the work? Are the politicians blind, stupid or just corrupt?

Of course, some individual politicians do fall into those categories. But the real problem is that governments in capitalist societies such as Canada are an important part of a state apparatus which serves the interests of the ruling class. In the absence of mass struggles for progressive reforms, exerted by a powerful working-class movement, the natural tendency of governments at all levels is to enact policies which satisfy the demands of the rich and the big corporations. Sometimes popular anger erupts which forces governments to legislate reforms. But building militant mass struggles to achieve and defend such gains requires years of hard work, not to mention leadership by left forces such as the Communist Party.

When the political balance of forces is favourable to the ruling class, the pendulum swings the other way. Often this leads progressive-minded people to consider easier, quicker solutions under the umbrella term of "mutual aid." Why not for example pool donations from some folks who have jobs in order to buy food for desperate community members? If food banks have become bureaucratised, why not bypass institutionalised barriers by simply finding locations where free food can be left for anyone to take?

It's a tempting strategy at a time when governments seem impervious to popular demands. But is this a strategy for achieving the fundamental change that working people need? Some elements of the political left are espousing just that, through an elevated focus on "mutual aid" and "serve the people" projects. While "mutual aid" can be a useful tactic when it is concretely tied to the struggles of working class and oppressed people, the examples above and other experiences show the need for caution.

During the 1980s, one tactic of the left was to establish unemployed action centres at locations made available by unions or anti-poverty groups. These initiatives sometimes had temporary success in helping to mobilise around immediate demands. But the action centres often turned into de facto social agencies, burning out volunteers with limited time and inadequate training.

In today's situation, the mutual aid strategy raises more fundamental questions. Given the huge numbers of jobless, underhoused, and hungry people in Canada, is it possible to assist more than the tiniest sliver of those in need using these tactics? And if there is some success in helping people in a low-income neighbourhood, can this be maintained indefinitely? Perhaps more to the point, will the energy and resources devoted by groups using such "mutual aid" tactics detract from their ability to organise and mobilise for social reforms which could improve the lives of millions?

At a philosophical level, is this strategy a potential model for a very different approach to the mass poverty created by capitalism? To the extent that such projects succeed, are they simply a device for the working class to share the burden a bit less unequally, while letting governments redistribute wealth to the benefit of big business and millionaires?

These questions point to an important difference between solidarity and charity. Real working-class solidarity helps militant movements to maintain their efforts during moments of difficult struggle. That's why communists and other radicals support picket lines, workers on strike or activists occupying government or corporate offices to back their demands. At the community level, it's why we pass the hat to help neighbours facing eviction or the impact of a fire in their apartment.

But if we establish semi-permanent structures to redistribute our own wages among ourselves, do we risk creating new types of charities which can let the ruling class off the hook? It's a dilemma which needs careful consideration including serious study of the history of strategies and tactics employed by the working-class movements of the past. And it's also a dilemma which can't be resolved simply by switching labels and calling something "solidarity" if it's still really just charity.

People's Voice

What began as a noble experiment in human solidarity was almost instantly turned into a never-ending exercise in charity.

BY ENGAGING WITH CHINA, PACIFIC COUNTRIES SEEK THEIR OWN PATHS OUT OF POVERTY

Part two

Roland Boer

Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia – Standing on what's left of the beach of the outer island of Ros. "Our country's name of Micronesia literally means 'tiny islands,' and we're sinking fast." Photo: 350.org – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Last week, I looked at Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, their histories and relationship with China. Here, a third country to be addressed is Fiji, which has developed a notably independent foreign policy under Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama. In the past Fiji was a British "protectorate" from 1874 to 1970, with "blackbirding" to and slavery on Fiji's cotton plantations. Since independence, Fiji has experienced a deal of political turmoil as it sought to develop a more independent line. Indeed, from 2009 to 2014, it was suspended from the Pacific Islands Forum and Commonwealth of Nations.

Fiji established diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1975 and has been unwavering since. Many decades of people-to-people exchanges, along with cultural and educational exchange, have seen a rather balanced view of China by Fijian people. It should be no surprise that these relations are reflected in the regular items from Chinese news sources in the *Fiji Sun* and *Fiji News*. The close connections between China and Fiji are seen in terms of continued socio-economic progress, with significant infrastructure development, educational and technical training of Fijian people, and essential medical supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic so as to aid Fiji's economic recovery. Like other countries, Fiji is very keen to gain from China's experience in poverty alleviation, improve its medical services, and disaster management.

