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INTEREST RATE TIME BOMB

Anna Pha

Two thirds of households face a hit as rising interest rates push up mortgage payments and drive up their rent. At the same time household budgets are also being squeezed by increases in the cost of fresh fruit and vegetables, healthcare, education, childcare, and energy.

Since May last year the Reserve Bank of Australia' (RBA's) interest rates have risen from 0.1 per cent to 3.25 per cent. In other words, they have not doubled or tripled but risen by 32.5 times! In the first years of mortgage repayments interest forms a far higher component. Household debt in Australia is the highest in the world at 200 per cent of income. The worst of the pain is still to be felt.

Home loan and rental arrears are set to rise. Charities are already stretched with hundreds of thousands of people unable to pay the energy bills or put food on the table.

The record low interest rates saw many more people enter the housing market in the belief they could afford a loan. As there is a shortage of housing stock, this drove up the cost of housing. Hundreds of thousands of households, farmers, and small businesses have become dependent on low interest rates in the belief that they would not rise for a few years.

If that were not bad enough, last year real wages fell by 4.5 per cent – the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 7.8 per cent and nominal wages only rose 3.3 per cent This comes after decades of stagnating or even falling real wages, especially in the public sector.

The RBA would appear to have lost the plot, as it plans even more rate hikes. But from the perspective of the big business interests it represents, it has not. The initial outcome of its previous rate rises can be seen in the booming profits in the big end of town.

PROFIT GOUGING

Workers, pensioners, the unemployed and others on low or middle incomes are being squeezed from all directions.

Soaring corporate profits are playing a major role in driving inflation. Monopoly pricing by the largest corporations is rife as they hide behind the smokescreen of inflation to raise prices far beyond what is necessary to pass on their higher costs, let alone absorbing those costs.

Last year Coles' net profit increased by 17.1 per cent and Woolworths' rose by 14 per cent. These are huge increases for the retail sector which is labour intensive.

The banks made a killing as they passed on the full amount of the RBA's interest rates rises in full on loans but failed to do so on deposits. The big four banks are forecast to make a combined record $33 billion profit this financial year.

There is more pain to come with 880,000 fixed rate loans set to switch to far higher variable rates this year. A mortgage of say $600,000 to $750,000 could see an annual increase in repayments of $12,500 to $15,000 or more.

RBA'S ROLE

Capitalism is full of contradictions. Capitalism only knows one "cure" for inflation, a cancer threatening the economic stability, and that is raising interest rates. But higher interest rates are destructive in themselves.

Essentially, the RBA is driving the economy into recession as it slashes the purchasing power of workers and others on low and middle incomes and thus causing a contraction in the economy. Its conduct is reminiscent of former Labor Treasurer Paul Keating's "recession we had to have."

Workers and smaller businesses take the biggest hit while large monopoly corporations can mostly stand the heat.

Inflation, as it undermines the purchasing power of wages has seen a rise in trade union militancy and industrial action. There is nothing that employers fear more than being forced to grant real wage rises and better working conditions which would eat into profits. Capital requires a large pool of unemployed – surplus labour – so that it can suppress struggle and workers' demands by pitting them against the unemployed.

Capitalist economists define "full employment" as a certain level of unemployment which they see as creating an adequate pool of reserve labour. The aim is to "cool" the economy, reduce real wages even further, suppress struggle, and increase the number of unemployed.

The claim by RBA Governor Philip Lowe that the bank is attempting to prevent a wage-price spiral is a long-promoted myth, an excuse to suppress wages. (See page 2 for real causes of inflation.)

CROCODILE TEARS

RBA Governor Philip Lowe Opening in addressing the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics on 17th February sat smiling as he said: "I don't recall any business ever saying they'd increased their prices to generate fat in their margins." Of course, they don't say it publicly!

Photo: Stephen Mitchell – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

"I get a lot of people writing to me at the moment telling me about their personal circumstances and it's really, really tough," Lowe said. "I understand that. And you know, I read those letters and hear those stories with a very heavy heart. I find it personally ... it's disturbing. People are really, really hurting and I understand that. But I also understand that if we don't get on top of inflation it means even higher interest rates and more unemployment."

"It's easier for me to do unpopular things than it is for maybe some of you,"a smiling Lowe said when addressing a Senate Committee.

The likely outcome of these and future interest rate hikes is a recession with all that that brings for the working class, with no guarantee of inflation being curbed in the near future. The is driving the economy into recession to make workers pay for an eventual reduction in interest rates.

GOVT MUST ACT

The RBA is not addressing the causes of inflation. Nor is the Labor government as it stands on the sidelines making a few token gestures to ease the pain.

Apart from sacking the RBA board of mostly big business representatives, state and federal governments have many levers at its disposal to actually tackle the causes. These include:

- Rental controls;
- Construction of hundreds of thousands of public houses;
- Nationalisation of energy;
- Price controls;
- Free early childhood education and care;
- A super-profits tax;
- Raising social security payments above the poverty line;
- Cancel the nuclear submarines and slash military spending;
- Redirect fossil fuel subsidies to renewable energy;
- Assist low-income households with renewable energy;
- Merchant shipping fleet to ensure trade in goods.

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The Communist Manifesto turns 175

In Sydney, comrades are getting ready to demonstrate at Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's office against the government's plan to spend an insane amount on preparations for war. In Perth communists are attending "Bridges of Love," a monthly event to highlight the unjust US blockade of Cuba. In Melbourne last weekend CPA members turned out in a group to demonstrate against a gym in Sunshine which is being used as an organising centre for neo-Nazis. Soon, comrades in many cities will mark International Women's Day. What's the connection between all these activities and a book published 175 years ago? February 22 marked the 175th anniversary of the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The comrades attending the various events are all part of a movement inspired and organised by the Communist Manifesto and other works of the minds behind it.

Marx and Engels didn't invent communism and socialism. A myriad of thinkers before them had been appalled by inequality and wondered if the world could be better organised. Marx and Engels' contribution was to put socialism on a scientific footing, looking objectively at history and economies to come up with an analysis of human society, and the forces that changed it over time. The *Manifesto* came at exactly the right time, a time when workers throughout Europe were beginning to sense that they were in a class with shared interests. Marx and Engels explained in concrete terms exactly how classes had related. But it was far more than just a coherent explanation. The *Manifesto* was written for a purpose, the purpose being to guide revolutionaries. In photographs, Marx and Engels always look relaxed and dignified. Their lives were anything but. They strove from early on to promote revolution, and to produce theoretical work which would help inspire the revolutionary movement, and guide that revolutionary movement to be more than just anger and energy. As Harold Laski said, Marx and Engels "laid the foundations of a world movement which had a well-integrated philosophy of history, and a clear method of action for the future directly born of that philosophy."

That energy, combined with the understanding of the situation that the *Communist Manifesto* fostered is what caused the Chinese Communist Party to create the largest increases in literacy and prosperity in human history. The "clear method of action" the Manifesto laid down led to the USSR taking a ruined feudalistic empire and creating a scientific superpower. It's also what leads our comrades in Perth to be attending the "Bridges of Love" event, in solidarity with working people in Cuba, and to communists all around the country being active members of their trade unions.

If you move in "progressive" circles, you will inevitably meet people who know that there is massive inequality, that military spending is excessive, that working people are exploited, but who think this can be fixed by just telling everyone how wrong it is. The *Communist Manifesto* explains how the inequality comes about and exactly what needs to be done. To quote our comrades in the Workers' Party of Ireland, the *Manifesto* exposes "the illusions of those who called themselves socialists but refused to confront the vicious reality of capitalism and of class power, and who served only to mislead workers and divert their struggles into dead-ends." It deals with arguments that are still being made in Australia on a weekly basis. If you're at all public about being a communist, you will meet people who ask: "What about freedom?" The *Manifesto* explains that "freedom" often means "free trade, free selling and buying" (for those who can do it). If you're feeling bewildered by the pace of change, the book that coined the phrase "all that is solid melts into air" has an explanation.

The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) follows the analysis and plan of action in the *Communist Manifesto* as developed by Lenin, and consequently "has no aims separate from those of the working class and all exploited people," to quote its Constitution.

Whatever your politics, if you haven't read the *Communist Manifesto*, do yourself a favour and read it. It's an eye-opener. It's also a guide to action, so read it, then consider joining the Communist Party of Australia!

"Wage-price spiral" myth

Anna Pha

Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) Governor Philip Lowe expressed concern that workers would get much higher pay rises in response to inflation, which he claims would fuel more price hikes. He was referring to the age-old capitalist claim that wage rises cause price rises or inflation.

But is this true?

Let's take a look at the current round of inflation. What caused it?

It is a huge stretch of the imagination to think that wages caused inflation. They have stagnated or even fallen over decades.

There are a number of contributing factors:

Energy prices rose dramatically when the EU and US imposed sanctions on Russia. The sanctions and conflict also impacted the cost of grains, fertilisers, other raw materials, and logistics. The law of supply and demand kicked in, with global corporations taking advantage of shortages to hike up prices and hence profits. The US then sold gas and oil to the EU at highly inflated prices. Australians were also hit by higher energy prices, and other costs of production.

For example, exporters of Australian coal and gas have reaped an estimated additional $85 billion in 2021-22. Australians get little if any benefit in tax revenue as these corporations ship their profits offshore. Whitehaven's thermal coal used to generate electricity was selling at $202 a tonne in the first half of 2022. That rose to $552 a tonne.

The outcome can be seen in rocketing profits of energy companies. For example, the reported post-tax profits of Santos, a major exporter of gas and oil, $3 billion in 2022 – up 221 per cent on the previous year. This was at the expense of households and businesses, especially smaller businesses that are not in a position to raise prices.

Higher energy prices and global shortages of containers pushed up the cost of trade, production, and transportation.

Food prices were impacted by floods as crops were destroyed and transportation disrupted.

The RBA's successive interest rate increases increased the cost of housing. (See page 1)

Another contributing factor to inflation is the massive increase in military expenditure on war preparations. The military industrial complex makes super profits while syphoning off and pushing up the price of materials used in the production of other goods and services.

