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# Early Childhood Educators
# RAISE OUR WAGE!

**Early Childhood Educators are demanding a 25 per cent wage rise to address a sector-wide worker crisis that is forcing centres to cut back and creating chaos for families.**

In a Federal Budget submission, early educators say their work needs to be recognised with higher wages, or there will be a devastating impact on their ability to provide the quality education and care services children need.

Educators say a 25 per cent increase in wages would address years of workers being undervalued.

"Low pay and high stress mean the best and brightest educators are leaving the sector in droves," United Workers Union early education director Helen Gibbons said. The depth of the crisis saw early childhood educators take national action to shut down the sector on 7th September last year.

"Parents either can't get the place they require, or they are being told on a daily basis they can't bring their children in because of worker shortages," said Gibbons.

"Educators are barely able to survive on the wages they are paid amid soaring cost-of-living increases. As a result turnover is going through the roof and workloads are unacceptably high.

"Educators need a reason to stay and now they are calling on the Federal government to step in to lift wages across the sector.

"The whole industry also faces a surge in demand as the Federal government increases accessibility to parents through its 'Cheaper Child Care' reforms starting on 1st July."

Gibbons said the Federal government needed to commit to funding a 25 per cent increase in workers' wages.

"We have seen in the aged care work-value case a belated recognition that care work has been historically undervalued, and the same applies to early educators," Gibbons said.

"The Federal government should also live up to its commitment to address entrenched gender bias and pay inequities in its Secure Jobs, Better Pay reforms.

"To ensure a sector that is able to continue to function, it's time to finally recognise the vital role early childhood educators play in children's lives.

"There will be a cost to the Budget, but the far greater cost will be the impact to children, families, workers and the broader economy if the sector spirals further into crisis."

Gibbons said the community needs confidence that additional funding for wages is delivered to educators and not used to prop up providers.

Big Steps Campaign, Early Childhood Educators Stop Work Action, September 2022. Photo: Matt Hrkac flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

Debbie, a centre director with Sydney's Clovelly Child Care Centre, said the sector desperately needed stability.

"I think the strongest impact is that families who are trying to find a place for their children are finding it difficult.

"Parent benefits in July are great but they do not address the fact educators have left the floor.

"It's a nightmare situation. It's a combination of not enough pay, COVID, and not feeling valued.

"It's a disgrace that educators who are trained professionals are getting the lowest wages; some are only earning $26 an hour."

## GROUND-BREAKING

Last year the UWU released a ground-breaking report showing that early education is on the brink of crisis.

In the largest survey of its kind, nearly 4000 current and former educators revealed they are leaving the sector at record levels because of excessive workloads and low pay.

Over a quarter of current educators reported they plan to leave the sector within the next twelve months, and of those educators who do plan to stay, almost half (46 per cent) think about leaving "all of the time" or "most of the time." In contrast, projections show the sector needs 40,000 additional staff by 2023 to meet growing demand for early learning services.

"The message from early educators across the country is clear: they are at breaking point. There is no early childhood sector without early educators, and they simply can't afford to stay and hold it together anymore," said Helen Gibbons.

"The pandemic has exacerbated an existing problem, with job vacancies close to doubling compared to pre-COVID levels. High workload because of increased understaffing is pushing more and more educators out of the sector."

The report, *Exhausted, undervalued and leaving: the crisis in early education*, also found:

- 70 per cent of educators surveyed said they **"always" or "often" worry about their financial situation**.
- 81 per cent of centre directors say they have had **difficulties in attracting and recruiting staff**.
- 92 per cent of educators said that **"under-the-roof" ratios compromise the safety** and wellbeing of children.
- 65 per cent of educators report that their services are **already understaffed**, and providers are reporting having to cap new enrolments because they **can't find enough staff**.
- 82 per cent of current educators say that in the past month they "always" or "often" felt rushed when performing key caring and/or educational tasks.
- Over 75 per cent of educators strongly agree that **turnover negatively impacts how children learn** and develop as well as their emotional wellbeing more broadly.
- Almost half of educators surveyed **would not recommend early childhood education and care as a career**.

"Services are already reporting having to cap new enrolments", said Gibbons. "Without urgent action, this crisis will spiral out of control and children and families will miss out, losing access to crucial early learning services.

"Across the sector, educators, families and service providers are in agreement: The only way to fix this crisis is to fix educators wages, and conditions. The Federal government is currently considering a workforce strategy for early education. This is the opportunity for the government to provide a real solution for the sector: by delivering a workforce strategy that provides targeted funding to improve wages."

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# Guardian

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## Balloons

**Anyone who wants a pleasant song to sing with children should look up the 2002 They Might Be Giants' song "Where do they make Balloons?," a harmless little ditty whose chorus is the childish question of where all the balloons are made. Balloons are on our minds for several reasons, some literal and some metaphorical. A search for the word "balloon" on the ABC website brings up the options of "spy balloon," "Chinese balloon," and "Chinese spy balloon." By now everyone will have heard about the balloon/civilian unmanned airship, similar to one which drifted across Chile not so long ago without anyone getting upset. The balloon performed a useful, if unintended purpose of giving various reactionary American political figures the chance to grandstand, demanding that the thing be shot down regardless of what might then fall on American citizens underneath it. Worrying about consequences for what an American millionaire once called "the little people" has never been the strong point of the American ruling class, who continued to huff and puff when the balloon was eventually shot down over the ocean. The balloon had done nobody any harm and had been assessed by the American defence establishment as not posing any risk, but a gesture is a gesture. We think the opportunistic Sinophobes of the Australian and American political worlds should chip in to buy some replacement balloons for China as a way of thanking them for another opportunity to create fear while acting stern and decisive towards the alleged floating menace.**

**Speaking of gestures, Australia's Treasurer has just floated a thought-balloon in the form of an essay in *The Monthly* magazine. In just under six thousand words, Jim Chalmers has a bash at striking a balance between what his party claims to do (look after the workers) and what they really want to do (stay in power, keep donors happy). Older readers may remember Bill Clinton and Tony Blair's "Third Way," which tried to do the same thing. Even older members might remember Bob Hawke and Paul Keating. Younger readers should have heard of "centrism." This essay is getting a lot of reactions from all sides of our media, and constitutes Chalmers' claim to being an intellectual heavyweight and possible future ALP leader. (A long essay in *The Monthly* was part of Kevin Rudd's path to leadership way back in 2006). Anna Pha has read all 5662 words of the essay so you don't have to, and provides a Marxist analysis and a response. (see page 3)**

**Toddlers like balloons, so it's easy to fob them off with some nice floating objects. Less easily satisfied are the early childhood educators who set the kids on the right path to a future of learning. As you can see on our front page, the underpaid staff of our childcare centres are voting with their feet as an alternative to getting by on pathetically low wages. The Communist Party of Australia is right with them. Early childhood educators deserve a pay rise now!**

**Unlike the already well-paid Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, who can buy a lot of balloons on $1.5 million per year. We don't think the decision to try to buy off the anti-BDS (Boycott, Disinvest, Sanctions) lobby by adopting the very iffy Internatioal Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-semitism as university policy earns him any more treats. To find out just what's wrong with the definition. (see page 7)**

***The Workers Weekly Guardian* welcomes letters to the editor on any topic, but there's no need to tell us if you know where they make balloons. You never know when the military industrial complex might be listening.**


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# The Communist Party of Australia Calls for a YES vote to the Voice in the upcoming Referendum

**The Communist Party of Australia Central Committee at its meeting in January 2023 came out proudly in favour of a YES vote in the upcoming referendum on a Voice to parliament for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.**

We listen to the words from the Uluru Statement from the Heart: "We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own Country. We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice in the Constitution."

"The referendum question presents us with an opportunity for historical change, for Australia to enshrine a First Nations Voice. The answer must be YES!" said Andrew Irving, CPA General Secretary.

A NO vote would represent a win for racism, colonialism, intolerance, and the far right in Australia. The CPA has pledged its forces to campaign for a YES vote. This will be a platform to further the struggles for Indigenous rights.

The CPA was the first political party in Australia to recognise that white Australia was built on stolen land and recognise the ongoing claim by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for land rights. The CPA has always stood in solidarity with Indigenous Australians.

The Voice could introduce a new period of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's engagement and empowerment, providing a constitutional platform to speak out, challenge, rally campaigns and build solidarity in the community.

The establishment of the Voice must also be linked to the Makarrata process, and truth-telling about colonialism and First Nations history.

While the Party supports the Voice, it knows that Land Rights, real recognition, prosperity, and control over the affairs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will not be gifted or bestowed on them by Australia's dominant capitalist class. Change only happens by consistent and ongoing campaigning, struggle, and the solidarity with the people.

The CPA is strongly committed to struggling alongside Indigenous Australians for their rights, for truth telling, and treaty. The Voice must be seen as a significant step forward in the long struggle ahead.

The CPA calls on all its members and supporters to actively vote and campaign for YES in the upcoming referendum.

**Communist Party of Australia**
**Central Committee**
**Sunday 29th January 2023**

## GLOBAL CLIMATE STRIKE

### 12pm Friday 3rd March
### Sydney Town Hall

*Invite your friends*

On March 3, students, workers, teachers, parents and grandparents will take to the streets of Sydney as a part of the Global ClimateStrike! The climate crisis has not disappeared with the defeat of Scott Morrison's government. 2022 was a year of climate breakdown. Climate extremes are happening at an increased pace across Australia – the disastrous floods in the Kimberley are just the latest example.

The Albanese Government's current 43 per cent target is inadequate and relies on an emissions trading scheme that allows polluters to buy their way out of reducing emissions. Alarmingly, the government is also supporting a series of major new fossil fuel projects like the Scarborough gas project in WA, the Middle Arm gas hub in the NT and the Santos Narrabri Pilliga Gas Project in NSW.

## PRESS FUND

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**Warm thanks and gratitude to those who have contributed to the Press Fund during January:**

**A Fox $20, GD &JM $100, VC $100, RO'F $20, BR $50, Digireb 25, Eddie Seymour $25.**

**January Total: $340.**

# An unsustainable govt

Anna Pha

**In the February *Monthly Essay*, "Capitalism After the Crises", Treasurer Jim Chalmers refers to "hard decisions" that "will accompany hard times ahead" and "the unsustainable state of the nation's books."**

"In 2023, every fifth [housing] loan will roll off low fixed rates onto higher variable rates, which will inflict significant pain," Chalmers warns.

For anyone expecting progressive reforms, the Treasurer says: "the federal budget is deep in debt and under pressure – so the options for large, broad new programs are limited."