At a political level, both sides stress that there is no hidden agenda in their relationship. Indeed, from the Fijian side, geopolitical rivalry is not its main concern. For the common people, geopolitical point-scoring means little compared to climate change, rising sea levels, and economic well-being. Bainimarama has observed that China-Fiji relations are a solid foundation, but that he is keen to press China further on commitments to protect the "Blue Pacific," keep aiming for a rise in temperatures by no more than 1.5 degrees, and end illegal fishing. At the same time, Bainimarama has gone a step further and congratulated the CPC on its 100th anniversary in 2021, observing that "under the great leadership of the CPC, China has proven to be a global success with its unprecedented achievements."

There is one other country I would like to consider: the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). FSM came into the spotlight at the second China-Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers Meeting, held in Fiji at the end of May 2022. The foreign minister from FSM raised a number of objections to a proposed security agreement, so the meeting agreed to discuss further. As some readers will know, this development led to some misrepresentations by the pundits in Australia and NZ, who opined that Wang Yi's whole trip was a "failure." The 36 agreements signed during the trip, as well as the common statement at the end of the Foreign Ministers Meeting, indicate that it was far from a "failure." Instead, the principle followed in China and among Pacific Islands is "consensus first," or "consultative democracy" as it is known in China.

As for FSM, one may gain the impression that it is rather anti-China, especially since the independent FSM – since 1986 – is a country in "free association" with the USA. Since 2021 a US base has been under construction. However, looking at the news sources provides a somewhat different picture. As a former colony of Spain, Germany, Japan, and the USA, FSM knows what subjection to a foreign power means. It established diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1989 and has developed good connections since then.

Despite – or perhaps because of – US "aid" over the years, FSM too has remained a very poor country, with most people living a subsistence lifestyle. Increasing engagement with China has meant roads, medical equipment and supplies, new buildings, agricultural modernisation – familiar items by now, but they are what FSM needs. Further, due to FSM's inadequate education infrastructure, China has been concerned with improving FSM's scientific capabilities, not only in STEM subjects, but also in relation to oceans, climate change, and sustainable fishing. All very well, but what do people think in FSM? The reader comes across pieces in the *Kaselehlie Press* pointing out that people in FSM know full well what colonial domination means. They are certainly not keen to be told what to think about other countries, especially if this is framed in terms of geopolitical rivalry. Instead, as one writer puts it, the people of FSM should be "active participants in the decision making process that affect their own interests in this political equation." A Micronesian perspective should not see China as a threat, but as an opportunity to "expand the scope of its own international interests" in line with its own laws and constitution. And this constitution observes: "We extend to all nations what we seek from each: peace, friendship, cooperation, and love in our common humanity."

These articles have not been able to deal with all of the Pacific countries, but common themes have emerged: the overwhelming concern with climate change; non-aligned engagement with all countries; sovereign decision-making in light of their own needs; and above all, concrete plans to lift the common people out of poverty. If a wealthier country is able to work with Pacific countries to achieve these aims, then they are welcome – as long as they do not interfere with internal political and social realities.

A final question: Australia, as well as New Zealand, have more recently rushed to put together one or two infrastructure investment projects in Pacific countries. Does China see these efforts as competition? No, instead they see this "Western aid with Chinese characteristics" as a positive development, although they wonder why it did not happen earlier. ✪

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NATO FACES INTERNAL DIFFERENCES, SETS STAGE FOR EXPANSION INTO ASIA-PACIFIC

NATO leaders convened in Spain last week for their annual summit with the main focus on Russia and toughening up their stance toward China. Analysts have said including China in the US-led military bloc's new strategic concept cannot help alleviate US divergences with the EU, and that severe domestic problems will also weaken Washington's ambitious plan to maintain hegemony.

The NATO summit, held in Madrid, will for the first time include the top leaders of four Asia-Pacific countries, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, and also for the first time, the bloc will identity China in its new strategic concept, a key document on NATO's future security trial and military development to be adopted at the summit.