Wage rises are NOT driving inflation. Real wages fell by 4.5 per cent last year.

Profit-gouging is driving it up.

Inflation involves a massive transfer of wealth from workers, pensioners, and others on fixed incomes to monopoly corporations. It reduces the purchasing power of wages – wage reductions by stealth.

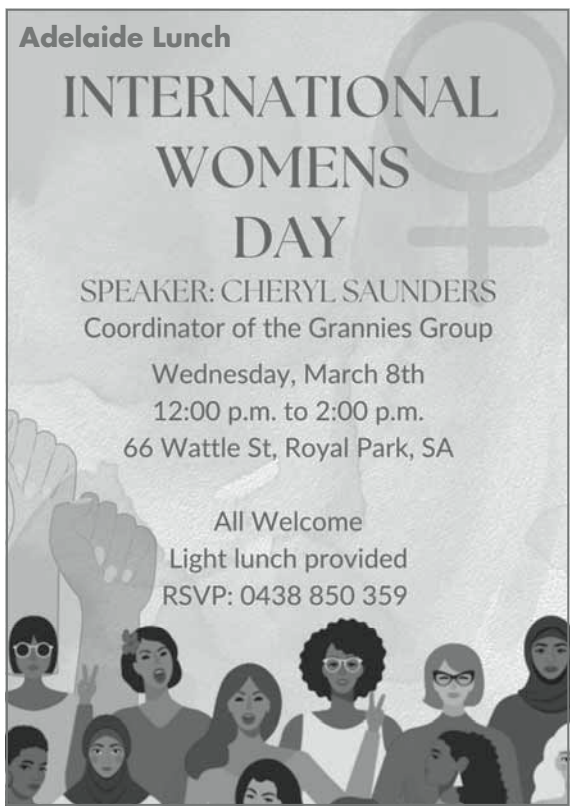
Real wage rises now!

Fight back now!

Join your union!

Join the Communist Party of Australia! ✪

Mary Lioupas a long time Party member and one of the hardest working comrades for the party passed away in hospital after a long illness on 27th February surrounded by her family who were by her side in her last moments



International Women's Day

All over the world women are not safe. Women are not equal. Women are not respected. This year, we're saying enough is enough! Join us ...

Melbourne
Wednesday 8th March
5:30pm to 7:30pm rally Old Treasury Building

Sydney
Saturday 11th March
11am Town Hall rally "Raising Up for Equality"

Adelaide
Wednesday 8th March
5.00 to 5.30 pm march – start Tarndanyangga/Victoria Square

Perth
Wednesday 8th March
5.30pm Forrest Chase

Where is super heading?

Anna Pha

When the Albanese government released a superannuation consultation paper last month, it brought the usual suspects out of the woodwork. The hysteria was a reminder of the Coalition's scare campaign, fuelled by the Murdoch media, when Labor in 2019 proposed progressive reforms to negative gearing and franking of dividends.

Labor is proposing to enshrine a core goal of superannuation in law. The consultation paper raises a number of possible goals and principles for discussion.

When Labor introduced the compulsory Superannuation Guarantee (SG) payment of three per cent in 1992 existing funds (mostly public sector and well-paid professionals in large corporations) $148 billion was held in existing accounts. Some trade unions had already won superannuation in awards.

The government's aims were three-fold:

To wind down the public, centrally funded age pension as part of the general drive to "small government" and hence avoid the "burden" of providing pensions for an ageing population. This would free up government income to fund income taxes, in particular for the wealthy and corporations.

To privatise retirement income, and so divest the government of previously accepted social responsibilities in line with its neoliberal economic policies. Financial institutions are waxing fat on income from administration fees imposed on superannuation investments. In Parliament, then Treasurer John Dawkins described the policy as increasing "self-provision for retirement."

To create an ever-increasing massive pool of savings to be employed as a major source of investment capital available to the private sector.

That pool has grown to $3.3 trillion today, larger than Australia's Gross Domestic Product.

Photo: Evita Fechner – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0).

TAX CONCESSIONS

At present there is a tax of 15 per cent on employer contributions which are 10.5 per cent of ordinary wages excluding such payments as penalty rates and overtime and it is set to rise to 12 per cent in July 2025. There is also a 15 per cent tax on salary sacrifice contributions to superannuation up to a certain limit. The investment earnings within your fund are also only taxed at 15 per cent. Withdrawals are tax-free if you're 60 or older.

For all but those on low incomes, these tax rates are far lower than on income earnt outside of a superannuation fund. These concessional tax rates have acted like a honey pot to bees for the wealthy.

Around 80,000 super accounts have balances over $2 million. The income from their investments is being taxed at 15 per cent – just one third of the highest marginal rate of 45 per cent on taxable incomes over $180,000 or the corporate tax rate of 30 per cent.

Last week the government announced that tax on earnings for savings over $3 million will double from 15 per cent to 30 per cent in July 2025, contributing an estimated $2 billion for the budget over four years.

PROPOSED OBJECTIVES

The government is seeking feedback on what the legislated objective of superannuation should be. "The objective of superannuation is to **deliver income** for a **dignified** retirement, alongside **government support**, in an **equitable and sustainable** way," the consultation paper proposes. It also suggests several variations in emphasis of wording around that objective.

It goes on to define several of these terms.

Preservation of savings means restricting withdrawal from superannuation funds to retirement only. This is something that Treasurer Jim Chalmers is quite adamant about. The Coalition let people raid their funds to the tune of $20,000 during COVID and has advocated for early withdrawals being used to towards a deposit on purchasing a house. Early withdrawals ultimately mean more retirees qualify for the age pension increasing the cost to the budget. They also have an impact on the final outcome at retirement depending on at stage they are drawn.

Government support in retirement refers to the age pension, its interaction with superannuation as well as other government support (eg concessions).

Equitable is defined as "similar outcomes for people in similar circumstances." The higher your income in the workforce, the higher your superannuation payment. Women and others on low incomes during their working life would continue to be disadvantaged. There is no suggestion that any attempt will be made to overcome this inequity.

Equitable also includes the principle of targeting support to those most in need. There is a debate around whether tax concessions should be cut or reduced. Action to cut the rorting would be a progressive step but would not make the system equitable.

Sustainable goes straight to cost-cutting measures to balance the budget. Chalmers is quite open about his government "needing" more money for "defence" – more accurately described as war preparations.

Treasury estimates that tax concessions on superannuation will cost the public purse close to $50 billion in 2022-23. This is just a little under the cost of the age pension at a cost of $55 billion. For a neoliberal treasurer seeking to balance a budget, this presents an opportunity to make cuts.

The government is also encouraging retirees to withdraw their super savings during retirement and not leave them in their accounts as an inheritance – one of the attractions for wealthy rorters of the system.

SECURITY IN RETIREMENT

The present superannuation system which is based on accumulation through investment of savings is a gamble for workers – both during the savings phase and in retirement. Returns on money invested on the stock market, in cash and other financial products are not guaranteed. For example, during the global financial crisis (2007-2009) $200 billion was wiped from superannuation savings. Someone who retired in 2006 would be far better off than if they retired in 2009.

Cutting back the tax concessions and reinvesting the money in the age pension would provide workers a far higher and more dignified retirement. The flat tax of 15 per cent on contributions and fund earnings is a regressive tax, favouring those on high incomes. Tax concessions should be made progressive and capped.

One of the areas where the current super scheme fails is that it perpetuates working life inequalities in retirement, with women, people with disability, Indigenous, and other low paid and vulnerable workers bearing the brunt.

Workers also have a right to expect that their savings will be safely invested, managed well, and invested in socially desirable areas.

No matter how much legislation is implemented, private superannuation and "self-provision" for retirement cannot be made to work efficiently or equitably nor can outcomes be guaranteed.

The government could solve many of the issues referred to above by setting up a national superannuation fund that workers could opt into on a voluntary basis and transfer their savings to. This fund would be administered democratically by representatives of trade unions and other community organisations. Savings would be guaranteed.

The fund would be invested in projects such as renewable energy development, public services including housing, schools, TAFE colleges, transport, aged care, and other projects of benefit to working people and retirees.

A universal age pension, which used to be Labor policy, would overcome so many bureaucratic inefficiencies and administrative expenses. There would not be all the problems associated with multiple funds, means and assets testing. CentreLink staff could be redirected to services such as JobSeeker. ✪

Employers threaten to withhold aged care wages

The country's largest union, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF), has raised concerns that some aged care providers are trying to short-change underpaid nurses and personal care workers, by not passing on full wage increases ordered by the Fair Work Commission (FWC).

A 15 per cent interim increase was ordered by the FWC in November 2022, with the full amount to be applied on 30 June this year. But ANMF Federal Secretary Annie Butler said members working in aged care are reporting that some employers are rushing to lock them into new Enterprise Agreements (EA) – offering wage increases which won't pass on the full amount of additional funding to cover wage increases.

"They're gaming the new government funding model, trying to short-change underpaid nurses and care workers. That's why the ANMF is calling on the government to ensure there's transparency and accountability around this new funding, so the money gets into the pockets of aged workers, not the wallets of wealthy providers," Butler said.

"There need to be rules or triggers imposed by the government that require aged care providers to pass the additional funding on to higher wages – many employers on the ground are saying that unless they are 'legally required' to pass the money on they will simply use their discretion about how they spend it. It must be used for the purpose it is provided – higher wages. Otherwise, the aged care staffing crisis will not be addressed and pay rates won't increase sufficiently to enable the attraction and retention of nursing and care staff.

"We believe it's crucial that the government consults with the ANMF and our members on how the funding will actually be applied, because if it's through the usual mechanisms, it's apparent that some providers won't pass on the full wage increases to their workers and will simply pocket the difference.

"The government must take a strong position now to fulfil one of its key election promises and make sure that aged care workers get the wage increases that they're rightly entitled to and have been waiting for."