The truth is, hard times are already here. More than 3.3 million people, 750,000 of them children, are living below the poverty line. (*ACOSS Poverty in Australia 2022: A snapshot*, December 2022)

Foodbank Australia CEO, Brianna Casey, says, "On any given day, over half a million households in Australia are struggling to meet their food needs and 306,000 are receiving assistance from food relief organisations."

Under-funded and under-resourced community services including homelessness, financial, legal, emergency support, food, and domestic and family violence are stretched beyond their limits, unable to meet the ever-increasing demand. Their staff and volunteers are burnt-out.

Millions of people are struggling with a cost-of-living crisis – skyrocketing power bills, higher petrol prices, rising food costs. Decades of stagnating or declining wages and growth of precarious employment have exacerbated the situation.

We've been repeatedly told that the rising costs of the NDIS, aged care and Medicare are unsustainable – what Chalmers refers to as the "the unsustainable state of the nation's books."

Public hospitals are stretched with COVID cases and thousands of people presenting to emergency departments who cannot afford or do not have access to a general practitioner. There is a "blow out" in NDIS and aged care costs along with unmet needs.

ACOSS (Australian Council of Social Service) Deputy CEO Edwina MacDonald said the report laid bare the shocking impact of the cost-of-living crisis. "Government relies on our sector to serve the public interest on its behalf. It is therefore vital that it properly fund services and invest in service sector staff who have been doing an incredible job in tough circumstances."

"But the challenges of demand, complexity of need, poverty and disadvantage, combined with the past decade of chronic underfunding, are pushing community services beyond breaking point, and that cannot be tolerated," MacDonald said.

The hard times and pain are already here.

## IS MORE PAIN UNAVOIDABLE?

Australia is a rich country. There is no excuse for the government relying on charities or crying poor when it comes to essential services and people's well-being. With a shift in priorities from the big end of town to people's interests the books (budget) could be sustainable and people's needs be met.

The stage three tax cuts are highly inequitable and regressive. They are a gift to those on taxable incomes of more than $90.000 to those on $200,000 or more a year. Workers on the minimum wage receive nothing. Repeal the $254 billion in tax cuts for the rich over ten years! Tax the big corporations!

The costs of the health system, aged care, and the NDIS could be sustainable and meet people's needs by cutting out the layers of profit. Nationalise health care, aged care, and the NDIS!

Schoolchildren line up for free issue of soup and a slice of bread in the Depression, Belmore North Public School, Sydney, 1934. Photo: Sam Hood – State Library of New South – no known copyright restrictions.

The environmentally destructive war machine with its forces of mass destruction, is unsustainable – more than $500 billion over the next ten years. That is without taking into consideration the tens of billions of dollars on nuclear-powered submarines. Its cost in dollars, in lives, and to the environment is unsustainable. Cancel the subs, slash the offensive war preparations!

Negative gearing, rorted by the rich will cost the public purse $130 billion or more over the next decade. Abolish negative gearing!

Fossil fuel subsidies are estimated to cost $11 billion in the current financial year and continue to rise in coming years. Abolish the fossil fuel subsidies! No new gas or coal projects! Phase out existing projects by 2030 to save the planet!

Redirect the savings to improving services. Increase all income support payments such as age pension, JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Austudy, and energy and rent assistance. Provide the necessary mental health services and dental services under Medicare. Redirect funding to priorities such as public housing; funding Indigenous communities; and research and development of renewable energy.

At a time of record profits there is no argument against workers' wages catching up with those lost decades and keeping up with price inflation and productivity. Time for a living wage and secure jobs!

## Capitalism with a human face

# Chalmers' oxymoron

Anna Pha

**Treasurer Jim Chalmers says it is time to "rethink capitalism," time for a "values-based capitalism" with "efficient markets." He is critical of the neoliberal responses adopted by previous governments to the global financial crisis, the COVID crisis and a "third [crisis] with its roots in the inadequate response to the previous two."**

Chalmers spells out his concept of "values-based capitalism" in *The Monthly Essay*, "Capitalism After the Crises." The responses to the essay by some sections of the media and economic commentators have been hysterical.

Murdoch's extreme right Australian newspaper went as far as comparing Chalmers' ideas with communism. Just mention of the word "equality" is enough to set *The Australian* off.

Another commentary in Nine's *Sydney Morning Herald* ran with the headline: "Chalmers takes on capitalism as we know it in bid to save stretched households." Wow!

"Social democrats always argued that sharing growth was right in itself – that economic inclusion is the measure of a decent society." And "Our local communities can gain choice and control over their own futures," says Chalmers.

But there is no indication how such outcomes can be achieved. The long-winded essay with all its fine-sounding platitudes has no specific detail.

"And the same regulatory frameworks that ensure that for-profit capital in the private sector creates value for investors can generate public value in the for-purpose economy. This is what values-based capitalism can look like," says Chalmers.

## WHOSE VALUES?

Under capitalism values are class based – either working class or capitalist class. Capitalism serves the interests of capital – private for-profit businesses through the exploitation of workers. Workers are not paid the true value of the wealth they, not their bosses, create.

"Governments and investors can be partners, not protagonists," he writes. Of course they can under capitalism. Capitalist governments share the values of capital, they serve the interests of capital.

Capitalist values are based on the never-ending drive for the maximisation and accumulation of private profits.

## CLASS COLLABORATION

"As the influential economist Mariana Mazzucato has explored in her work, markets built in partnership through the efforts of business, labour and government are still the best mechanism we have to efficiently and effectively direct resources," Chalmers claims.

There is nothing new about cooperation or partnership between business, labour, and government. It was ably pursued by the Hawke/Keating governments under the Accord. The Accord saw trade unions restraining wages and suppressing struggle while employers never let up in their pursuit of draining more and more blood from workers. Tripartite partnership is based on the capitalist myth that workers and their bosses have common economic interests. It is class collaboration.

## THE REAL PARTNERSHIP

Chalmers: "Collaboration is just as important as co-investment. The private sector is key and central to sustainable growth, and there's a genuine appetite among so many forward-looking businesspeople and investors for something more aligned with their values, and our national goals," Chalmers said, reasserting Labor's commitment to the private sector.

"It's not just our economic institutions that need renewing and restructuring, but our markets as well. Here, government has a leadership role to play: defining priorities, challenges and missions – not 'picking winners.'" It aims to do this through partnerships with the private sector.

Labor has already announced a National Reconstruction Fund, a Housing Australia Future Fund, and a Rewiring the Nation Corporation Fund in addition to the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC). These public funds, based on debt, are to assist the private, for-profit sector with finance for projects. Government debt to subsidise the private sector.

"Across the social purpose economy, in areas such as aged care, education and disability, effective organisations with high-quality talent can offer decent returns [read profits] and demonstrate a social dividend – but they find it hard to grow because they find it hard to get investors. Right now, the market framework that would enable that investment in effect doesn't properly exist."

The policy is to expand the role of private for-profit organisations in these areas, and we can add health care to the list. The present problem with social spending is the private sector which is driven by the profit motive instead of people's needs. Nationalisation, not expansion of private sector involvement, is required.

Chalmers' essay is a revamp of the oxymoron "capitalism with a human face" and the capitalist myth that workers and employers have common economic interests.

"Values-based capitalism" is a rehash of former Labor PM Bob Hawke's social contract (Accord) and former Labor Treasurer Paul Keating's "saving capitalism from itself" which ushered in neoliberalism, class collaboration, wage restraint, and record profits.

# Anti-anti-Semitism, or attacking dissent?

**In the last week of January this year, the University of Melbourne adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism. It is the second Australian university to do so, after Wollongong. This might seem like the responsible thing to do: anti-Semitism definitely exists, and it should be opposed. However, the IHRA's definition of anti-Semitism is not as straightforward and authoritative as it might seem. Of the 11 examples of anti-Semitism given by the IHRA definition, seven are about criticism of Israel, leading Jewish critics of the definition to argue that it being used to "shut down legitimate debate on Israel's policies towards the Palestinians and to harass and silence critics."**

Queen's College, University of Melbourne Photo: Donaldytong (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Readers who take an interest in British politics might remember the absolute hounding Jeremy Corbyn received when he was leader of the British Labour Party over his hesitation on the IHRA definition.

But don't take our word for it. You could take the word of the 40 Jewish groups who joined Jewish Voice for Peace in opposing equating anti-Semitism with criticism of Israel, and produced the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, which outlines what anti-Semitism is without being designed to stifle criticism of Israel, its actions, and some of its supporters.

The following is a letter from a Melbourne comrade and Melbourne University graduate to their old university.

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To: Vice Chancellor

I'm a Melbourne University alumni. I'm writing to register my disappointment that the university has decided to adopt the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism. This definition has been used to stifle free speech at universities in the UK, and is an open invitation to interest groups who seek not so much to combat anti-Semitism as to close down legitimate debate.

Three sections of the IHRA definition are particularly problematic:

"Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations."

There are definitely Australians who prioritise what they see as the interests of Israel over the interests of their own country, and it should not be forbidden to describe this.

"Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour."

The "e.g." here is particularly worrying, implying as it does that someone seeking to close down legitimate criticism of Israel is free to be inventive about which criticisms do or don't "deny the Jewish people their right to self-determination," also that "Jewish people" are the same as the State of Israel – demonstrably not the case, as proved by the existence of Jewish people who are citizens of other countries, and the existence of Israeli citizens who are not Jewish. This line also invites people to conflate criticisms of racist policies or actions by the Israeli state with claiming that Israel's existence is racist.

"Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis."

If the Israeli government has a policy or a practice that is similar to policies or practices of the Nazis, it should not be illegal to point that out. If someone compares contemporary Israeli policy to the Nazis and is wrong, the response in a university which genuinely valued free speech would be to explain why the comparison is wrong, not to close it down.

Adopting this definition amounts to caving to a particular interest group in an attempt to keep them quiet and to stave off criticism. It will not achieve either aim. The university is quite capable of adopting a definition of anti-Semitism which allows for free discussion.

I will not be donating to any Melbourne University fundraising appeals while the IHRA definition is Melbourne University policy.

Sincerely,

# Australian Strategic Shipping Fleet Taskforce progress

**The Australian Shipping, Strategic Fleet Taskforce – established by the Albanese Federal government to advise on the implementation of its pre-election promise to revitalise Australian shipping – has entered the second phase of its work after delivering its interim advice to the Minister for Infrastructure, Catherine King MP. The Taskforce is due to present a final report to the Federal government by the end of June this year.**

The taskforce was established in October 2022 and includes representatives from the Maritime Union of Australia, Maritime Industry Australia (representing shippers), the Department of Defence, and major shipping sector users such as Woodside Energy. The Albanese Government allocated $6.3 million in the current budget to fund its activities.