NATO and some of the US allies have ramped up efforts to hype the so-called China threat. For example, the White House released the readout on US President Joe Biden's meeting with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on 26th July ahead of the G7 summit, in which it noted that the two leaders discussed the challenges posed by China. An anonymous White House official was also cited by *Reuters* as saying that the US is confident that NATO's new strategy document will include "strong" language on China.

NATO will massively boost the number of troops on high readiness to over 300,000, Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said last Monday.

The current NATO Strategic Concept which was agreed at the summit in Lisbon in 2010 did not mention China. Analysts said that it is not surprising to see the upcoming new strategic concept include China, since during last year's summit in Brussels, the bloc had adopted a tough rhetoric on China's military build-up, growing influence and "coercive economic" measures.

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg also told an event organised by *Politico* in Brussels on 22nd June that it is a big step for NATO to include China in its current Strategic Concept as "China is openly contesting the rules-based international order" and poses some challenges to "our values, our interests, and our security."

At the G7 and NATO summits, the US is going to serve as the baton to mobilise the West to take China as an adversary – mostly by combining China and Russia. This is a new version of the cold war, and by coercing other countries to reduce their exchanges with China on economy and other fields, the US attempts to exclude China from the global community, Xiang Haoyu, a research fellow at the China Institute of International Studies, told the *Global Times*.

For example, on 26th July at their annual gathering, G7 nations pledged to raise $600 billion in private and public funds over five years to finance infrastructure in developing countries and counter China's Belt and Road initiative.

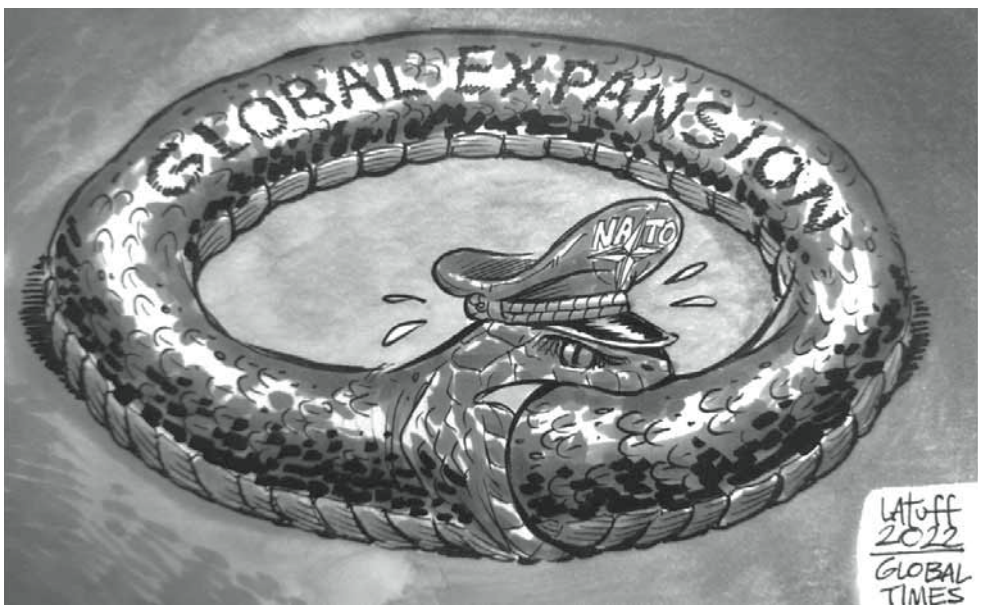
The inclusion of China in the "Strategic Concept" means that China will become a priority of NATO in the next few years, which will also affect the direction of its foreign policy and strategy, Yuan Zheng, a deputy director and senior fellow of the Institute of American Studies, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, told the *Global Times*.

NATO, a legacy of the Cold War, is increasingly extending its reach beyond Europe, to the Asia-Pacific region particularly, where it hopes to play a more prominent role, suppressing the development and influence of Russia and China, Yuan added.

The focus of NATO's global strategy and geopolitics seems to be in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, but it is really in the Indo-Pacific region around China. The US sees China as a main competitor and is using all means to contain it. Other Western countries also want to take good positions in the area given the region's significance in the global supply chain and future developments, Xiang said.

Hyping so-called China threats will offer NATO and the US more excuses and "legitimacy" to be involved in the Indo-Pacific region, Xiang said, pointing out that some countries in the region, especially Japan, have been working to help serve as the pivot for NATO to enter Asia.