The ANMF (Victorian Branch) has filed bargaining dispute applications in the FWC, including Lifeview (four facilities) and mecwacare (14 facilities and home care). These providers won't agree to include a clause in their proposed EAs which provides for three basic principles – transparency about the funding they receive, consultation with the ANMF when they receive it and a commitment to pass on all additional work value money provided by the Commonwealth as higher wages. These providers are not alone in saying they will not commit to passing all work value funding on to employees. ✪

Nationwide demonstrations against AUKUS

The Australian Anti-AUKUS Coalition (AAAC) co-ordinated a series of successful rallies on 24 February at the offices of Federal Ministers around the country.

The rallies were held to oppose Australia's rising tide of militarism, including the AUKUS nuclear-powered submarines.

The Sydney Anti-AUKUS Coalition, Marrickville Peace Group and Wollongong Against War and Nukes attended along with members of other groups including the CPA, Medical Association for the Prevention of War, Socialist Alliance, and Solidarity.

Speakers called on the Prime Minister to turn his government's back on military might and instead pursue a path of diplomacy with our neighbours in the region.

The major demands were for AUKUS to be scrapped, no nuclear submarines and no war on China.

A delegation was allowed into the office to deliver a letter to Prime Minister Albanese. ✪

The demo near Anthony Albanese's office in Marrickville on 24th February. Photo: Denis Doherty

Franklyn Report

Renovate, don't demolish!

"My complex at Franklyn Street in Glebe is 35 years old and needs refurbishing. The present NSW government wants to demolish it and replace our present low rise with a 14-storey complex.

"We are fighting to save our homes," public housing tenant Emily Vallentine said at the launch in Sydney Town Hall of The Franklyn Report.

The Report, written by Hands off Glebe with the assistance of The Glebe Society, argues the case for renovation instead of demolition and privatisation of public housing at Franklyn Street, Glebe.

Sydney Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor Sylvie Ellsmore launched The Franklyn Report, supported by Emily Vallentine, ALP NSW Shadow Housing Minister Rose Jackson and writer, architecture critic and former City of Sydney Councillor Dr Elizabeth Farrelly.

They were followed by local public housing tenants who spoke movingly about their homes and communities and their fears of eviction and forced relocation.

"As The Franklyn Report says," Vallentine stated, "redesigning and retrofitting will save money, be more environmentally friendly, will protect the much-loved trees and gardens, and retain community rather than split and disseminate it." ✪

Maritime Union of Australia

Resolution on Public Housing

RECOGNISING that all people have a right to good standard, safe and affordable homes and that the NSW Government should ensure that all citizens can exercise this right, and 5,266 (17 per cent of the total) have been waiting for more than 10 years.

RECOGNISING that over 51,000 households are currently on the housing waiting list, including 4,812 women and their children experiencing domestic and family violence, and that 10,009 (31 per cent) have been waiting for between five and nine years, while 5,266 (17 per cent) have been waiting for more than 10 years.

RECOGNISING that expecting the market to provide homes for people is not working; instead the NSW Government must invest in public housing which will provide decent, affordable homes and create construction jobs and economic growth.

This meeting of MUA members therefore calls on NSW ALP to strengthen its current housing policy to:

- recognise that only a greatly expanded public housing sector can solve the current housing crisis;
- commit to investing government money in renovating and increasing public housing by funding a minimum of 5,000 public housing properties a year for the next 10 years;
- social housing is a form of privatisation – ban the transfer of public housing to social housing and transfer all current social housing back to government public housing.
- ensure that reasonably priced and secure public housing is available for essential workers.

28th February 2023 ✪

Gender pay gap

While figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) showing that Australia's gender pay gap is narrowing, women still receive, on average, $472 per week less than men.

Despite narrowing the gender pay gap, this will provide little comfort to female workers, who, as the ABS revealed, are experiencing the biggest fall in real wages in history.

The ABS figures revealed that the gender pay gap had narrowed from 14.1 per cent in May 2022 down to 13.3 per cent in November 2022.

This outcome can be attributed in part to a strong decision in last year's annual wage review which has helped to boost the incomes of award-reliant workers, especially in the private sector, most of whom are women.

Figures from "ABS characteristics of employment" (August 2022) indicate that women who are members of their union take home on average $1,390 per week (median), compared with just over $1,000 for women who were not members of their union, indicating that union membership can play a strong role in lifting wages for women.

"If women are to have justice in their workplaces, governments and industry must continue to make every effort to eliminate the unacceptable pay gap which unfairly disadvantages women and devalues and discourages their participation in the workplace," said ACTU president Michele O'Neil.

"ABS data also clearly demonstrates that women who are members of their union earn, on average, $390 more per week than women who are not union members. This demonstrates the critical role union membership can play in lifting women's wages.

"With spiralling inflation driven by corporate greed, rapid interest rate rises driven by an out-of-touch Reserve Bank and over a decade of stagnant wage growth, the fact is that Australian women and their families have little to celebrate." ✪

Dingo bytes

New research from Australia Institute economist Dr Jim Stanford has confirmed that excessive corporate profits are the main driver of inflation, not wages. The research findings come in the same week Qantas announced a $1.4 billion profit, supermarket giants Woolworths revealed a $907 million profit (up 14 per cent) and Coles announced $643 million profit (up 17.1 per cent), hot on the heels of Commonwealth Bank, which recently reported a record $5.15 billion in profit (up 9 per cent). Inflation would have stayed within the Reserve Bank of Australia's target band had companies not pumped-up prices and squeezed consumers over the past 18 months, Stanford's research finds. The Wage Price Index revealed that workers in Australia are enduring the biggest real wage cut in history. Inflation is at 7.8 per cent while wage growth is at 3.3 per cent in the year to December 2022. Inflation is clearly outpacing wage growth. Real wages in Australia fell by 4.5 per cent in 2022, the largest fall on record. ACTU Secretary Sally McManus noted: "What we're seeing is a greed-price spiral. Qantas has joined Coles and Woolworths, as well as the Commonwealth Bank in posting eye-watering profits. Inflation is being fed by these companies putting up prices far more than they need to. Wage growth is clearly not contributing to inflation." Any wage rises in 2022 and early 2023 were chasing price increases and interest rate rises. Real wages are going backwards, a shocking 4.5 per cent.

The country's largest union, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF), has applauded the order by the Fair Work Commission (FWC) to lift the Award wages of low-paid aged care workers by a full 15 per cent, effective from 30 June this year. ANMF Federal Secretary Annie Butler said this is a great win for aged care workers and a further step towards genuine recognition of their true value but noted that there is still more work to do. "From our perspective, the order to pay the full 15 per cent this year not only recognises the severe undervaluation of aged care workers under the current award system, but also acknowledges the rising cost of living pressures these workers continue to face, whilst receiving chronically low wages." The ANMF is now calling on the Federal Government to fund the full 15 per cent as ordered by the FWC to urgently improve the pay and conditions of workers in the aged care industry – one of its key election commitments.

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: After having its plans for a massive overdevelopment at Sydney's Little Bay rejected by the planning authority and local council, construction company Meriton went straight to its connections in the Perrottet government. Said Meriton managing director Harry Triguboff, net worth $13.5 billion: "They can go to hell. They want production, they have to make sure I don't go broke."

Support the *Guardian* by donating to Press Fund

Privatisation inquiry call

Cayman Island owners pay no penalty for Australian hospital failures

The Sydney public hospital now controlled in the Cayman Islands is not subject to penalties for healthcare failures. **Michael West** reports on calls for a public inquiry into the privatisation and performance of Northern Beaches Hospital.

Northern Beaches Hospital.
Photo: Cabrils – Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Built at public expense, should the Northern Beaches Hospital (NBH) have been privatised and sold to a bunch of tax-avoiding financiers in the first place?

There is a youth mental health epidemic on Sydney's Northern Beaches fuelled by drug and alcohol abuse. Yet even after a private criminal prosecution of the Northern Beaches Hospital and even after authorities vowed to inject $11m to help address the critical shortage of beds and youth mental health capacity, the father of deceased 14-year-old Joshua Gill says nothing has been done.

Josh Gill died in tragic circumstances in August 2021. His father Andrew Gill brought the action against the hospital operator Healthscope – which is controlled by an entity in the Cayman Islands – and it was settled confidentially in February 2022. Gill received no money from the settlement but following the lawsuit there was an agreement by health authorities in June 2023 to lift funding for youth mental health.

"$11.4 million to boost Northern Beaches youth mental health services," said the press release.

Despite the pledge however, and despite numerous phone calls and emails with the Northern Sydney Local Health District (NSLHD) Gill says the capacity to address the youth mental health crisis has still not been delivered.

Gill is calling on the government to hold an inquiry into the conduct of the hospital and its secretive financial arrangements. A lawyer and former banker, he believes public hospitals should not be privatised and sold to foreign private equity players. Healthscope and its 42 hospitals were sold in a takeover to Brookfield.

Critical health infrastructure should remain in public hands, says Gill. The interests of shareholders are not the same as the interests of patients. As part of his investigation into the secretive Public Private Partnership (privatisation) process which led to the sale of Northern Beaches Hospital, he found the hospital operators are not penalised for negligence even though the Project Deed stipulates that there should be financial penalties for negligent care and incidents necessitating Serious Adverse Event Reviews (SAERs).

"It seems there ... no matter how bad the service, they (the hospital operators) still get paid the full price. When you are dealing with healthcare – when a private company is providing the service – that makes no sense at all.

"In my view, it incentivises the private company to provide substandard care."

In correspondence with the NSLHD, which Gill says is described as the "Client Representative under the Project Deed" he says there is an "intractable conflict of interest" between the local health authority (NSLHD) and the hospital it is supposed to regulate.

"Under the Project Deed, the NSLHD pays monthly invoices for services rendered by the NBH (public portion). The NSLHD also has responsibilities including conducting SAER investigations into the performance and quality of service delivery by the NBH, noting again for the record that medical professionals employed by the NBH were on the panel of investigators who considered the SAER held regarding the death of our late son Joshua Gill.

Any adverse finding of such SAER or other enquiries would be made after any invoice has been paid (by the NSLHD); but as per the Project Deed, the NBH must have already advised the NSLHD of any adverse event so that payments to the NBH could be abated to reflect any substandard and/or negligent care."