The taskforce consulted with industry in late 2022, looking to inform its high-level strategic objectives for the fleet. In a recent statement, the Taskforce is inviting a fresh round of industry consultation, this time calling for "proposals, options or ideas" for the establishment of the fleet.

Speaking to industry news outlet *The DCN*, a spokesperson for the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts explained that the Taskforce had provided its interim report to the government, which is considering the interim advice.

"As part of phase one, the taskforce sought broad stakeholder feedback on a discussion paper that assisted it to undertake an initial strategic needs assessment to help determine strategic needs the fleet could deliver," the spokesperson said.

"As part of phase two, the taskforce is now asking stakeholders to provide specific advice on how a strategic fleet could be established, as well as any measures to help support Australian shipping more broadly."

The taskforce is specifically seeking industry views on four points:

- The composition of the strategic fleet;
- Ways the fleet could be established and operate;
- What kind of government assistance would be required to establish the fleet; and
- Whether and to what extent legislation, such as the Coastal Trading (Revitalising Australian Shipping) Act 2012, be amended to support the fleet.

"The purpose of this broad consultation in phase two is to help the taskforce develop options to put to the government on how to establish the fleet," the departmental spokesperson said.

"This is intended to provide all interested parties with further opportunities to engage with the taskforce following the phase one consultation. It is expected that the taskforce will undertake further specific consultation as it develops its final report."

The Communist Party of Australia calls for the conversion of submarine building facilities to build a merchant fleet for Australia. Australia is highly reliant on shipping for trade but its merchant fleet has been decimated. ✪

## Dingo bytes

"Exhausted," "struggling to cope," "let down," "dangerous," and "overwhelmed" is how nurses have described working conditions at the prestigious St Vincent's Private Hospital in Darlinghurst and Mater Private Hospital in North Sydney. On 2nd February, for the second time since December, members of the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) walked off the job at St Vincent's Private Hospital and held a community rally, supported by patients and medical staff. NSWNMA Assistant General Secretary, Michael Whaites, said members were fed up being overworked and feeling undervalued by group employer, St Vincent's Health Australia (SVHA). "Yesterday, nurses and midwives took four hours' protected industrial action at Mater Private Hospital and told stories of working 56 hours of overtime – this is simply unsafe," said Whaites. NSWNMA St Vincent's Private Hospital Branch Delegate, Grainne Mahoney, said nurses were fed up being run off their feet, trying to care for up to 10 patients each. NSWNMA St Vincent's Private Hospital Branch member, Melissa Bancroft Crookes, told the Green Park crowd safe ratios were paramount and desperately needed. "For years, a wedge has been driven by CEOs of the hospital between the wards and theatres. But today I stand here to let Chris Blake know that theatres have had enough. They are tired and theatres stand with the wards. We stand together. We stand united!"

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance(MEAA), has lodged an application to conduct a ballot among members to take protected industrial action at the national broadcaster, the ABC. The application follows overwhelming rejection by Alliance members last year of an inferior offer from ABC management which failed to address critical issues at the ABC. MEAA has applied to the Fair Work Commission to hold a ballot of members for a range of industrial action, including work restrictions, bans, and strike action as a final resort. MEAA Media Director Cassie Derrick said members believed industrial action was the only way to force ABC management back to the bargaining table after months of stalling. "ABC staff delivered a resounding No vote last year when management insisted on putting forward an insulting and inferior offer," she said. "Since then, management has refused to engage with members around key issues of a fair pay rise that keeps pace with cost of living, removing impediments to career progression for staff wherever they are based, and real action to increase gender and racial diversity and end pay inequity. The past few years have shown just how important the accurate and reliable reporting of ABC news staff is. We can't let this be jeopardised by tight-fisted management. The ABC has been running on a business model of overwork, underpay, and systemic inequality for a long time."

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: Why Peter Dutton opposes any kind of Indigenous voice: Aboriginal control of their land makes it harder for corporations to rip out Australia's wealth for private profit.

# Voice, Treaty and Truth Telling

**The requests from the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* imply a journey that all Australians will need to take together to achieve a nation espousing true equality and dignity for all.**

This statement, set to become one the most significant documents that has shaped Australian history, enshrines a plea for "justice and self-determination" from the first sovereign owners of this continent for the whole nation to make amends for the tragedies of the past. The key paragraphs state:

"We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution."

"Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination."

"We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history."

While at the national level the focus has been on the establishment on the *First Nations Voice* to our federal parliament, at the state and territory level of government across the nation consideration is also being given to the other key requests of the "Uluru Statement from the Heart," that is, the *Makarrata* or treaty, and the associated truth-telling about First Nations history. In addition, the emphasis is on governments across the nation making agreements with Australia's First Nations to meet their expressed "aspirations." Let us consider what is actually happening in each state and territory around the nation.

## SA – VOICE FIRST

Similar to the federal level of government, South Australia has chosen as an initial step to proceed with voice under its *Voice to Parliament* legislation, the result of state-wide consultation by the Inaugural Commissioner for First Nations Voice, Dale Agius, a respected Ngarrinjeri elder and advocate of the principle of self-determination. The SA First Nations Voice will comprise representatives from regions across the state.

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Kyam Maher says the Voice to Parliament won't "impinge" on Native Title, after traditional owners penned an open letter raising concerns. (*The Advertiser*)

To date, the South Australian government has placed strong emphasis on the Voice, while Truth Telling and Treaty are yet to receive detailed official consideration.

## QLD – TRUTH TELLING AS A PATH TO TREATY

The Queensland government says a bill to legalise the establishment of a three-year Indigenous truth-telling inquiry will come before parliament in 2023, as the state unveils steps it will take towards signing a treaty with First Nations peoples. Truth telling will take place with support from such institutions as art galleries, museums, and libraries accompanied by government-facilitated research.

Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk has declared, "What we do next on the Path to Treaty will define our humanity, our sense of fairness, and the legacy we leave our children." The Voice remains a consideration for the future.

Indigenous activist and author Jackie Huggins says treaty is about accepting our true history to open the door to our shared futures. (*Facebook: Annastacia Palaszczuk*) per ABC News

## VIC – TREATY FIRST, IMPLICIT VOICE

"In negotiating a Treaty with First Peoples, the Victorian Government is acknowledging that prior to the formation of the State of Victoria, First Peoples communities were here – practising their own law, lore, and cultural authority." ("Treaty Victoria", **www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/treaty**)

An "overarching Statewide Treaty" is proposed along with multiple local Treaties with provisions for "political representation" and "economic development" which has implications for "land and water" control or management. Working through a First Peoples' Treaty Authority, the Victorian government believes that a negotiated Treaty will provide "sustainable solutions" into the future with First Nations peoples "making decisions that will impact their lives."

## WA – TRUTH TELLING FIRST

In Western Australia the government has developed an *Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy 2021 – 2029* to promote a "better future" for their First Nations peoples. "Walking together" is seen as a key element of this strategy along with Truth Telling, hopefully leading to a reduction in racism. Ideally, the process should involve an avoidance of trauma and in fact embrace a promotion of healing. In a historical perspective, on the one hand there should be recognition of dispossession, frontier violence and massacres, and on the other, an emphasis on survival and endurance along with examples of cooperation between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal people.

Premier McGowan has emphasised that the West Australian Constitution now recognises "Aboriginal People as the first people of Western Australia and traditional custodians of the land." In addition, recent settlement agreements, the South West Settlement and the Geraldton Settlement, both contain some of the elements found in many treaties. Before acting further, the WA government appears to be awaiting the outcome of the national referendum.

## TAS– TRUTH TELLING, AT LEAST

The Tasmanian Government sees Truth Telling not simply as an end in itself but rather believes the process must result in tangible outcomes such as changes in education curricula and the naming of landmarks. In Tasmania it is recognised that Truth Telling may have "re-traumatising" effects needing psychological support. Government leadership in the island state has strongly supported the concept of the Voice nationally if not locally as yet. Empathy should prevail as discussions continue.

## NT – TREATY BASED ON TRUTH TELLING

Under the Barunga Agreement 2018, First Nations Territorians are acknowledged as the "prior owners and occupiers" of the land and sea. In addition, under the Treaty Commissioner Act 2020, Mick Dodson, a notable member of the Yawuru people, was appointed the Northern Territory Treaty Commissioner. The Act specified Truth Telling as the "core of any Treaty negotiations." However, the process is yet to be resolved, and may be delayed by recent events in Alice Springs and immediate concerns such as the desperate need for employment opportunities and adequate housing as well as comprehensive education and training programs.

## ACT – TREATY INVESTIGATION

The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028 obliges the signatories to work together to "enable equitable outcomes" for Aboriginal and Torres Islander peoples in the ACT.

In 2022 Professor Kerry Arabena, a descendant of the Merian people of the Torres Strait and Chair of Indigenous Health at the University of Melbourne was appointed as the facilitator of preliminary talks about what a Treaty would mean for the traditional owners of the ACT.

The Chief Minister is due to make a formal response outlining key elements of a proposed Treaty for the Northern Territory.

## NSW – PROMISE OF TREATY

A formal Treaty process should begin in NSW if a Labor Government is elected in March 2023. NSW is yet to begin work on any agreement with First Nations people. The current Coalition government leadership has given clear support for the national Voice despite the lack of initiative at the state level.

## REFLECTION

Virtually all state and territory governments across Australia have at least taken some heed of the requests of the "Uluru Statement from the Heart" which, at the very least, should bode well for harmony and reconciliation, both long overdue, in the future of this nation.

State legislation has a profound effect on First Nations people just as federal legislation does. For instance, the introduction of designated seats in parliament for First Nations representatives in one legislature as a complementary form of the "Voice", will inevitably pose a challenge for other legislatures. A momentous journey has just begun.

The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) is committed to the establishment of a genuinely representative national Aboriginal advisory body, to the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and to recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original occupiers and owners of Australian territory.

The Party supports the Voice; at the same time it recognises that Land Rights and control over their own affairs by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are necessary for real recognition and prosperity to be achieved. ✪

Photo: Wayne Quilliam / Yothu Yindi Foundation – flickr.com (CC BY-ND 2.0)

# GREEN NOTES

Anna Pha

Welcome to Green Notes, a fortnightly column which will cover climate change, environmental issues and biodiversity and their impact on humanity including indigenous populations, health, and the planet.

The Amazon is 10 million years old, and its vast river basin runs across South America. Its rich biodiversity and hundreds of millions of trees are unrivalled anywhere in the world. It is often described as one of the lungs of the world. Around 60 per cent of the rainforest's total area lies within the territory of Brazil where deforestation and loss of biodiversity have reached crisis proportions.