On the 25th July, before his five-day trip to Europe, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida was quoted by Japanese media as saying that Japan hopes to boost cooperation with NATO "to a new stage." Analysts warned that Japan's advocacy of an "Asian NATO" or "global NATO" goes against the times and could lead to a new cold war or even a hot war given the previous catastrophes and destruction the US-led military alliance has led to globally, including in Afghanistan.



NATO swallows the consequence of its expansion. Illustration: Carlos Latuff

In the context of the current Russia-Ukraine crisis, the US and the West have demonstrated an unprecedented unanimous tough stance, Yuan said, noting that the US has been hyping the theory of "the axis of authoritarianism" between China and Russia, which directly leads to rising anxiety in European countries about China, and China-Europe relations have encountered relatively great difficulties.

DIVERGENCES ON CHINA

While the US is working hard to impose its' strategic purposes on allies, attempting to tie China and Russia together, comparing Ukraine with the island of Taiwan, and conflating the security of Asia with that of Europe, there are divergences between the US and some Western countries, which may make it hard for the US to realise its ambitious plan, Cui Hongjian, director of the Department of European Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, told the *Global Times*.

Major powers in Europe want to put the Russia-Ukraine conflict under control and bring the two sides to the negotiating table, while the US and Japan want to use the crisis to prolong the geopolitical conflict into a long-term confrontation, Cui said, noting that some countries in Europe insist that China will not challenge the international order with military forces given its development path in recent decades.

Cui said that China and the EU have different stances on many issues but the two sides hope to work in the same direction and to stabilise relations not only in trade but also bilateral relations. The US hype of the China threat and pressure on the EU is a test for the leading countries in Europe on whether they can maintain strategic autonomy.

In last year's summit in Brussels, French President Emmanuel Macron was quoted by media as saying that "NATO is an organisation that concerns the North Atlantic, and that China has little to do with the North Atlantic. It's very important that we don't scatter ourselves and that we don't bias our relationship with China."

The US has been committed to expanding its alliance system around the world, but it is difficult to establish a new NATO in Asia. The culture, history, values and other factors of Asia-Pacific countries make China's influence in this region hard to ignore, Yuan said.

Yuan also noted that China pursues an independent foreign policy of peace and win-win cooperation, and with the deepening of China-Europe exchanges, European countries' perception toward China will also improve.

US political elites' plans to maintain its hegemony by using the Ukraine crisis have also worried some of its allies and such an ambitious global project will also be weakened by its domestic problems. Gun violence, racism, the wider and increasing rage toward the US' Supreme Court decision to overturn abortion ruling [...] all these have reminded the world that the US is far past its Golden Age, analysts said.

The EU also faces serious problems with energy, social welfare, soaring inflation, and human rights. Some observers have warned it may lose the best chance to solve domestic problems and will only harm the world if it still follows the US in a speculative strategic arrangement.

Global Times ✪

NATO and some of the US allies have ramped up efforts to hype the so-called China threat.

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Sydney Vigil

STOP USA BLOCKADE ON CUBA

Join us in Sydney to demand that the USA stops the blockade on Cuba with the right to self determination. Also stop other blockades like Venezuela and Gaza.

12:30 pm Sunday July 17
Sydney Town Hall

Following this event we will celebrating 69 years of Moncada and the Cuban Revolution at the MUA in Sussex Street Sydney from 2pm to 4pm. With speakers and finger food. Entry by donation.

CP OF USA CONDEMNS *ROE* REVERSAL: "ALL OUT TO DEFEND ABORTION RIGHTS"

Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) Statement

The Supreme Court's ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* is a horrific setback for women, their partners, their families, and society overall. As expected, the Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, making abortion rights susceptible to the whims of extreme-right state legislators.

A woman may not get an abortion in Texas, but a resident of New York can. Just as where you live determines whether you can vote with ease, breathe fresh air, access Medicaid, or have your children attend a well-funded school, the same is now true regarding abortion rights.

Human rights in this country have never been universal, and the *Dobbs* decision highlights this fact even further.