"The NSLHD and the NBH are in an intractable position of conflict because if the NBH has not advised the NSLHD of an adverse event, and the NSLHD uncovers an adverse event ex post (but has not been informed about it) then the payment of the invoice has been improperly made. Where are the incentives to improve the quality of care?"

"I also confirm that I requested you (the NSLH) to provide the amounts paid to the NBH by NSLHD in your role as Client Representative for the care provided to my late son by the NBH. The NSLHD denied this request."

SECRECY THE PROBLEM

Gill told Michael West Media (MWM) the local health authorities appeared to be protecting the hospital operators by withholding financial information and information about breaches. He says that the publicly available financial statements of the NSLHD appear to show payments of $52 million to the Operator to provide health services at the NBH but it was unclear whether it was $52 million per year or $52 million per month.

Gill believes that the figure is a monthly figure. He says, "It seems that after the COVID pandemic, monthly payments to the NBH rose from around $22 million to $52 million per month. If this is correct, this would mean that NSW taxpayers are now paying a Cayman Island related entity around half a billion dollars a year to operate our 'local' public hospital."

Gill says that if this is the case, it is a "breathtakingly deplorable state of affairs, considering that the taxpayer paid to build the hospital and the operator pays $1 per year in rent to occupy the hospital buildings."

The state spent $1.2b building the hospital and surrounding road networks but the PPP documents have redacted the relevant financial information so it is not possible to find out what the private operators Healthscope paid the state for the private hospital.

The National Mental Health Survey revealed the annual prevalence of mental ill health in 16 to 24-year-olds had surged from 26 per cent in 2007 to 39 per cent in 2020-21 – an unprecedented increase of 50 per cent in 15 years.

Yet, according to Gill, "the Northern Beaches Hospital was opened without having one dedicated bed for acute youth and adolescent mental health care despite the Northern Beaches being home to around 50,000 kids."

Michael West established michaelwest.com.au to focus on journalism of high public interest, particularly the rising power of corporations over democracy. Formerly a journalist and editor at Fairfax newspapers and a columnist at News Corp, West was appointed Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Sydney's School of Social and Political Sciences.
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PEACE NOTES

Hannah Middleton

In the latest escalation in Australia's increasingly forceful campaign to manufacture consent for war with China, the Murdoch-owned Sky News Australia has aired a jaw-droppingly propagandistic hour-long special which advocates a dramatic increase in the nation's military spending.

Australians are uniquely vulnerable to propaganda because our nation has the most concentrated media ownership in the western world, the lion's share of it by Rupert Murdoch, who has well-documented ties to US government agencies going back decades.

The Sky News special is a brazenly propagandistic program, with its opening minutes featuring footage of bayonet-wielding Chinese troops marching while ominous cinematic Bad Guy music plays loudly over the sound of the marching.

In its promotional clip for the special, Sky News Australia tinged all footage pertaining to China in red to show how dangerous and communist they are. These are not decisions that are made with the intention of informing the public, these are decisions that are made with the intention of administering war propaganda.

The first expert Sky News brings on to tell viewers about the Chinese menace is Mick Ryan, an Adjunct Fellow at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, which is funded by military-industrial complex entities like Raytheon, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and Northrop Grumman, and is also directly funded by the US government and its client states, including Australia and Taiwan.

The other experts are former Australian Major General Jim "The Butcher of Fallujah" Molan, former CIA Director and US Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta, Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu, Taiwan's Director of Chinese Affairs Dr Lai Chung, Japan's ambassador to Australia Yamagami Shingo, Australian Shadow Defence Minister Andrew Hastie, and John Coyne of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. A virulent propaganda firm which is once again funded by US-aligned governments and military-industrial complex war profiteers.

So it's about as balanced and impartial a punditry line-up as you'd expect.

"The United States plays a major strategic role in the Indo-Pacific," says Sky News anchor Peter Stefanovic as the screen lights up with graphics showing the military presence surrounding China. "With 375,000 personnel, there's a vast network of operations that extend from Hawaii all the way to India."

The US would never tolerate being encircled by the Chinese military like that and would immediately wage war if China tried; it's clear that the US is the aggressor in this conflict and China is reacting defensively.

We are shown illustrations of how much smaller Australia's military is than China's or America's to help us understand how important it is to increase the size of our nation's war machine, ignoring the fact that Australia's total population is a tiny fraction of either of those countries.

We are told that the AUKUS pact will "beef up America's military presence in the north of Australia," and that "America has long used Australia as a key strategic outpost," showing images of Pine Gap and other parts of the US war machine which dot this continent.

"Now, there's more to come," says Stefanovic, with US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin describing the surge in the US military presence we're to expect in Australia.

The real purpose of this Sky News special is to manufacture consent for a dramatic increase in Australia's military budget.

Australia currently has a military budget of $48.7 billion, a little less than two per cent of the nation's GDP.

"The Australian government needs to talk to the Australian people about the kinds of threats it faces," says Mick Ryan. "It needs a more compelling narrative to convince the Australian people that they need to spend more on defence."

To be clear, this is not just a call to increase military spending, this is a call to propagandise Australians into consenting to more military spending. It's not very often that the propaganda comes right out and explains to you why it is propagandising you.

The US is beating the drums for a future war of unfathomable horror all to please a dark god known as unipolarism, and it threatens to destroy us all. The time to start resisting is now.

This is an edited version of an article by Caitlin Johnstone in "Pearls and Irritations" – johnmenadue.com (17-02-2023)

Book Banning American Style
The Attacks on Critical Race Theory

Graham Holton

For anyone who is a book lover what is happening across the USA will be shocking. Over the past year, a nationwide campaign has removed books from public school libraries. If this sounds like something from George Orwell's *1984*, consider this; *1984* is also being considered for a ban in an Orwellian act of banning the book that gave rise to the term "Orwellian." In Texas last year, over 1,600 books were banned, or considered for banning, as part of the attack on Critical Race Theory (CRT). Book bans turn a private and personal act, book reading, into a public battle, policed by the conservative establishment.

Despite the First Amendment of the US Constitution guaranteeing Freedom of Speech, banning reading material has a long history there. Even comic books have faced the wrath of the censors. In the 1950s, a crusade by psychiatrist Fredric Wertham sought to have the majority of comic books banned, for having a corrupting influence on children. This led to the creation of the Comics Code (no longer enforced). Of the few publishers that survived the censors, two later became DC Comics and Marvel Comics, which today are worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Book bans in public schools have occurred throughout US history, notably during the 1950s McCarthy era and in the 1980s under President Ronald Reagan. Over the past ten years popular children's books have not escaped scrutiny.

Books banned from public school libraries included the Dr Seuss series, the Harry Potter novels, as well as *Little House on the Prairie,* and *Mary Poppins,* as being too racist. *The Wind in the Willows*, *Narnia*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and all editions of the Bible, have also been considered unsuitable for children in the USA.

Book censorship has radically worsened over the past two years, and the numbers have grown. The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) has finally seen *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* being removed from school curricula, but *To Kill a Mockingbird* has also made the list.

Most of the books now banned could be considered Left-wing; novels, political writings attacking racism, books by people of colour and Latinx, books containing abortion and LGBTQ-related themes. The reason given is that such books made students "uncomfortable" over their dealing with race and gender issues. Yet this does not explain why Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is not even being considered for banning.

On 25th October 2021, Texas State Rep. Matt Krause (R-Fort Worth) sent a letter to school districts across the state, asking them to review a sixteen-page list of books he thought contained "objectionable content."

Some of the books considered for banning were: Ari Folman's graphic novel adaptation of Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*; *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison; *Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe; *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism and You* by Jason Reynolds; *This Is My America* by Kim Johnson; *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander; *The Undefeated* by Kwame Alexander; and *All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M Johnson.

Ta-Nehisi Coates's National Book Award-winning *Between the World and Me* is on the list, as is his *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*, which features essays on race in America. Other notable titles include Duncan Tonatiuh's history book for young readers, *Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation*, and Mychal Denzel Smith's memoir *Invisible Man, Got the Whole World Watching: A Young Black Man's Education*. Both of Ibram X. Kendi's books *How to Be an Antiracist* and *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* are now banned. One wonders how delicate those enforcing the bans think American children are.

The venerable writers' human rights and freedom of expression group PEN America found that across the country, 1,648 titles have been banned by schools. Of these titles, 41 per cent addressed LGBTQIA themes, or with prominent characters who are LGBTQIA.

Another 40 per cent contained prominent characters of colour. Novels such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye*, Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, and William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* have all been removed from libraries, as has Maya Angelou's book of poetry *And Still I Rise*.

Books challenging the politics of racism have been banned, which includes: Susan Campbell Bartoletti's *They Called Themselves the KKK: The Birth of an American Terrorist Group*; Vegas Tenold's *Everything You Love Will Burn: Inside the Rebirth of White Nationalism in America*; the Pulitzer Prize-winning history of the Holocaust comic book *Maus* by Art Spiegelman; and the DC Comics anti-authoritarian graphic novel *V for Vendetta* by Alan Moore.

In the 1970s critical race theorists held that racism is inherent in the law and legal institutions of the United States, as they create and maintain social, economic, and political inequalities between whites and non-whites, especially for African Americans.

CRT was dedicated to applying this understanding of the institutional and structural nature of racism to eliminate all prejudicial hierarchies. "Critical" is a reference to critical thinking, critical theory and scholarly criticism. CRT became a graduate-level framework for examining the racial biases embedded in the US legal, political and social institutions.

In 2019 political conservatives attacked *The 1619 Project*, the Pulitzer Prize-winning historical re-evaluation which seeks to place slavery and racism at the centre of US history and institutions. They then took on CRT in a propaganda campaign which redefined CRT as something sinister. They applied this new set of ideas and used this to discredit political opponents, or groups of people associated with the original ideas of CRT.

These conservatives falsely claimed that CRT is a subversive ideology which had infiltrated the elementary (primary) school curriculum. According to *Education Week*, since January 2021 thirty-six states have passed or proposed legislation to restrict the teaching of any issues pertaining to race and racism, using their attacks on CRT to ban books from library collections. They insist that they are defending children against the pain associated with racism and gender issues.