For much of the past fifty years, millions of people have been encouraged to colonise the Amazon. Land clearance accelerated with corruption and violent expulsion of indigenous people from their lands destroying their means of subsistence, source of traditional medicines, and cultural connections. Logging, cattle ranges, and soy crops pushed into indigenous lands and national parks. Scientists estimate that at the current rate of land clearance more than 25 per cent of the Amazon Forest will be cleared by 2030 and 40 per cent by 2050.

From 2004-2012, when Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and the Workers' Party was in office, the rate of deforestation declined by 80 per cent.

But that was not to last. In particular, the election of the right-wing climate sceptic Jair Bolsonaro in 2019 saw the rate of deforestation increase by 92 per cent. He dismantled the mechanisms that had achieved the reduction in deforestation – satellite monitoring, personnel on the ground, and legislation to punish offenders and demarcate indigenous land and conservation areas. He promoted the interests of corporations and agribusiness that were wrecking the forest with impunity. His rule fuelled violence and corruption, including the narcotics trade.

Scientists monitoring the impact of land clearing and resultant changes in weather patterns say the forest has reached a tipping point – reduced rainfall, drought, and fires are on the rise. Beyond this point changes will be irreversible, and there will be serious global consequences.

Some life has been breathed into the Amazon with the election of former president Lula in October 2022. Tackling deforestation and reenforcing environmental protections were central to Lula's election campaign commitments. He also promised to give formal recognition to land rights and to resurrect the Amazon Fund that had been frozen by Bolsonaro. The Fund was created to raise donations for non-reimbursable investments in efforts to prevent, monitor and combat deforestation, as well as to promote the preservation and sustainable use in the Brazilian Amazon.

Lula has a difficult job ahead of him, with a violent backlash already under way from pro-Bolsonaro forces and those with a vested interest in deforestation, but he has the backing of the people.

Readers are invited to make contributions or send information to Green Notes. They should be around 500-600 words and emailed to **editor@cpa.org.au**. We look forward to your contributions.

# Inhumane medical blockade

Ruwaida Amer

**Mahdi Amer, 35, lost his father at the beginning of the new year. Ibrahim Amer was 65. He had a heart attack.**

But due to Israel's blockade of Gaza, the emergency equipment he needed and that could have saved him was simply not available in Gaza. "My father suffered from a blockage in each of his four arteries, resulting in a sudden heart attack," Mahdi said. "Because there was no interventional catheterisation device that could save my father, he was referred for treatment."

An attempt was made to have him transported to a West Bank hospital, but it came too late. With all the bureaucracy involved in getting an exit permit from the Israeli military and the time spent traveling, Ibrahim didn't make it in time.

He returned to Gaza in a burial shroud.

For over a year, according to Gaza's ministry of health, Israel has prevented medical diagnostic devices, critical equipment such as mobile, and standard x-ray machines, as well as spare parts for such machines, from entering Gaza.

Along with a host of medicines and other medical equipment barred from entry, Israel's blockade has left Gaza's health sector dramatically under-supplied and in a constant state of crisis.

This in spite of clear international guidelines and rules under the Geneva Conventions and other international agreements that the right to healthcare must be preserved in times of war.

Israel's medical blockade of Gaza has been described as one that "gravely breaches" residents' rights to healthcare in Gaza and outside.

## AGING EQUIPMENT

Cancer patients are particularly vulnerable to the lack of access to x-ray machines.

That ability to track the spread of cancer is crucial to combating the disease, and even if hard-to-obtain travel permits, travel costs are "exorbitant," said Subhiya Skaik, 55. Despite all of this, Skaik is hopeful that "the health crisis will be resolved, and we will have access to every possible course of treatment."

Some private health centres do have x-ray or Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machines – the one at Gaza's main al-Shifa hospital is often broken due to the inability to import spare parts – but the cost of using them is often prohibitive in Gaza, where the average daily wage is only $10.

Medical professionals are helpless.

"All of our hospital units are suffering due to the limited access to medical devices," Muhammad Abu Salmiya, director of al-Shifa hospital said. "These are life-saving equipment for our patients, many of whom ultimately die because we cannot treat them properly."

Abu Salmiya lamented the lack of interventional radiology equipment that he needs and the insufficient, worn-out equipment he is forced to work with.

"We use a very old device [for interventional radiology] that we urgently need to replace. Patients must be transferred to West Bank hospitals. But there are several cases where they have died from not receiving medical intervention quickly enough."

There should be six x-ray machines at al-Shifa hospital, he continued. There is only two.

"We are often compelled to move a patient from the intensive care unit to a different floor, often while they are connected to oxygen, in order to take an x-ray. This is unhealthy."

## UNNECESSARY AND INHUMANE

Compounding frustrations, health professionals say there is no reason for Israel to prevent these devices and spare parts for their repair from entering Gaza.

Many are donations, Ibrahim Abbas, director of the medical imaging unit at the ministry of health in Gaza, pointed out, citing the example of 14 devices blocked from entry in October 2021, all donated by the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction (PECDAR).

These imaging devices still sit in storage, awaiting permission to enter, Abbas said.

Fadel al-Muzaini of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) said Israel had to honour its obligations under international law. "The Oslo agreements and the resulting transfer of the tasks of providing health services to the Palestinian Authority do not exempt the Israeli occupation from its obligations to facilitating health care in the Palestinian territories."

According to al-Muzaini, over 13,500 patients in Gaza are currently waiting to undergo surgery – major and minor – a number the health sector is simply too underequipped to deal with.

PCHR works alongside other human rights organisations to provide legal and logistical support for official Palestinian agencies to facilitate the supply of medical devices. Sometimes these efforts succeed, but not enough to mitigate the life-threatening restrictions Israel imposes on the Gaza Strip.

"The primary responsibility for providing medical supplies to the residents of the Gaza Strip rests with the Israeli occupation authorities," al-Muzaini said.

Israel is a party to the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, he pointed out.

"It is bound by Article 12 of the covenant, which guarantees the respect, protection, and fulfilment of the rights of persons under its rule to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental healthcare."

Ruwaida Amer is a journalist based in Gaza.

*The Electronic Intifada*

**Israel's medical blockade of Gaza has been described as one that "gravely breaches" residents' rights to healthcare ...**

## Statement

# Israel's criminal occupation

**Since the start of the year, Israeli occupying forces (IOF) have killed 35 Palestinians. Nine victims were killed on 26th January alone, when IOF carried out yet another violent, large-scale military invasion of the Jenin refugee camp, West Bank.**

To be clear: Israel has no sovereignty rights whatsoever in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. Israel, its military forces and settlers have no right whatsoever to enter Palestinian homes, cities, towns, villages, or camps. There is no valid justification for a military invasion of Jenin or Nablus or any other Palestinian area.

Even Israel's claims of so-called "preventive attacks" in "search and arrest operations" do not justify such force and threat of force against a civilian population under occupation. The Palestinian people are not "terrorists," and these are not merely "search and arrest operations" falling under traditional "law and order" measures.

The fact is that Israel targets Palestinians for who they are – Palestinians – and for daring to reject its illegal colonial occupation, including through non-violent protest, and then flagrantly exploits "counter-terrorism" arguments as justification.

Israel is a colonial occupier using violence and fear to maintain control and force submission to its unlawful presence and domination over the Palestinian people and land it occupies, and its distorted "counter-terrorism" narrative and pretexts must be questioned, exposed and rejected.

Collective punishment is an extension of this policy, despite being specifically prohibited by Article 33 of the 4th Geneva Convention. Following an earlier announcement of punitive measures against the Palestinian people and leadership for pursuing justice by requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice, Israel has now declared that it will pursue other illegal collective punishment measures in response to an attack on 27th January in an illegal Israeli settlement in occupied East Jerusalem in which seven Israelis were killed.

The Israeli government has pledged to seal and demolish the homes of alleged attackers, revoke residency rights and deport Palestinian civilians, and has announced plans to intensify settlement activities, and expand settlers' access to weaponry.

Israeli settler violence is another part of this policy of State-sponsored violence and impunity. Between 28th-29th January, in less than 24 hours, there were 144 attacks by Israeli settlers recorded in Nablus alone.

Other incidents of Settler terrorism include arson attacks on Palestinian homes and vehicles, vandalisation of property with racist, hateful graffiti, harassment and physical assault of unarmed Palestinian civilians, uprooting, destroying and burning of Palestinian trees and crops, and public chanting of "Death to Arabs," and other racist slogans.

This is in addition to regular provocative marches into the Old City of Jerusalem and continuous incursions into Al-Aqsa Mosque.

All of this violence is committed with the support and protection of the Israeli government. In the absence of international protection, the Palestinian people continue to suffer lethal assaults and atrocities at the hands of Israel, which has completely abdicated all legal obligations and responsibilities in flagrant contempt for the law and the international community.

For the cycle of violence to end, the root causes of the recurrent crises we are facing must be addressed: Israel's illegal colonial occupation and apartheid regime. Israel must be held to the same standards of the law as every country, and its government officials, military personnel and settler militias faced with consequences for their deliberate human rights violations and contempt of international law.

**1st February, 2023**
**The General Delegation of Palestine to Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific**

## CPA statement

# Free Palestine, end the occupation

**The Communist Party of Australia calls for the end to the ongoing Israeli occupation of all Palestinian lands, the establishment of an Independent Palestinian State based on the borders of 4th June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We call for the right for Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland in accordance with the UN Resolution 194, access to water and the full realisation of a sovereign state.**

The CPA expresses its solidarity and support with all the Palestinian political prisoners and calls for their immediate release.

We condemn the Israeli government's policies of occupation, settlements and the fracturing of the geographical continuity of lands that would make up the future Palestinian state.

We demand the immediate dismantling of all Israeli illegal settlements and the Apartheid Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

We denounce the long-term US Administration's support to the Israeli war and occupation policies as well as the US-fostered diplomatic relations of some Arab states with Israel. These are not peace agreements, but a validation of Israel and the US's policies of more resource exploitation and military and economic hegemony in the region.

The CPA calls on Australia to immediately join the nine countries of the G20 (Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Turkey) that have recognised Palestine as a state.

The Communist Party of Australia will continue to campaign alongside the Palestinian community and organisations in solidarity for the end of the occupation and the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state.

**Central Committee**
**22-23 January, 2022**

# Anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism

Graham EL Holton

**The recent fighting in the Gaza Strip has claimed the lives of 47 Palestinians, including 17 children, as Israeli forces targeted leaders of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and militants for firing unguided projectiles into Israel, which did little damage with no Israelis killed.**

On 30th January the University of Melbourne Student Union (UMSU) condemned the "ongoing ethnic cleansing of Palestinians" and the "use of Zionism to justify the illegal occupation of Palestine as racist and colonial."