The Supreme Court decision surely ranks high among the worst, anti-human decisions in its history, such as the Dred Scott decision of 1857 or *Plessy v. Ferguson* of 1896. The first decision, made by a Supreme Court dominated by slaveholders, eliminated all restrictions on slavery in the Republic. Adding insult to injury, the Court stated that the Constitution's authors never intended any Black person to have citizenship rights. *Plessy* held that racial segregation was constitutional, enshrined in the "separate but equal" doctrine. We all know how the "equal" part went.

Like the 19th-century justices, today's right-wing Supreme Court has determined that certain people, in this case women and trans men, are even less equal than they were before the Court ruled on 24th June.

What will be the impact of the ruling? The Southern Poverty Law Center writes that it will:

"[H]ave serious, long-term consequences for women and others. This terrible ruling also endangers other fundamental rights, putting many other communities at risk. The constitutional rights in jeopardy include the right to contraception and equal rights for the LGBTQ+ community. ... The decision is particularly harmful for those people living in poverty because they lack the resources to travel to a state where abortion is legal or pay for necessary medical procedures."

We must fight back to prevent this from becoming reality.

Today, we mourn this horrific setback. Tomorrow and beyond, we organize. Everywhere – in our communities, unions, schools, places of worship, and workplaces. We must help build a backlash against the right, one in the same spirit as the women who rebelled after Trump's election and helped take the House of Representatives away from the GOP in 2018; the millions who marched for Black Lives after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others; and the teachers, auto workers, and nurses who went on strike these past four years.

As big as these movements were, the current situation demands a much larger movement, one that's more inclusive, broader, more militant. Civil disobedience is in order.

Members of the Communist Party USA and Young Communist League protest in New York City on Friday, June 24, 2022, immediately following the Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. Photo: Courtesy of CPUSA

By inclusive we mean the involvement of a wide range of society, genders, classes, and ethnic backgrounds.

We also mean inclusiveness in terms of tactics. Some may only be willing to make phone calls to their elected officials. Some may want to work in the electoral arena to vote out anti-abortion politicians. Others may demonstrate and engage in civil disobedience and risk arrest. All tactics are on the table. We must engage with people who have never carried a picket sign or called their members of Congress.

This is the kind of unity needed to turn the Court's decision into a temporary setback. The Communist Party USA is committed to helping build unity to restore women's right to an abortion.

NEW ZEALAND EMPLOYERS RUNNING "ACTIVE MISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN" ON FAIR PAY ACT

In New Zealand the Labour government is planning to introduce a nationwide collective bargaining system known as the Fair Pay Act.

Minister for Workplace Relations and Safety Michael Wood, who is piloting the plans, has accused BusinessNZ — the country's employers' body — of running an "active misinformation" campaign after an International Labour Organisation (ILO) committee found the law was not inconsistent with international conventions.

BusinessNZ argued before an ILO committee that fair pay agreements would constitute compulsory arbitration in breach of ILO Convention 98 on the right to organise and join unions and bargain collectively.

Wood said it was pleasing to have support from the Australian government, after a government representative, Felicity Rowe, spoke in support of FPAs before the ILO's committee.

Rowe said Australia respected the "rights of countries to implement measures, appropriate to national conditions, to encourage and facilitate collective bargaining between employers and workers.

"Australia fully supports the objectives of the proposed fair pay agreement system, a system that is intended to deliver better living standards for workers and their families and provide an environment that enhances productivity, growth and the sustainability of enterprises.

"The Australian government believes sectoral minimum standards, supplemented by collective bargaining, provides the right balance between a safety net on the one hand, and driving wage growth and productivity on the other."

Wood slammed New Zealand employers who he said have been running "active misinformation campaigns and vexatious complaints to international bodies, do a disservice to the employers that actually want to make the change required to help New Zealand realise its economic potential.

"After the ILO conclusion it's time for BusinessNZ to come back to the table and work with us to introduce a system that allows industries to set minimum pay and working conditions to stop a race to the bottom. Sector based minimum standards are common place across the OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development], including Australia and most of Europe.

"It's time to leave the hyperbole at home and engage in rolling out an employment relations system that is fairly commonplace around the world.

"New Zealand's 30-year experiment with a low-cost labour model hasn't worked. Many workers have suffered, but, equally, our rates of labour productivity have been amongst the worst in the world under that regime."

In Britain the Labour Party has picked up the New Zealand fair pay agreements model as part of the New Deal For Workers policy.

Morning Star

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