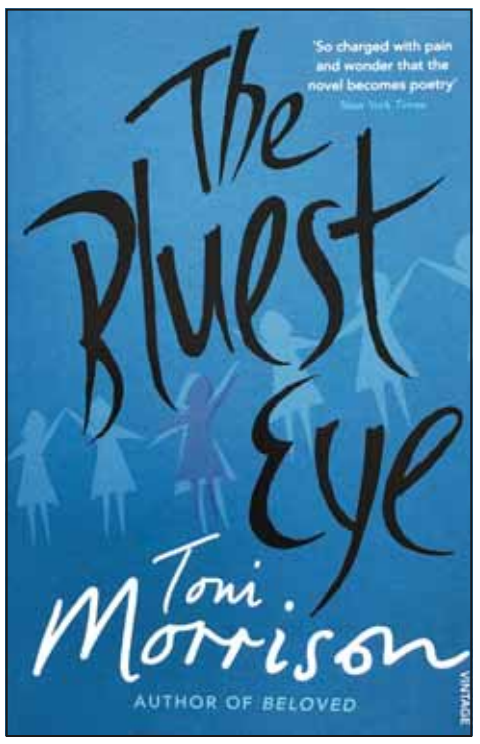
These conservatives have rewritten US history, making all socialists and left-wing activists "violent, godless, communists," and feminists are now "man-hating radicals." Black Lives Matter (BLM) became "violent white hatred," and "Wokeness" (being socially aware) became political correctness and thought-policing.

They transformed CRT into reverse-racism, Black supremacy and Marxism. President Donald Trump issued an executive order in September 2021 banning "diversity and race sensitivity training" in government agencies, including all government "spending related to any training on critical race theory."

Legislation has been drafted to ban teaching CRT. These attacks feign concern for students feeling guilty about what people did, in regards to race, gender and disability. The conservative's real agenda is to remove all books that question their right-wing view of US history.

Since 2020, conservative US lawmakers have sought to ban or restrict CRT instruction in schools. Conservatives are waging a battle on school boards and in libraries, and seeking teacher removal. Librarians and educators are threatened with criminal charges. In the process, the conservatives attack the intellectually vibrant heritage of US culture. They seek to silence discussions on racism, equality, social justice and the history of race in the USA, using the minds of children as their battlefield.

Further Reading: Dan Solomon. 20th September, 2022. "A User's Guide to All the Banned Books in Texas."
tinyurl.com/Banned-Books-in-Texas



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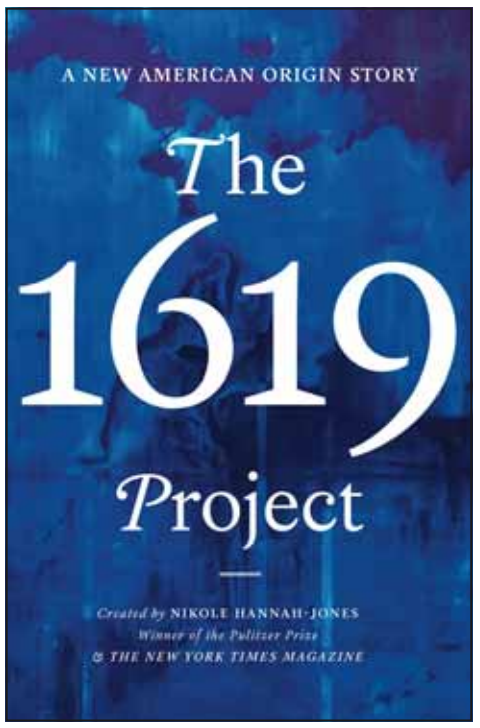

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Freedom for the Sahrawian People is long overdue

Che Janz

Recently some much-needed attention has been brought to the situation in Western Sahara, brought on by speeches and visits from Ndaba Mandela, Nelson Mandela's grandson. Another noteworthy speaker regarding this issue is Magdalene Moonsamy speaking with the group "Solidarity Movement with Western Sahara" (SASOMWES), who has attended protests in Pretoria in the last few weeks.

In 2021, the Kingdom of Morocco exported 6.5 billion dollars' worth of phosphate, a large chunk of which was mined from the Western Sahara. Phosphate mined from the Western Sahara is noted for its rich quality, making it among the most lucrative in the world. Morocco has also exploited the Western Sahara for its coastal fish reserves. In 2006 Morocco signed a deal with the EU to supply them with fish from the Western Sahara's waters. The deal was thankfully finally put to an end after constant public pressure from Western Saharan advocacy groups, but Morocco still produces billions from the Western Sahara in fishing alone. Not a cent of this money goes towards Sahrawis.

The entire conflict rests in the history of imperialism and the anti-colonial movement, from the time when France and Spain controlled much of North West Africa. When Morocco and Algeria gained independence from European colonial rule in the mid-20th century, tensions between the two were already high due to the sloppy borders drawn by their former imperial rulers. This resulted in the Sand War, which although short lived, resulted in much destruction in the area. Fidel Castro personally helped the Algerian military to create a ceasefire.

After this chaotic period, Northern Africa was once again thrown into disarray with the issue of the Western Sahara when it was finally released from the clutches of Fascist Spanish rule. Morocco took the view that the Sahrawi people's freedom could only be granted at their whim, while Algeria and Libya (under Gaddafi) took the view that the region could only be free via Sahrawian self-determination. They achieved this by funding the Polisario Front, a Marxist revolutionary organisation that to this day fights Morocco's illegal control of the region to establish an independent socialist state called the "Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic." The 10th of May 2023 will be the 50th anniversary of the founding of Polisario.

There have been a number of treaties and agreements between Morocco and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, but they are all meaningless, as Morocco constantly violates them and holds thousands of Sahrawians in detention centres. There is a mass of testimonies online about the horrific treatment inside these facilities, from sex abuse from guards, to slave labour and reported massacres. This cements Morocco's determination to continue its endless war and kill as many Sahrawians as it takes, as long as the phosphate and fishing money keeps coming.

Unlike, say, Palestine, the Western Sahara does not receive much attention in western media. The Western Sahara is the forgotten side of the same kind of anti-apartheid struggle.

Western Sahara is the victim of two sets of imperialism – that of the European powers who arbitrarily divided up the area, and that of the Kingdom of Morocco. The people of Western Sahara deserve attention and support in their fight to go from being Africa's last official colony to being its newest independent state.

African slaves in colonial Australia

Graham Holton

The Melbourne Gaol is famous for being the place where the bushranger, Ned Kelly, was hanged in 1880. In the early 1970s I saw a collection of death masks displayed on its walls. They were made after the deceased had had their heads shaved. Executed criminals also had their heads boiled down and added to skull collections for "scientists" to study the criminal "type."

Some of these skulls were held at the Old Melbourne Museum. In the 1990s, while researching for a seminar paper, I enquired at the new museum whether they still held the skull collection. It was confirmed that they did and that it included Aboriginal skulls, collected by explorers and anthropologists.

Amongst the death masks was one of an African. Who was this Black person and how did he get to "White" Australia? African slaves came to Australia with the First Fleet, and continued to arrive from England, the West Indies, and Africa in our colonial period, making Australia an integral part of the international slave trade.

Many believe that Africans and African West Indians only arrived in England in the 1950s. In fact, they have a long history in Britain. In 1783, following the American War of Independence, 9000 Africans, mainly former slaves, fled with the British. At the time there were over 15,000 people with African heritage living in England, of which 10,000 lived in greater London. By the early 1800s there were over 40,000, many from the West Indies.

Thousands of Black families had been living in England for hundreds of years, as slaves and as free men. By the late 1500s there were so many Africans in London that Queen Elizabeth I passed the draft proclamation of 1601 to stop further African immigration.

Rich Africans had moved to London to trade gold, ivory and cloth. Their children studied at Oxford. William Shakespeare probably had a relationship with an African woman, and his character Othello, a black general in the service of Venice, shows that he had some contact with Africans.

For those who remained in London after the 1600s life was not easy. In 1786, the plight of the African English was so bad that £900 was donated by the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor. Destitute, some turned to crime to eat. They were duly arrested and sentenced to the colonies. These poor people went from slavery to penal servitude.

FIRST FLEET

Cassandra Pybus outlines in *Black Founders* the background a number of Africans who were sentenced as convicts to the Colony of NSW in the First Fleet in 1788. These men were Caesar, John Randall, John Martin, Janel Gordon, James Williams, John Coffin, John Williams, Thomas Orford, Samuel Chinery, and George Francisco. These convicts were illiterate and there is no record of how they got to England, only that they were sentenced for petty theft.

"Black Caesar" was a Creole slave who was evacuated from the American colonies in 1783. Five years later he was sentenced for stealing money and transported to the colony aboard the *Alexander*. The naval officer William Bradley thought he was "a native of Madagascar." In 1796 Caesar escaped and became Australia's first bushranger. He was hunted down, shot and killed.

Samuel Chinery became a servant and died in 1841. John Coffin was sentenced to Norfolk Island, which he left in 1795. George Francisco died in 1789.

John Martin came from the American colonies. He was freed in 1792. In 1812 he married the daughter of another black First Fleeter, Mary Randall, and had eleven children. He died in 1837.

John Moseley was sentenced to death but reprieved to transportation for life to NSW on the *Scarborough*. He lived in the Rocks and died in 1835 at the age of 77.

Thomas Orford was transported on the *Alexander* and in 1794 was granted 30 acres of land at Bulanaming. He left the colony in 1806, when he disappears from government records.

John Randall was also aboard the *Alexander*. In 1792 he received 60 acres north of Sydney. He died in 1822. His wife petitioned to have his two daughters placed into the Orphan Institution.

James Williams had been on a West Indian ship, before being sentenced for theft to the penal colony aboard the *Scarborough*. He was named "Black Jemmy" after trying to escape twice. He disappeared in 1792.