It supported Palestinians in their "self-defence against their occupiers." The student union has renewed calls for the university to "participate in an academic boycott and cut ties with Israeli institutions, researchers, and academics."

In May 2022 the UMSU passed the motion, "UMSU stands with Palestine – BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions] and Solidarity Policy." It called Israel a "settler colonial apartheid state" and accused it of "massacres, forced expulsion and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians." Zionism was "a racist, colonial ideology."

Natalie Gunn, the president of the Australasian Union of Jewish Students said the UMSU motion contained an "utterly false and ludicrous version of history" and would lead to an increase in anti-Semitism on campus. Australia's leading Jewish groups, the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council, Executive Council of Australian Jewry, Zionist Federation of Australia, Jewish Community Council of Victoria, and Zionism Victoria condemned the UMSU motion.

A letter on behalf of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry complained that the resolution raises the risk "to Jewish students, the likelihood that it will incite racial hatred" by the anti-Semitic nature of its claims and falsehoods. A spokesperson for the University of Melbourne told *The Australian Jewish News* that "this antisemitic motion is not the position of the University of Melbourne, nor is it one that is endorsed or supported by the University." The University had sided with pro-Israel politics.

The argument that anti-Zionism is inherently anti-Semitic rests on three interrelated arguments. First, that opposition to Zionism is anti-Semitic because it denies Jews a state of their own. Second, that it seeks to remove Israel's right to statehood, thereby creating the political dispossession of its nine million citizens. Third, anti-Zionists are also anti-Semitic, because you cannot find one without the other. In fact, 1.9 million, 21 per cent of the population, are Arab Israelis, who refer to themselves as Israeli-Palestinians.

Israel also contains five million non-citizens, Palestinians, who live under Israeli control in the West Bank and Gaza, without basic rights. Israel excludes Palestinian parties from its governing coalitions.

## ETHNIC NATIONALISM

A commission created in 2003 by the Israeli government described Israel's handling of the Arab sector as "discriminatory." Israel's form of ethnic nationalism, Zionism, denies equality to non-Jews who live under Israeli control. That anti-Israel equates to anti-Semitism is false, when one notes that Ultra-Orthodox Jews strongly believe that the State of Israel should not exist "before the Messiah comes."

None of the anti-Zionism-equals-anti-Semitism arguments stand up to scrutiny. To ensure that the Zionist state is not challenged by academics, laws have been passed that equate criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. This has been seen at universities in North America, Europe and Australia.

The sacking of academics accused of anti-Semitism has a long history in the United States. The most prominent of whom was Norman Finkelstein in 2007. The author of *The Holocaust Industry* and *Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History* was removed from his position in the department of political sciences at DePaul University in Chicago, a Catholic university.

A rally in Sydney to end the blockade of Gaza. Photo: Anna Pha

Finkelstein, a Jewish intellectual critical of Israel, argued that the accusation that his books incited antisemitism is being used to reduce criticism of Israeli policy towards the Palestinians. His removal came after Alan Dershowitz, a Harvard law professor, had campaigned against his tenure being granted. Noam Chomsky and the Oxford historian, Avi Schlaim, spoke out in support of Finkelstein.

## BDS

Indigenous people see parallels between what is happening in Palestine with their own history. In 2018 the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) declared its support for BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) on Israel, as did the American Studies Association and the Asian American Studies Association. The BDS movement was established in 2005 by the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel.

NAISA supports academic inquiry about and by Indigenous communities to be free from political controls. "The NAISA Council protests the infringement of the academic freedom of Indigenous Palestinian academics and intellectuals in the Occupied Territories and Israel who are denied fundamental freedoms of movement, expression, and assembly, which we uphold."

The council is against the colonisation and domination of Indigenous lands by settler states throughout the world. It sees Palestinians as indigenous to the land with Israel as modern-day settler colonialism. Palestinians are ejected from their lands in a process of ethnic cleansing. As such it resembles the experiences of Native American Indians and the indigenous peoples of Hawaii, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

## WITHIN ISRAEL

People in positions of power within Israel have also been outspoken against the attacks on Palestine. In 2018 Avrum Burg, the former speaker of Israel's Knesset declared that the settlement in the West Bank had rendered the two-state solution impossible. Israelis must "depart from the Zionist paradigm, and move into a more inclusive paradigm. Israel must belong to all of its residents, including Arabs, not to the Jews alone."

Other Jewish Israeli progressives include the former deputy mayor of Jerusalem, Meron Benvenisti, the *Haaretz* columnist Gideon Levy, and the activists of the Federation Movement.

In the past few years, legislation in North America and Europe has toughened the stand against critics of Israel. On 26 October 2020, the Ontario government, Canada, under Order in Council 1450/2020 adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism. The student governments at Ryerson University and McGill University in Canada adopted the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism in their anti-discrimination policies.

The IHRA defines anti-Semitism by labelling the criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic. The definition lists eleven examples of anti-Semitism, seven of which equate criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. Its definition has been criticised by academics and activists for curtailing academic freedom and equating criticism of Israel and Zionism with anti-Semitism. Its definition potentially denies critics of Israel access to campus resources.

That year Valentina Azarova was appointed the director of the University of Toronto faculty of law's international human rights program. She was soon attacked for her scholarly criticism of Israel's appalling human rights record.

In May 2022, the Goethe-Institut, a cultural institution based in Hamburg, Germany, disinvited Palestinian poet and activist Mohammed El-Kurd from participating in the "Beyond the Lone Offender" summit. It considered El-Kurd as not an "appropriate speaker for this forum" due to his posts on social media criticising Israel, which the Institute "did not find acceptable."

The British Pakistani journalist Mohammed Hanif and Berliner Zeitung writer Hanno Hauenstein cancelled their participation in the conference in solidarity with El-Kurd. Hauenstein wrote on Twitter, "anti-racism that doesn't care about Palestinians is a bad joke."

In January 2023 David Miller, professor of political sociology at the University of Bristol, the United Kingdom, was accused of anti-Semitism for writing that Israel wants to "impose its will all over the world" and it is "fundamental to Zionism to encourage Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism."

## SETTLER COLONIALISM

Miller's aim is to end "settler colonialism in Palestine" and to "end Zionism as a functioning ideology of the world." Miller was fired from his position. At Sheffield Hallam University, Shahd Abusalama, an associate lecturer was suspended from her post in 2022. The university alleged that Abusalama had broken the university's rules, specifically the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism.

She had posted on Twitter, in an academic discussion, the origin of the word *Holocaust*. Abusalama was later reinstated after a global campaign and protests against her removal. Academics and student organisations from across the UK had sent in open letters of support for her.

The IHRA definition of anti-Semitism is based on false assumptions that quell any criticism of Israel as a Zionist state. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) website argues that criticism of Israel crosses into anti-Semitism when: all Jews are held responsible for the actions of Israel; Israel is denied the right to exist as a Jewish state; and when it uses anti-Semitic symbols and images.

The ADL goes further, seeing any anti-Israel stand as an extreme form of criticism of Israel. That anti-Zionism is prejudiced against the Jewish movement for self-determination and the right of the Jewish people to their homeland, Israel. The ADL sees the BDS campaign as a rejection of Israel's very existence as a Jewish state. It denies the Jewish people the right to self-determination, a right universally afforded to other groups. Of course, these other groups do not include Palestinians.

Criticism of Israel's actions against Palestinians has increased over the past fifty years. In the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Israel routed the Egyptian–Syrian–Jordanian alliance and occupied the Sinai Peninsula. This extended its territory far beyond the 1947 United Nations Resolution 181 for the division of Israel and Palestine. On 10th November, 1975, the United Nations General Assembly passed the "Zionism is racism" resolution, equating Zionism with racism and apartheid. Criticising Israel's inhumane treatment of Palestinians is not anti-Semitic, nor are criticisms against a brutal Zionist state.

Therefore, anti-Zionist and anti-Israel statements should not be grounds for dismal at universities, the same institutions that call for academic freedom from political control. Anti-Semitism is always wrong, because it denigrates and dehumanises people because of their ethnicity and religious beliefs, but claims of anti-Semitism cannot be used as a tool to stifle criticism of Israel's inhumane actions.

Further Reading: Ilan Pappé. 2006. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. London. Oneworld Publications.

## Britain

# “As long as it takes”

**A “constant cycle of National Health Service (NHS) pay strikes will continue for as long as it takes,” unions warned last week, as tens of thousands of nurses and ambulance workers downed tools in the biggest-ever health service walkout.**

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN), which began a 48-hour strike, said members at 73 health trusts across England withdrew their labour – a massive increase on the 44 that saw action in December’s first walkout.

Unite and GMB union paramedics, call handlers, and other staff at ambulance trusts also joined the massive industrial action, which NHS leaders said caused “huge disruption.”

Ahead of further strikes by physiotherapists and ambulance staff – including Unison members – union leaders urged Tory ministers to act on years of falling take-home wages, saying the situation is driving a worker exodus and endangering patient safety.

However, Downing Street repeated its stubborn refusal to reopen talks on 2022-23’s below-inflation 4.75 per cent salary deal, despite an improved offer from the Welsh Labour government late last week.

The latest employer proposal – an additional 3 per cent on top of this financial year’s deal, of which 1.5 per cent is a permanent increase – saw most health unions postpone planned walkouts, but Unite ambulance members were still out on strike.

Unite General secretary Sharon Graham stressed the action went ahead because it would be “disingenuous for us to put an offer to pause the strike in the full knowledge it was going to get rejected, but we’re tantalisingly close to a deal in Wales.”

She contrasted progress in talks with the devolved administration there to Westminster’s approach, where Tory ministers “just always sing ‘la la la la la’ and hope that the year goes by and we will forget what’s happened.”

There “isn’t going to be any other way to end this dispute” until Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Health Secretary Steve Barclay agree to talk pay for 2022-23 and not just for 2023-24, she said.

Saffron Cordery, deputy chief executive of NHS Providers, which represents health trusts, backed the call, telling Sky News that ministers must engage with unions on this year’s wages as health services face a “hugely disruptive week.”

Pickets at Norfolk 4-hour pay strike, 2014. Photo: Roger Blackwell – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

## BACK FROM THE BRINK

RCN head Pat Cullen hailed nurses for “trying to bring their NHS back from the brink.”