John Williams aka "Black Jack" was also aboard the *Scarborough*. He left Sydney aboard a sealing ship in 1805 and settled on Kangaroo Island, living amongst Aboriginal women. He drowned in 1830. We know from government records that the Indigenous people never attacked Black convicts, possibly having a racial and cultural affinity with them.

Photo: rawpixel.com

Other Africans included William Blue, who was originally from a free black family in New York state. He joined the British Navy in 1759 and went to England as a marine. In 1796 he was sentenced for stealing sugar and transported on the *Minorca* in 1801. Two years later he was freed. He died in 1834 at the age of 100.

END OF SLAVERY

Amongst the famous Black bushrangers was Black Douglas, who was described as a "Mulatto Indian." He robbed travellers between Melbourne and Bendigo in the 1850s gold rush.

The British government abolished the trade in slaves within its empire in 1807. Twenty-six years later it passed the Slavery Abolition Act, which was supposed to emancipate all slaves in the British West Indies. It was replaced by indentured servitude, known as an "apprenticeship," that required freed slaves to continue to work for their former owners as apprentices.

After the continuing slave revolts against the system, slavery was finally ended by colonial assemblies in 1838. Eric Williams argues in *Capitalism and Slavery* that falling sugar prices made slavery no longer economically viable. It was this and not some newfound morality in British capitalism that ended slavery in the Caribbean.

Australia's colonies did not operate in exclusion from other British colonies. They were directly included in and interconnected with the British Empire, especially with the West Indies. Captain Bligh was procuring bread fruit trees from the Pacific Islanders, to supply cheap starch foods for Caribbean slaves, when the mutiny on the *Bounty* broke out.

The famous explorer Edward John Eyre had mapped SA and WA. In South Australia Lake Eyre, Eyre Peninsula and the Eyre Highway are named after him. In 1854 he became Governor of Jamaica, immediately increasing the harsh punishment of striking workers. In 1865 Governor Eyre brutally suppressed the Morant Bay rebellion, with 439 Black unarmed workers brutally butchered in reprisals. Another 600 strikers were flogged and 1000 houses burnt down. The trial against Eyre was influential in setting a precedent in English and Australian law. The conflict of laws between the colonies was applied to later international torts cases. Eyre was exonerated by the Queen's Bench and retired peacefully in England. In Jamaica, Eyre remained a bitter memory amongst its Black population.

The delay in the emancipation of slaves had led to numerous and violent slave revolts that shook the West Indian colonies in the early 1800s, most notably in Jamaica, British Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. After 1830, as a means to control the West Indian colonies, the most troublesome slaves were transported to the Australian colonies.

Government records show that Alexander Simpson arrived in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) and told the Muster Master that he was part of a "Mutiny and exciting the Slaves to rebellion. I was a slave myself." In 1831 Simpson had taken part in one of the largest slave rebellions in the British Empire, at Montego Bay, Jamaica. No slave society, other than Brazil, experienced such a series of revolts as Jamaica. Former African West Indian slaves were held in harsh servitude in the Australian colonies long after slavery ended in the West Indies.

The Caribbean economy failed after the fall of sugar prices in Europe, due to the production of sugar beet. Planters in Jamaica and elsewhere closed their plantations and moved their profits to England. West Indian sugar and slavery was the foundation of British capitalism. It was well studied by Karl Marx in *Capital*. British capitalists sent their ships to West Africa to buy slaves, which then sailed to the Caribbean, where the slaves were sold. There, rum and sugar were purchased for sale in Britain, leading to massive profits.

By 1865 sugar production in Jamaica fell to half that of 1834, creating massive unemployment, high taxes, low wages and increased poverty. Living conditions on the islands failed to improve resulting in civil unrest well into the 1930s. Slavery made an indelible impact on West Indian society retarding its socio-economic development, forcing many to emigrate to the UK, New York and Australia. Amongst them were many socialists and communists, who fought for the betterment of Black people around the world.

Further Reading: Pybus, Cassandra. 2006. *Black Founders: The Unknown Story of Australia's First Black Settlers*. Sydney. UNSW Press.
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African slaves came to Australia with the First Fleet, and continued to arrive from England, the West Indies, and Africa in our colonial period, making Australia an integral part of the international slave trade.

China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis

2023-02-24

1. Respecting the sovereignty of all countries. Universally recognised international law, including the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, must be strictly observed. The sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries must be effectively upheld. All countries, big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, are equal members of the international community. All parties should jointly uphold the basic norms governing international relations and defend international fairness and justice. Equal and uniform application of international law should be promoted, while double standards must be rejected.

2. Abandoning the Cold War mentality. The security of a country should not be pursued at the expense of others. The security of a region should not be achieved by strengthening or expanding military blocs. The legitimate security interests and concerns of all countries must be taken seriously and addressed properly. There is no simple solution to a complex issue. All parties should, following the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security and bearing in mind the long-term peace and stability of the world, help forge a balanced, effective and sustainable European security architecture. All parties should oppose the pursuit of one's own security at the cost of others' security, prevent bloc confrontation, and work together for peace and stability on the Eurasian Continent.

3. Ceasing hostilities. Conflict and war benefits no one. All parties must stay rational and exercise restraint, avoid fanning the flames and aggravating tensions, and prevent the crisis from deteriorating further or even spiralling out of control. All parties should support Russia and Ukraine in working in the same direction and resuming direct dialogue as quickly as possible, so as to gradually deescalate the situation and ultimately reach a comprehensive ceasefire.

4. Resuming peace talks. Dialogue and negotiation are the only viable solution to the Ukraine crisis. All efforts conducive to the peaceful settlement of the crisis must be encouraged and supported. The international community should stay committed to the right approach of promoting talks for peace, help parties to the conflict open the door to a political settlement as soon as possible, and create conditions and platforms for the resumption of negotiation. China will continue to play a constructive role in this regard.

5. Resolving the humanitarian crisis. All measures conducive to easing the humanitarian crisis must be encouraged and supported. Humanitarian operations should follow the principles of neutrality and impartiality, and humanitarian issues should not be politicised. The safety of civilians must be effectively protected, and humanitarian corridors should be set up for the evacuation of civilians from conflict zones. Efforts are needed to increase humanitarian assistance to relevant areas, improve humanitarian conditions, and provide rapid, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access, with a view to preventing a humanitarian crisis on a larger scale. The UN should be supported in playing a coordinating role in channelling humanitarian aid to conflict zones.

Kyiv, 25th February 2022. Photo: Oleksandr Ratushniak / United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – flickr.com (CC BY-ND 2.0)

6. Protecting civilians and prisoners of war (POWs). Parties to the conflict should strictly abide by international humanitarian law, avoid attacking civilians or civilian facilities, protect women, children and other victims of the conflict, and respect the basic rights of POWs. China supports the exchange of POWs between Russia and Ukraine, and calls on all parties to create more favourable conditions for this purpose.

7. Keeping nuclear power plants safe. China opposes armed attacks against nuclear power plants or other peaceful nuclear facilities, and calls on all parties to comply with international law including the Convention on Nuclear Safety (CNS) and resolutely avoid man-made nuclear accidents. China supports the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in playing a constructive role in promoting the safety and security of peaceful nuclear facilities.

8. Reducing strategic risks. Nuclear weapons must not be used and nuclear wars must not be fought. The threat or use of nuclear weapons should be opposed. Nuclear proliferation must be prevented and nuclear crisis avoided. China opposes the research, development and use of chemical and biological weapons by any country under any circumstances.

9. Facilitating grain exports. All parties need to implement the Black Sea Grain Initiative signed by Russia, Türkiye, Ukraine and the UN fully and effectively in a balanced manner, and support the UN in playing an important role in this regard. The cooperation initiative on global food security proposed by China provides a feasible solution to the global food crisis.

10. Stopping unilateral sanctions. Unilateral sanctions and maximum pressure cannot solve the issue; they only create new problems. China opposes unilateral sanctions unauthorised by the UN Security Council. Relevant countries should stop abusing unilateral sanctions and "long-arm jurisdiction" against other countries, so as to do their share in deescalating the Ukraine crisis and create conditions for developing countries to grow their economies and better the lives of their people.

11. Keeping industrial and supply chains stable. All parties should earnestly maintain the existing world economic system and oppose using the world economy as a tool or weapon for political purposes. Joint efforts are needed to mitigate the spillovers of the crisis and prevent it from disrupting international cooperation in energy, finance, food trade, transportation, and undermining the global economic recovery.

12. Promoting post-conflict reconstruction. The international community needs to take measures to support post-conflict reconstruction in conflict zones. China stands ready to provide assistance and play a constructive role in this endeavour. ✪

Western summits on Africa "Just talking clubs"

Although the US and Western leaders often talk about assisting Africa, there is no movement when it comes to real actions.

A *South China Morning Post* report recalls the dissatisfaction of African leaders with Europe, noting in particular the absence of most European leaders at the African Adaptation Summit in Rotterdam last month. Six African heads of state, including the current African Union chairman and Senegal's President Macky Sall, were present, while only Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte attended the summit in person among the European leaders. President Sall said frankly that he was "disappointed" by such a patronising attitude.

This is undoubtedly an echo of the colonial mind-set of the Western countries. No matter how much they emphasise the potential and importance of Africa, the US and Europe have never considered the continent to be significant in international political and economic affairs. Despite the end of the colonial era, the ghost of colonialism still lingers in their hearts, making them lack respect for African countries.

What's still fresh in people's minds is that former US president Donald Trump referred to African countries as "shithole" nations during a meeting in 2018, drawing unanimous condemnation from the international community.

And the European leaders' failure to turn up for the September meeting is not the first time they have slighted their African counterparts. At the EU-Africa Summit in Brussels in February, about 40 African leaders were invited by the EU, but at one point only the Belgian Prime Minister was reportedly present from the other side, according to SCMP.

Not only did Europe surprise Africa in terms of courtesy, but the plan that came out of that conference will probably be more lip service to Africa's disappointment. During the meeting, the EU announced 150 billion euros in investments under the EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package of 300 billion euros as the highlight of the summit. However, the plan has been criticised for being a "paper tiger" amid the competition with China's Belt and Road Initiative, since it is merely made up of a mixture of existing commitments from European development financial institutions.