Speaking at a picket line outside St Mary’s Hospital in Paddington, west London, she added: “They will continue to do this for as long as it takes for this government to actually wake up and listen to their voice on behalf of patients.

“This government has chosen to punish nurses instead of getting around a table and talking to me about pay in the same way as they’ve done in Wales and Scotland.”

Walkouts north of the border have been avoided so far after Scottish National Party ministers upped their salary offer to 7.5 per cent before Christmas.

Labour accused the PM’s under-pressure administration of “sitting this one out” when it comes to negotiating with striking workers.

Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer, who has himself faced criticism for refusing to commit to inflation-matching wage rises for public-sector workers should Labour win the next general election, said the strikes were a “badge of shame for the government.”

He added: “I think many people will be absolutely flabbergasted that the government is still sitting this one out, not showing any leadership in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, making the situation much worse than it otherwise would be.”

## SOLIDARITY

Meanwhile, the National Education Union’s Robert Poole reports: Normally I spend my time documenting and recording other people’s pickets for the website I co-founded a couple of years ago, **www.strikemap.org**.

We list every strike and picket that we can and then encourage people to send messages of solidarity or make a trip to visit a picket.

But on Wednesday last week the tables were turned and I found myself standing outside the school in which I have worked for eight years setting up my own picket line in the dark and drizzly rain.

Not one person on the picket line wanted to be there – “We’d rather be teaching!” was oft repeated. This is not something we take lightly though, this is the reaction of a workforce at the end of its tether.

Battered and bruised by austerity, undervalued and overworked most feel as though we have no other option.

Although the official reason for the strike is pay, for most it is about so much more than that.

The strike is the symptom of a diseased education system. A system in which teachers regularly report working 55-hour weeks, a system where stress and overwork force a third of teachers to leave the profession in the first five years.

The government’s answer to this is to constantly throw more and more money at new teachers through “golden hellos,” but this is money wasted if we cannot convince these teachers to stay.

We have one of the worst-funded education systems of any high-income country in the world and all that is holding education together is the goodwill of teachers and support staff in our schools.

Last week we saw that this goodwill is coming to an end. What is often forgotten is that there is a direct link between teachers’ pay and conditions and pupils’ learning conditions.

I do not want my own children taught by stressed-out teachers who work two other jobs on the side just to make ends meet. We left the picket line just after nine and, after a hearty strikers’ brunch, we headed into Manchester for a rally.

We met at St Peter’s Square. A red plaque on the wall pointed out that this was the site of the Peterloo Massacre. This felt ominous but kind of fitting.

I am not, of course, comparing our protest to the brave men and women who died opposing a different Tory government but what it does show is a continuation of the struggle of the labour movement. We are still fighting the same battles today as they were fighting that day.

The rally in Manchester saw perhaps 5,000 striking workers take to the streets, a scene echoed up and down the land.

As the day went on more messages kept coming through, “2,000 in Liverpool!” “1,000 in Durham!” “Some say 40,000 in London, perhaps 100,000!” The rally was great fun, despite the wind turning our new banner into a sail and causing a slight panic as I thought I might take off.

## PICKET LINE AND SOLIDARITY

Rallies help the PR battle; they show the weight of support behind the strikers and they give confidence to the workers to continue the fight. The more important part, though, is the picket line.

On the picket line we can discuss with those thinking of crossing why they are crossing and try to win them to our side. We can then talk to them about why solidarity is important.

The picket line is a place where for once we are not bogged down in day-to-day work and can speak and get to know each other — but most importantly we can build a stronger union group.

A picket is a visible display of support for the strike in the local community too plus it’s our chance – for once – of giving our side of the story.

The last time I went on strike was 2012 in the strike over public-sector pensions. We won serious concessions then. It is depressing to think that if the government gets its way, this may be the last time I am legally allowed to strike.

The forced labour Bill that is rocketing through Parliament at the moment threatens to put minimum service levels onto schools.

This would mean that the brave teachers who stood with me on the picket line on Wednesday next time could be ordered into work despite voting democratically to withdraw their labour that day.

For most teachers who joined the picket it was their first time taking strike action.

For the rest of us it was our first time in over a decade. The questions should surely be, why has it taken this long?

We’ve seen a decade of falling wages; years of increased surveillance from Ofsted (Office of Standards In Education) and an increase in workload.

The union membership in my school has nearly doubled in the past couple of years, with a massive surge in the last couple of weeks, and everyone is up for a fight.

This isn’t a battle we will win in one day. It may not even be a battle we win in the seven planned days of strikes. We must now keep up the momentum – we have had 40,000 new members join our union and these new members are all fighters.

They joined because they wanted to take industrial action and they perhaps felt they had been denied this. We must mobilise these members now and get them active in the union.

The strike action is not just about pay. It is about dignity. That is why it was so heartening to see hundreds of thousands of people take to the streets finally realising that for once they had power and agency.

I am proud of what the members of my union beat the anti-trade union thresholds and we have finally found our collective voice.

The chant on the marches up and down the country was “Save our schools!” which shows that what is at stake here is more than just wages – it is the very future of education itself.

*Morning Star*

## USA

# "Not so fast"

Mark Gruenberg

**Amid a headlong political rush to proclaim the coronavirus pandemic virtually over by both Democratic President Joe Biden and especially the House's ruling Republicans, the peak union body AFL-CIO is saying, in so many words, "not so fast."**

And so is the data on illnesses and deaths. It shows that cumulatively at least 1.107 million people have died in the US in the three years since the pandemic was officially declared in early 2020.

That's equal to killing off San Jose, the US's tenth-largest city (1.036 million people) plus 81,000 in its suburbs. And the total may be low since state reporting all COVID-19 (coronavirus) deaths is now optional.

Nevertheless, the Republicans plan votes on three pieces of legislation to end the pandemic's restrictions, including one ending the national emergency announced in 2020. Biden himself is planning to end it as of 11th May.

"The AFL-CIO urges Congress to oppose the Pandemic Is Over Act (HR 382), legislation to end the COVID-19 national emergency (House Joint. Resolution 7) and the Show Up Act (HR 139). These bills will severely disrupt the administration's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic," it said in a series of tweets.

The Show Up Act also concerns federal worker unions – a favourite punching bag for Republicans. It mandates workers return to their offices, rather than work from home, within 30 days, the federation pointed out. Current teleworking both mimics the situation in the private sector and is a mandatory health care bargaining subject in negotiations, the federation noted. Passage of the Republican-backed bill would be another serious attack on collective bargaining rights, the federation notes.

A bigger concern is the continuing death toll and the end of anti-COVID care. It also, though the AFL-CIO didn't explicitly say so, ends an emergency-imposed ban on private insurers refusing to cover people with COVID-19. The nation can afford to continue both, public health scholars told the Public Broadcasting System on 13th January.

"These bills will also eliminate important access to COVID-19 testing and treatment and cause millions to abruptly lose Medicaid coverage and free testing. Our nation can simultaneously provide resources to keep Americans healthy while moving our economy to full capacity," it explained.

### STILL CLAIMING LIVES

The federation isn't the only group concerned with the abrupt ending of anti-coronavirus measures. National Nurses United (NNU), which now represents more than 240,000 RNs nationwide, is particularly worried about the lasting impact of "Long COVID" – the damage that will linger among people for months and years.

NNU's even offering a continuing education course to members on treating Long COVID, including scientific updates on the course of the disease and its implications for patients, nurses, and quality of care. Many hospitals still report buckling under the load of COVID patients.

"The COVID-19 pandemic continues to spread unabated around the world due to a near complete abandonment of public health measures and dissembling about the ongoing pandemic," the union warns.

"Repeated surges in COVID infections, hospitalisations, and deaths put nurses and other health care workers at heightened and perpetual risk for infection and moral injury. As more individuals are continually exposed to and infected by [the coronavirus] reports of long-term health consequences have also increased" from Long COVID.

Though Biden announced he would end the COVID health emergency on 11th May, his Office of Management and Budget (OMB) opposes the Republican legislation. It calls the measures "a grave disservice to the American people."

"An abrupt end to the emergency declarations would create wide-ranging chaos and uncertainty throughout the health care system – for states, for hospitals and doctors' offices, and, most importantly, for tens of millions of Americans," OMB explained.

That's why, as part of the laws the last Congress enacted, it mandated at least 60 days advance notice of the emergency's end. Otherwise, state budgets, which partially pay for Medicaid to treat COVID-19 victims "would face a radical cliff" as the extra money for that is cut off – and the patients are, too.

"If the public health emergency were suddenly terminated, it would sow confusion and chaos into this critical wind-down. Due to this uncertainty, tens of millions of Americans could be at risk of abruptly losing their health insurance, and states could be at risk of losing billions of dollars in funding.

"Additionally, hospitals and nursing homes that have relied on flexibilities enabled by the emergency declarations will be plunged into chaos without adequate time to retrain staff and establish new billing processes, likely leading to disruptions in care and payment delays."

*People's World* ✪

In America, "How Could This Happen" is a project by artist Suzanne Brennan Firstenberg on the Armory Parade Grounds. There is a flag planted for each death, with more flags added each day as the death toll increases. Photo: Victoria Pickering – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

## Global Briefs

THE PHILIPPINES: The US and the Philippines announced plans for four more US bases to be established in the Philippines. The agreement was reached during the visit of US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin to Manila. The two countries are to "accelerate the full implementation" of the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) which regulates the deployment of US troops to the Philippines. "The United States has allocated over $82 million towards infrastructure investments at the existing five sites under the ETCA, and is proud that these investments are supporting economic growth and job creation in local Philippine communities," the Pentagon said in a statement. "Job creation" may sound very noble but the fact of the matter is that the US is pursuing its strategy of encircling and containing China and has a goal of increasing its military presence in the Asia-Pacific. The Philippines has a critical geo-strategic position on the South China Sea to the south of Taiwan. If there is a conflict between China and the USA, the Philippines will be caught in it.

IRAN: Iran blames Israel for a drone attack that targeted a military workshop in the city of Isfahan. "Early investigations suggest that the Israeli regime was responsible for the attempted act of aggression," said the letter published by Iran's mission to the UN on its website. Israel was responsible for a number of attacks targeting not only Iran's nuclear programs but nuclear scientists as well. Israeli officials declined to comment on the issue. However, in a letter to UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres and the Security Council, the UN Iranian ambassador warned that "The Islamic Republic of Iran reserves its legitimate and inherent right ... to defend its national security and respond resolutely to any threats or wrongful actions by the Israeli regime, wherever and whenever deemed necessary."