In addition, more than seven months after the commitment was made, no significant progress has been seen on this plan due to the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the current social crises in Europe. As Liberia's former Minister of Public Works W Gyude Moore put it, "There is a long history of unfulfilled commitments, so this might just be par for the course."

Western countries are accustomed to painting a big picture for developing countries without providing any tangible assistance.

He Wenping, director of the African Studies Section at the Institute of West Asian and African Studies under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, mentioned that former British Prime Minister Tony Blair liked to lobby around, claiming that "the state of Africa is a scar on the conscience of the world," and thus raising attention to the continent. Other than this attention British policies toward Africa have had very little to offer for Africa's development problems.

Moreover, Western countries also have a strong purpose in Africa. Every penny spent by these old colonial powers has its considerations, either to consolidate their influence or to further strengthen the dependence of African countries on them.

Nonetheless, the colonial era is gone. African countries are well aware of the calculations of the countries that have colonised the continent for centuries, as well as their intentions for Africa now, which are nothing more than to seize resources and enhance their control.

In the past, African countries had limited options and were dependent on Western funding. But the situation is quite different now. African countries have made great strides in the decades since independence. In addition, the rise of emerging countries, including China, has given them an alternative to Western countries.

As China-Africa relations have flourished and total trade has increased year after year, so has the vilification from the West. We have never seen Chinese leaders mention the Western countries' intentional efforts in Africa during their visits to the continent, nor have they ever cooperated with Africa with the purpose of "competing with the West." This shows that China-Africa cooperation has never been directed at third parties, but rather has been a desire to draw in all forces to improve the investment environment in Africa, noted He.

In the long-term cooperation, African countries have come to realise the difference between China and the West. In China's eyes, Africa is a continent with infinite possibilities and high potential for development, which is why it has continued to invest there, rather than regarding it as "a scar on the conscience of the world" with pity.

Global Times ✪

International Unemployment Day

Owen Bennett

Unemployed men sitting on the sunny side of the San Francisco Public Library, California. Photo: picryl.com – public domain.

Sixth March marks International Unemployment Day. Unemployed workers have for centuries borne the scars of class war. Since the rise of capitalism in the 16th century, ruling classes have approached unemployment not as a social problem to be addressed but as a weapon to be wielded against the working class.

Capitalists invariably understood that the greater the misery inflicted upon unemployed workers, the more unemployed workers become willing to accept wages and conditions below the "going rate," sometimes as a "strike breaking" force. Similarly, employed workers are made to fear unemployment and, as a result, become less confident in their demands to the boss. This drives down real wages and conditions, boosting profit rates in the process.

This led to Marx's famous conclusion that the unemployed form not only a "lever of capitalist accumulation," but also the "condition of existence of the capitalist mode of production." Echoing Marx, for centuries radicals have frequently rallied around the call for the "right to work." By demanding the elimination of unemployment, radicals reasoned that capitalists would have less scope to use unemployment as a union-busting tool.

The high point of unemployed workers' struggle came during the Great Depression (1929-1939). Confronted with record high rates of unemployment – typically more than 20 per cent of the workforce – and hopelessly inadequate systems of income support, unemployed workers and their allies across the world mobilised to demand job creation programs and social security payments as a right. Big business and their proxies fought bitterly against these demands, leading to a sharpening of the class struggle in most capitalist countries.

The ferocity of the struggle against mass unemployment during the Great Depression reflected the growing international influence of Communism. In September 1928, the Sixth Congress of the Communist International (Comintern) predicted that the global capitalist economy was heading toward a "revolutionary collapse." This analysis argued that the capitalist class, confronted with a failing economic system, would increasingly rely on social democratic parties to use authoritarian measures to bring workers into line and shepherd capitalism thorough this turbulent "third phase" of capitalist development.

As economic conditions worsened and workers revolted, the Comintern predicted that labour moderates would, in partnership with the capitalists, resort to fascism to oppress the organised working class, particularly the unemployed. The Comintern directed its fraternal organisation, the Red International of Labour Unions (formed in 1920 to organise militant unionists), to build an international network of unemployed workers' organisations.

On January 16 1930, the Comintern executive declared 6th March the "international day" of protest against unemployment. The response from unemployed workers, who were mostly not involved in radical politics, was overwhelming. Across the world, dozens of Communist Parties and their fraternal organisations mobilised millions of unemployed workers and their supporters into mass rallies, often culminating in brutal police crackdowns.

In the United States, over one million workers attended dozens of protest rallies around the country under the slogan "Work or Wages" and "Don't Starve – Fight." Notable rallies were held throughout Europe, including in Berlin, Vienna, London, Manchester, Paris, Bilboa, and Seville.

The strong reaction meant that International Unemployment Day was quickly established as a leading rallying point of the international working class against the inaction of capitalist governments to address the horrors of mass unemployment. This burgeoning movement was remarkably successful in achieving concessions for unemployed workers and went on to have a significant impact on Depression-era and post-WWII politics. ✪

African Union Summit

"Democracy must be promoted and protected"

The African Union summit ended in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa on February 19 with the body stating it had a zero tolerance for undemocratic changes of power on the continent.

The 55-nation bloc also vowed to speed up progress towards an African free trade deal.

African Union leaders discussed a range of major challenges facing the continent, including the climate emergency, conflict and coups.

African Union commissioner for political affairs, peace and security Bankole Adeoye told a news conference: "The assembly reaffirmed zero tolerance against unconstitutional change. The commission is ready to support these member states to return to constitutional order – the idea is that democracy must take root and must be promoted and protected."

Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Sudan – which have been ruled by military leaders following coups – remain suspended from membership of the African Union.

The new African Union chairman, Comoros President Azali Assoumani, said that he would leave no stone unturned to ensure the African Continental Free Trade Agreement became a reality.

It would be the world's largest free trade agreement in population terms, covering 54 out of the 55 countries on a continent with 1.4 billion people. Only Eritrea has not agreed to participate.

The expulsion of an Israeli observer delegation to the summit at the opening ceremony on Saturday threatened to overshadow the gathering.

Commission head Moussa Faki Mahamat granted observer status to Israel in 2021, but a number of nations objected because of the treatment of the Palestinians by the Israeli state.

Mr Mahamat said that after disagreement last year over whether Israel should be invited to observe the summit, no final decision had yet been taken and so "we did not invite Israeli officials to our summit."

An Israeli statement said that "extremist states like Algeria and South Africa" had been behind the action.

Morning Star ✪

Communist Party of Australia

www.cpa.org.au

Global Briefs

GERMANY: Anti-war demonstrations were held in many countries last weekend, a year after the special operation in the Ukraine started. The largest by far was in Berlin, with tens of thousands of people taking part in what was called the "Uprising for Peace." The protesters called for peace talks to end the hostilities in the Ukraine and urged the German government to stop shipping weapons there. Similar protests were held in France, Italy, and Britain. 4000 people marched in London for peace talks to end the Ukraine conflict. All the protests highlighted the impact of wasting money on weapons instead of looking after the people's interests and needs in their own countries. Transport union RMT speaker Carlos Barros, addressing the crowd in London, said members of his union were facing "the biggest attack in generations ... We are facing that attack because we've been told there's no money." In other news, everyone saw Rishi Sunak last week in his massive helmet with his shiny new jet. Well shiny new jets won't fund the NHS (National Health Service); that is currently crumbling or pay teachers, doctors, posties, and nurses the wages they demand which we all know they deserve.

USA: Four weeks after the Ohio toxic train disaster the local department of natural resources increased its estimate of animals killed as a result of the hazardous chemicals to nearly 44,000. The local community is still trying to cope with the aftermath of the disaster and its impact on human health, livestock and crops. Ohio has about 75,000 farms and is a leading producer of Swiss cheese, ranks second in the country for egg production, and third in tomatoes and pumpkins. Water contamination is another major concern not only for the locals but for the wider population as well. Trace amounts of chemicals were found in the Ohio River and though the local environmental protection agency claims that the Ohio River water is safe, dead fish in waterways tell a different story. The locals are also upset that president Biden has chosen a photo opportunity in Kiev instead of visiting the site of the disaster.

PALESTINE: On February 23rd, 2023, Palestinians went on a general strike to denounce the killing of 11 and wounding of about 120 people by Israeli forces in Nablus. Public institutions, banks, shops, schools and universities closed doors as part of the protests called by the Palestinian factions. The Palestinian Authority requested an emergency session of the UN Security Council to address the escalation of violence that Israel carries out with impunity.

US hands lit torch for Israeli arsonists

Maureen Clare Murphy

The US is paving the way for horrific violence against Palestinians by allowing Israel to go into settler-colony and apartheid overdrive. By doing so, Washington may also be hastening the end of the total impunity that allows Israel to episodically "mow" down Palestinians who challenge its colonial domination.

The conflict management approach – by which the colonised Palestinians are treated as an equal partner to their oppressor while being required to do the occupier's dirty work – prevailed during the quarter-century that followed the signing of the Oslo Accords by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation in the mid-1990s.

It was during that period that Israel grabbed West Bank hilltops and accelerated the building of its settlement colonies in violation of international law, further fragmenting Palestinian land and society.

US State Department spokesperson Ned Price typified that approach during a press conference following Israel's bloody daylight raid in the West Bank city of Nablu.

Eleven Palestinians, including a child and three men over the age of 60, were killed and dozens more injured by live fire during the raid, which began when Israeli forces disguised as Palestinian civilians opened fire in a busy vegetable market.

Price said, "we are deeply concerned that the impact of today's raid could set back efforts aimed at restoring calm for both Israelis and Palestinians," implying that it wasn't the violent raid itself that posed a setback to calm.

Asked whether the bloodbath in Nablus meant the US's efforts were a failure, Price insisted that Washington was playing a "constructive and useful role."

"The United States is a partner. We are a partner to Israel; we are a partner to the Palestinians," Price added. "We are, in our capacity as a partner, coordinating between and among them."