CUBA: The First International Meeting of Theoretical Publications of Parties and Movements of the Left will be held in Havana from 10th to 12th February. The event will address issues around imperialism, socialism, youth, solidarity and unity on the Left, and the legacy of Fidel Castro, the historic leader of the Cuban Revolution. The meeting will discuss the problems, and challenges faced by the revolutionary and progressive forces in the current world context of the right-wing offensive.

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# Albanese's PNG visit falls flat

Roland Boer

**In the second week of January of this year, Prime Minister Albanese made a delayed visit to Papua New Guinea (PNG). Albanese addressed the PNG parliament, albeit not without controversy as some PNG politicians felt it was inappropriate for a foreign leader to do so.**

There were one-on-one meetings, consultations, visits to a region or two, and promised further interactions.

Although there was a lot of rhetoric about "friendship," observers in PNG have assessed that Albanese failed to deliver. Listening to the bilateral press conference after the meetings, one quickly gains the sense that Albanese and PNG Prime Minister Marape were speaking at cross-purposes. Albanese tried to emphasise a "security" agreement, which was supposed to have been signed at this meeting. Nothing was signed and it has been pushed down the road and is subject to more negotiation.

By contrast, Marape stressed that an economically independent Papua New Guinea would be better, stronger, and safer for all.

Has Australia assisted PNG's economic development? No. Reading through the newspaper articles, there is a long list of grievances on this score. For example, they speak of "boomerang" aid, the ban on export to Australia of PNG tropical fruits and vegetables, immense delays for ordinary visas to Australia, since – astonishingly – there is no visa processing centre in PNG (the closest one is in Fiji).

Did Albanese promise anything? Listening to the press conference, all I could identify was an empty call for Australian businesses to invest, along with an increase in modern-day "blackbirding" in which young and able people would get work visas to come to Australia to work in agriculture, construction, road works, and so on. As for fruit and vegetables, he merely mentioned the need to increase "bio-security" checks. And a football team in the NRL ...

It is no wonder the PNG commentators are singularly unimpressed. One speaks of the need for an "economic base," which will lead to urbanisation and industrialisation. Another writes of the need for developing "downstream processing" of PNG's rich resources. Yet another stresses the need to be free from the "bonds of poverty." "How can Australia," the author continues, "expect us to concern ourselves over regional security when our most immediate need is to fix our economy, feed ourselves and live quiet secure lives?" As for Albanese, all he offered was the "Old Father Christmas tune."

The reader may wonder where China fits into all of this. At the press conference, Marape was asked this question. His response: this issue was "not before us." There was no need to bring "China or any other nation into the picture," since the relation with Australia is "particularly unique" – note the careful choice of words here. Instead, "The PNG-China relationship remains the PNG-China relationship."

What has the PNG-China relation already delivered? Extensive economic collaboration so as to establish an economic base, downstream processing, and economic development so as to provide real benefits to the people of PNG.

As for the hapless Albanese, a newspaper headline sums it up: "Nothing delivered at Albanese - Marape meet." ✪

Photo: Asian Development Bank – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

# Solidarity with the Peruvian people

Vinnie Molina

**Communist and workers' parties around the world have expressed their condemnation at the removal of Peruvian president Pedro Castillo in a right-wing coup d'état last December.**

Since then, more than 60 people have been killed by the de facto government's repressive forces. President Dina Boluarte has blood on her hands by refusing to step down and not calling for new elections.

The people have taken to the streets to demand the release of President Castillo, currently in prison. They have also called for de facto president Dina Boluarte to resign and for new elections and a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution that guarantees the rights of the Peruvian people.

President Castillo won the presidential elections just short of two years ago. His policy program aimed at creating jobs, independence, and for no Peruvian to be poor in a rich country. It attracted a lot of popular support.

Unfortunately, the local oligarchy and the US government and multinational corporations did not allow him to govern. Castillo faced several obstacles by the majority controlled right-wing Parliament. Threats of impeachment, sabotage of his government initiatives and opposition to several of Castillo's ministers forced them to resign or be replaced.

The experiences in Peru have been present in many Latin American countries in which left and progressive forces have been able to win office and form government. Right-wing forces and the bourgeoisie, who control the economic power will not allow progressive governments to have an easy run.

Any reform that would benefit the people is fought by any means in defence of the economic interests of the powerful. The interests of the multinational corporations, those in the mining and resource sectors represent a big danger to popular democracy.

The historically privileged do not care if workers and their families are able to satisfy their basic needs to reproduce their labour.

The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) stands in solidarity with the workers and people in Peru who are currently sacrificing their lives in defence of democracy and their right to self-determination.

The CPA calls for a halt to the repression that is killing the people. The CPA supports the demands for the release of President Pedro Castillo, the resignation of de facto president Dina Boluarte and her government as well as the call for immediate elections and a Constituent Assembly to draft a new Constitution that would guarantee the rights of the people. ✪

# Transforming education

**The Transforming Education Summit, convened by the United Nations last September in response to a global crisis in education, has initiated a new international body to consider the future of teachers and teaching.**

The UN is working with UNESCO and the International Labour Organisation to decide how best to establish the Global Commission on the Teaching Profession.

Teachers feel deeply disrespected and overwhelmed because they are seen as tools rather than partners, says David Edwards, general secretary of Education International (EI), which represents more than 32-million teachers and education support personnel worldwide.

"A Global Commission on the Teaching Profession could illuminate solutions, many of which come from our profession itself, and match those with the political will and commitment required to meet this moment," says Edwards.

"The commission is an opportunity to systematically bring together all the disparate strands of research and actions and weave them into a reinvigorated and clear social contract."

Edwards says the new initiative is a step in the right direction to ensure "that every learner has access to a professional, trained, and well supported teacher and that every teacher has access to the tools, time, and trust necessary to reach, teach, and inspire the generations and communities they have been entrusted to serve."

EI president Susan Hopgood told the summit that to transform education governments must include teachers and their unions as partners in the process.

"We share the same goal, ensuring that every single learner enjoys everything promised under SDG 4 (Sustainable Development Goal)," she said. SDG 4 requires countries to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

"Our partnership can enable truly resistant quality education systems. Our partnership can be the transformation," she says.

## CONVICTION, IMAGINATION, SOLIDARITY

UN secretary-general António Guterres called on the international community to give the education crisis the attention it deserves.

"We must respond decisively with conviction, imagination and in solidarity to transform education," he said in a vision statement following the summit.

"Education is the great enabler, but today, in many cases, it is also the great divider. Studies show that up to 70 per cent of children in poorer countries are unable to read a basic text by age 10. In a world that is experiencing a fourth industrial revolution, nearly half of all students do not complete secondary school and 700 million adults are illiterate, the majority of whom are women," Guterres says.

The impacts are greatest on those who are already marginalised or disadvantaged, particularly adolescent girls and people with disabilities. But the crisis runs deeper with "study after study, poll after poll" concluding that education systems are no longer fit for purpose, he says.

Guterres promises that change is possible. "There can be no going back to the education models of the past," he says. We must reimagine education systems and raise the status of education. We must ensure that learning empowers individuals and societies to both reshape the present and lead us to a more just, sustainable, resilient, and peaceful future."

He says "truly transformative" education should build on what communities, families, parents, and children treasure most, and respond to local, national, and global needs, cultures, and capacities.

"It should promote the holistic development of all learners throughout their lives, supporting them to realise their aspirations, and to contribute their families, communities, and societies," he says.

Guterres says education transformation needs the commitment and action of "visionary" political leaders, parents, students, teachers and the public.

## WARNING ON DIGITAL REFORMS

The summit generated commitments by 133 countries, including Australia, to prioritise education. Hopgood says most countries included plans for digital learning and public-private partnerships with technology providers, an area that requires careful consideration and strong governance.

"Involving teachers in the governance of education technology is imperative to ensure that these new tools truly benefit all students.

"Technology does not equal innovation. The source of effective innovation in education is the teaching profession itself. This was demonstrated during the pandemic," Susan Hopgood said.

"We will never truly transform education if education financing is steered towards edtech companies in the misguided hope that new technologies will provide a 'magic solution' to quality education, rather than invested in teachers, to fulfil every child's right to be taught by a trained and qualified teacher." ✪

# The Banshees of Inisherin

Jenny Farrell

**International film awards are by no means a good film guide. And this applies to *The Banshees of Inisherin* as much as to the rest of them.**

The story is set in 1923 on an island off the west coast of Ireland ("Inisherin" – *Inis Éireann*), filmed in fact on Achill island and Inis Mór in Galway Bay. This setting during the Civil War is made clear early on: throughout the film occasional bombs go off on the mainland, and the local policeman is chuffed to have been asked to participate in some executions – he knows not for which side, nor does he care.

In fact no-one on the island seems to be in the slightest bit interested in the war; amazingly, it is not a topic of conversation, nobody is touched by it, no-one is involved; there are no discussions about the Treaty terms, which had such a momentous impact on post-independence Irish history. And all this on "Ireland Island."

One can only wonder why. Did Martin McDonagh not wish to offend any side? Might any partisanship have affected awards, and gross profits? Might the film even have caused controversy in Ireland itself? We will never know, because it manages to steer clear of any possible offence caused by reflecting actual sensibilities during this time.

Anybody who wishes to know what these sensibilities were needs to read Liam O'Flaherty, not watch Martin McDonagh. O'Flaherty, native of Inis Mór, not only wrote about the Civil War on the mainland (*The Sniper and The Martyr*) but also refers to the way it affected people in terms of their class on the Aran Islands. And O'Flaherty took part in the battle of Dublin himself (on the Republican side).

Amusingly, the cottage in which Pádraic Súilleabháin (Colin Farrell) lives with his sister Siobhán (the absence of Ó and Ní in their surname troubles an Irish-speaker) is set in Gort na gCapall, O'Flaherty's home place.

But McDonagh clearly does not wish to go there. His reluctance to engage with this very obvious Irish issue is reflected too in the musical score. McDonagh's instruction to Carter Burwell for the score was not to use Irish music, as McDonagh "hated that 'deedle-dee' music." So instead, bewilderingly, and jarringly out of place, the atmosphere is underscored musically by a mix of Brahms's "Lieder," a Bulgarian piece at the start of the film, and Indonesian gamelan music.

As Colm Doherty (Brendan Gleeson), one of the two main characters, is a fiddler, and this is central to the plot, there is also some Irish music. This features as part of the story – not the musical score which supports the atmosphere and emotional reinforcement of the film. Apparently the thinking was that these musical pieces from around the world and different cultures would increase the appeal to an international audience.

The opposite is in fact the case. The more specific a story is, the greater its universal appeal. A story that tries to please everybody simply rings hollow; and although Brahms's German Lieder are hauntingly beautiful, they don't fit the atmosphere on Inisherin. An a *capella* sean-nós solo voice would simply have been more fitting.

In addition, and in parallel to this, there is the unhappy absence of any kind of Irish-language speech, song, signage – indeed anything in the native language. Again, this is profoundly out of joint with the time, and the place, shown on screen.

What is the film about? A falling out between two islandmen, because of one of them panicking about ageing and therefore ostracising the other. The older man has decided overnight he wants to immortalise something of himself – in traditional music.

For this proposition to work McDonagh makes the younger man out to be somewhat infantile. Burwell sees him as a Disney character (!) and gives him a matching musical theme. Doherty is simply suddenly bored with Pádraic Súilleabháin. (Is there any significance in the fact that the "simpleton" has an Irish name, while Doherty uses the English spelling?) Even Pádraic's sister, Siobhán Súilleabháin – the strongest character outside of the two protagonists – finds island life tedious.

Few people in the film do any actual work. The height of it is walking some cattle down the bohereen, or caressing the pet donkey or dog. There is no field work or other rural labour to be seen. People just somehow get along without it – going to the pub in the middle of the day – and yet they have the money to do so and clearly have enough to eat, dress, and furnish their houses.

O'Flaherty's short stories about island life, in contrast, are defined by people working. He does this easily and naturally, as he grew up in this community – which McDonagh did not. Where "despair" appears as a theme in O'Flaherty, as it does in the expressionist novel The *Black Soul*, or his play *Darkness*, this is rooted in recent events, namely in the experience of the First World War – another recent (at that time) event with which the islanders on McDonagh's island have no connection.

And so the film ends up feeding old stereotypes about Ireland. This ignorance of people's daily working lives affects the film badly and is the reason why McDonagh can suggest that their lives (not to mention their music) is dull.

Set at a momentous time in Irish history, the film could have had a great deal to say to people in similar situations, then and now; McDonagh instead chooses to ignore this history and working lives and instead, possibly for box-office returns, feeds modern sensibilities about ageing – and does not even do this credibly.

*Socialist Voice* ✪

## Restraint (rɪˈstrnt)

Our first word comes from the very weasely team at the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, who would like the government to show 'expenditure restraint'. They were pretty quiet on this very necessary thing when the previous government was showing no restraint on showering some businesses with COVID payments they didn't need, and somehow even quieter still on the plans to spend $170 billion in real money on eventually getting nuclear-powered submarines, so maybe, like someone dipping their toe in the world of S&M [sadism and masochism], the ACCI only likes a *little* restraint.

## Objective (əbˈjehɛktɪv) – "It's our/my"

Promising things is fun, keeping the promises often not so much. This is a problem for people who like the praise and admiration for making promises, but don't enjoy having strips torn off them when everyone else works out that they never wanted to actually do the hard yards of making the promises happen. One way around this is to have an "objective" instead of a promise. The objective need never actually happen, but you can say that you're working towards it, and maybe even get some praise for trying to do this difficult thing – like Stephen Jones, our Assistant Treasurer. While being told off by high profile former asylum seeker Behrouz Boochani for not honouring a promise to get refugees off the excruciating limbo that is the Temporary Protection Visa, Jones used the word "objective" a lot, then blamed staff shortages. Look up the interview, it's a masterclass in squirming.

## Grassroots (grˈsrts)

Grassroots movements are terrific. What's not to like about ordinary people getting together and organising themselves in order to achieve a worthwhile change? Grassroots movements are also good because if a collective/movement is *not* grassroots, it's top-down (boo!) or hierarchical (double boo!). The only catch is this; setting up a genuine grassroots movement takes time and hard work, as well as a lot of consulting with actual people. What a drag! The easy, if weasley way around this is to just decide you want to do something, then tell everyone you're doing it because of a grassroots movement. Like the "millions of voters" Peter Dutton keeps telling us he's working for, the grassroots don't have to actually exist.

## Conversations (ˌknvərˈsʃənz) – "to be having"

Actual conversations are usually fun, over a beer, a meal, a coffee or in a spare moment at work. We've already mentioned "having the conversation," the weasly way of raising a topic without defending any of its noxious aspects (very popular with reference to nuclear power). It's also a good way of stalling and/or passing the buck. Queensland's State Health Minister is having conversations with the Minister for Housing to try to address a housing crisis that means some rural full-time health workers have to be effectively homeless if they want to be close to the hospital they work for. We hope housing in Queensland (and all of Australia) improves soon, but our instinctive response to "having conversations" is "get a move on and do something."

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# Africa resists Cold War push

## Western attempts to subordinate Africa to their geopolitical agenda threaten unity and sovereignty on the continent

Vijay Prashad

**On 17th October, the head of US Africa Command (AFRICOM), US Marine Corps General Michael Langley, visited Morocco. Langley met with senior Moroccan military leaders, including Inspector General of the Moroccan Armed Forces Belkhir El Farouk. Since 2004, AFRICOM has held its "largest and premier annual exercise," African Lion, partly on Moroccan soil. This past June, 10 countries participated in African Lion 2022, with observers from Israel (for the first time) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).**

Langley's visit is part of a broader US push onto the African continent, which we at Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research documented in "Defending Our Sovereignty: US Military Bases in Africa and the Future of African Unity," a joint publication with The Socialist Movement of Ghana's Research Group.

In that text, we wrote that the two important principles of Pan-Africanism are political unity and territorial sovereignty, and argued that "[t]he enduring presence of foreign military bases not only symbolises the lack of unity and sovereignty; it also equally enforces the fragmentation and subordination of the continent's peoples and governments."

In August, US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield travelled to Ghana, Uganda and Cape Verde. "We're not asking Africans to make any choices between the United States and Russia," she said ahead of her visit, but, she added, "for me, that choice would be simple". That choice is nonetheless being impelled by the US Congress as it deliberates the Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act, a bill that would sanction African states if they do business with Russia (and could possibly extend to China in the future).

### UNFOLDING SITUATION

To understand this unfolding situation, a briefing prepared by the No Cold War movement, "NATO Claims Africa as Its 'Southern Neighbourhood,'" looks at how NATO has begun to develop a proprietary view of Africa and how the US government considers Africa to be a frontline in its Global Monroe Doctrine.

In August 2022, the United States published a new foreign policy strategy aimed at Africa. The 17-page document featured 10 mentions of China and Russia combined, including a pledge to "counter harmful activities by the [People's Republic of China], Russia, and other foreign actors" on the continent, but did not once mention the term "sovereignty."

Although US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has stated that Washington "will not dictate Africa's choices," African governments have reported facing "patronising bullying" from NATO member states to take their side in the war in Ukraine. As global tensions rise, the US and its allies have signalled that they view the continent as a battleground to wage their New Cold War against China and Russia.

At its annual summit last June, NATO named Africa along with the Middle East "NATO's southern neighbourhood." On top of this, NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ominously referred to "Russia and China's increasing influence in our southern neighbourhood" as a "challenge."

The following month, the outgoing commander of AFRICOM, General Stephen J Townsend, referred to Africa as "NATO's southern flank." These comments are disturbingly reminiscent of the neo-colonial attitude espoused by the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, in which the US claimed Latin America as its "backyard".

This paternalistic view of Africa appears to be widely held in Washington. In April last year, the US House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed the Countering Malign Russian Activities in Africa Act by a vote of 415-9. The bill, which aims to punish African governments for not aligning with US foreign policy on Russia, has been widely condemned across the continent for disrespecting the sovereignty of African nations, with South African Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor calling it "absolutely disgraceful."

The efforts by the US and Western countries to draw Africa into their geopolitical conflicts raise serious concerns: namely, will the US and NATO weaponise their vast military presence on the continent to achieve their aims?

### AFRICOM

In 2007, the United States established AFRICOM "in response to our expanding partnerships and interests in Africa." In just 15 years, AFRICOM has established at least 29 military bases on the continent as part of an extensive network which includes more than 60 outposts and access points in at least 34 countries – over 60 per cent of the nations on the continent.

Despite Washington's rhetoric of promoting democracy and human rights in Africa, in reality, AFRICOM aims to secure US hegemony over the continent. AFRICOM's stated objectives include "protecting US interests" and "maintaining superiority over competitors" in Africa. In fact, the creation of AFRICOM was motivated by the concerns of "those alarmed by China's expanding presence and influence in the region."

From the outset, NATO was involved in the endeavour, with the original proposal put forward by then Supreme Allied Commander of NATO James L Jones, Jr. On an annual basis, AFRICOM conducts training exercises focused on enhancing the "interoperability" between African militaries and "US and NATO special operations forces."

The destructive nature of the US and NATO's military presence in Africa was exemplified in 2011 when – ignoring the African Union's opposition – the US and NATO launched their catastrophic military intervention in Libya to remove the government of Muammar Gaddafi. This regime change war destroyed the country, which had previously scored the highest among African nations on the UN Human Development Index.

Over a decade later, the principal achievements of the intervention in Libya have been the return of slave markets to the country, the entry of thousands of foreign fighters, and unending violence.

Gen Michael E Langley, Commander, United States Africa Command.
Photo: US Africa Command – Public Domain.

In the future, will the US and NATO invoke the "malign influence" of China and Russia as a justification for military interventions and regime change in Africa?

### AFRICA REJECTS A NEW COLD WAR

At this year's UN General Assembly, the African Union firmly rejected the coercive efforts of the US and Western countries to use the continent as a pawn in their geopolitical agenda. "Africa has suffered enough of the burden of history," stated Chairman of the African Union and President of Senegal Macky Sall; "it does not want to be the breeding ground of a new Cold War, but rather a pole of stability and opportunity open to all its partners, on a mutually beneficial basis." Indeed, the drive for war offers nothing to the peoples of Africa in their pursuit of peace, climate change adaptation and development.

At the inauguration of the European Diplomatic Academy last October, the European Union's chief diplomat, Josep Borrell, said, "Europe is a garden ... The rest of the world ... is a jungle, and the jungle could invade the garden." As if the metaphor were not clear enough, he added, "Europeans have to be much more engaged with the rest of the world. Otherwise, the rest of the world will invade us."

Borrell's racist comments were pilloried on social media and eviscerated in the European Parliament by Marc Botenga of the Belgian Workers' Party, and a petition by the Democracy in Europe Movement (DiEM25) calling for Borrell's resignation has received over 10,000 signatures.

Borrell's lack of historical knowledge is significant: it is Europe and North America that continue to invade the African continent, and it is those military and economic invasions that cause African people to migrate. As President Sall said, Africa does not want to be a "breeding ground of a new Cold War," but a sovereign place of dignity.

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*Third World Resurgence*

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