In that "capacity," the US pressed the Palestinian Authority and Israeli security officials to meet in Aqaba on 26th February, hosted by Jordan's King Abdallah and joined by Egyptian officials.

The Zionist pogrom taking place in Huwara is a consequence of the Israeli government's Zionist supremacist political platform.

Washington provides a minimum of $3.8 billion in military aid to Israel each year while giving a relative pittance to the Palestinian Authority on the condition that it serves as an enforcement arm for the Israeli occupation.

All the while, the US serves as Israel's lawyer at international fora, undermining Palestinian efforts towards accountability. And what else has happened in the days after Washington thwarted the Security Council vote on Israel's settlements?

Israel approved plans for 7000 new settlement units – "the largest number ever authorised in one sitting," according to *The Times of Israel* – including hundreds of homes in outposts built on Palestinian land that have not yet been formally legalised by the government.

Tel Aviv is also moving to build thousands of housing units in the E1 area of Jerusalem, which would effectively sever the West Bank into two and, in the words of Peace Now, deal "a deadly blow to a future Palestinian state."

"It is permitted to have disagreements between friends, but in the end we do what is right for us, and they understand that," finance minister Bezalel Smotrich said, as reported by the Tel Aviv daily *Haaretz*.

Meanwhile, Smotrich was crowned governor of the West Bank in a move that legal experts say constitutes *de jure* annexation of occupied territory.

An agreement signed by Israel's defence minister transfers governmental powers in the West Bank to Smotrich, extending Israeli sovereignty beyond the Green Line.

Michael Sfard, an Israeli human rights lawyer, said that "transferring powers to Israeli civilian hands is an act of *de jure* annexation because it entails removing power from the occupying military and placing it directly in the hands of the government" settlement building and formal annexation of occupied territory which are blatant violations of international law.

Free Palestine Rally – Melbourne, 2021. Photo: Matt Hrkac www.matthrkac.com.au flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

The joint communiqué issued hailed "the importance of the Aqaba meeting, the first of its kind in years."

It announced another gathering to be held in March, this time hosted by Egypt at the Red Sea resort of Sharm al-Sheikh, aiming to "maintain positive momentum and expand this agreement towards wider political process leading to a just and lasting peace."

It's an effort to put Washington back in the driver's seat.

But events on the ground show that a colonial conflict has its own brutal logic. The fury and resistance of the Palestinian people can no longer be controlled or contained either by Israel's brutality or by Washington's bad-faith diplomatic charades.

By refusing to put pressure on Israel, the US is bursting the bubble of impunity that it has helped maintain for so long.

Gilad Noam, Israel's deputy attorney general, warned lawmakers that the government's efforts to erode the independence and scope of the judiciary undermines its best defence against the scrutiny of the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice.

If implemented, these changes would alter "the perception of the justice system as professional, independent and apolitical," Noam said.

"This could affect Israel's ability to cope with the challenges of the international legal system," Noam added, saying that "not everything can be elaborated upon in such a public debate."

Israeli reservists, including those in the air force, are threatening to refuse "to comply with call-ups or with certain directives" as the Israeli public protests against what many call a "judicial coup," as reported by Haaretz.

"Reserve pilots and navigators say crew members increasingly seek to postpone reporting for training days in their squadrons," according to the paper.

Among the air force squadron WhatsApp groups, "the calls for refusal to serve are spreading like wildfire."

Reservists are concerned "that new laws may make reserve pilots more vulnerable to legal action abroad," *Haaretz* added.

Israeli defence ministry legal advisers told lawmakers during the closed-door meeting that "if the judiciary is weakened ... the state's claim to robust investigatory and legal mechanism[s] that make external intervention unnecessary will also be weakened."

Israeli air force pilots could therefore "be first in the sights of the court in The Hague," as *Haaretz* made clear.

If international justice wasn't a rigged game, the US personnel whose fingerprints are all over Israel's crimes wouldn't be far in line behind them.

Ali Abunimah contributed reporting and analysis. Maureen Clare Murphy is senior editor of *The Electronic Intifada*.

Gaza families hit hard by earthquakes

Yasmin Abusayma

Majdi Darabih used to feel a sense of relief that his son Yousif had moved to Turkey. During Israel's major attacks on Gaza, Majdi took comfort in the knowledge that Yousif was safe from harm.

All that changed with the earthquakes which caused devastation in Turkey and Syria on 6th February. Yousif had spoken to his family the previous day. Yet when news of the disaster broke, they had no details about his situation.

"We posted his photo on social media to try and check on him," said Majdi. "We hoped he was still alive. But unfortunately we heard on 9th February that his body had been found."

Yousif was 28.

After growing up in Jabaliya refugee camp, north of Gaza City, he received a scholarship to study medicine in Turkey, emigrating there in 2013. Qualifying as a doctor a few years ago, he lived with his brother Usama in the coastal city of Samsun.

A few months ago, Yousif moved to Antakya, the capital of Hatay province. The medical centre where he had taken a job cared for refugees uprooted by the war in Syria.

According to his family, Yousif lived on the fourth floor of a seven-floor building. "The whole building was completely destroyed," his father Majdi noted. Majdi had hoped that Yousif would return to Gaza and work in local hospitals. Instead, Yousef's body has been brought back in a white burial shroud.

"My heart is broken," Majdi said.

Many people in Gaza have friends or relatives living in Turkey.

My sister-in-law Manal Ismail is among them. She had a narrow escape.

Just before the earthquakes occurred, she visited a friend in the city of Mersin. Manal had barely returned to Istanbul – where she lives – when she heard about the earthquake and learned that Mersin was among the areas affected.

"We checked on our friend to make sure she is OK," Manal said, adding that she felt "really lucky" she was no longer in Mersin.

Manal, a mother of two, moved to Turkey in 2016. She had previously lived through three major Israeli offensives against Gaza.

The earthquakes that have occurred in Turkey this month have prompted her to make the same kind of preparations that Gaza families make when under Israeli bombardment. She has, for example, placed key documents in a bag that can be grabbed if she suddenly needs to evacuate her home.

"I don't know how to feel," Manal said. "I felt very sad when I saw all the people running away, leaving everything behind. I cannot imagine what it would be like to run away from my home, with my kids."

"I CAN'T SLEEP"

Abdulkarim Abu Jalhoum had been a taxi driver in Gaza. Finding it extremely difficult to make ends meet, he left for Turkey 12 years ago. He found a job with a wood factory in Antakya, with his family later joining him. Abdulkarim, his wife Fatima and their four children were all killed on 6th February.

Their relatives back in Beit Lahiya, northern Gaza, learned what had happened to the family from a friend of Abdulkarim. The building where they lived had collapsed, his friend informed them.

The youngest member of the family, 3-year-old Muhammad, was taken alive from the remains of the building. Tragically, he died in hospital.

"We never imagined that the whole family would die," said Ramzi, Abdulkarim's brother. The family moved into a new apartment about six months ago.

Like so many other victims, the family lived in a building that was not designed to withstand earthquakes.

"My brother did not have enough information when he rented the apartment," Ramzi said. "As long as it was nice and affordable, other things did not matter for a big family like his. If you want to have a good house in Turkey, you need to pay extra."

The Electronic Intifada

Red Books Day

Marx, Engels and Byron

Nick Wright

Two books take us back to the middle of the 19th century – the poetry of Byron and the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.

It was perfect timing. Just as a chain of democratic revolutions against the tyrannies and despotic royal regimes of Europe began, two young Germans, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, penned *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*. It appeared in print on February 21, 1848.

Marx and Engels later recounted: "The Communist League, an international association of workers, which could, of course, be only a secret one, under conditions obtaining at the time, commissioned us, the undersigned, at the Congress held in London in November 1847, to write for publication a detailed theoretical and practical program for the party.

"Such was the origin of the following manifesto, the manuscript of which travelled to London to be printed a few weeks before the February [French] Revolution [in 1848]."

1848 – the year of revolutions – was marked in London by a massive Chartist manifestation for democracy.

In the country where capital first triumphed over feudalism, the instruments of government remained firmly rooted in this feudal past, while only men of property had a vote.

The procession carrying the signatures to the People's Charter reached Kennington Common in south London at 11am.

Armed police and military guarded the bridges to Parliament, the palace and the City while thousands of working people gathered on the common.

The *Illustrated London News* report, detailed but hostile in tone, recounted: "Here had already assembled the Irish confederalists and the various bodies of the trades of London, who had intimated their intention of joining in the demonstration.

"These had taken their position in numerical order on the Common, having arrived from their different rendezvous some time previously.

"Each trade had its emblematic banner, and the Irish confederalists displayed a very splendid green standard emblazoned with the harp of Erin, and the motto 'Erin go bragh,'" and, "Many of the members and their partisans wore rosettes of red, green, and white, the colours of the Convention" – also, as the *News* conspicuously failed to note, of the British republic.

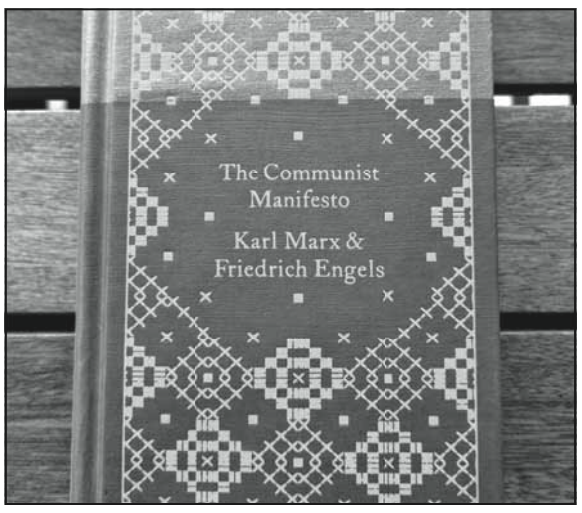
The leader of London's trade unions and trade union representative on the Charter's national executive was the blacklisted tailor William Cuffay, son of a freed slave from St Kitts, and a woman from the Medway Towns.

In the repression that followed, he was tried for conspiring to wage war on Queen Victoria and transported to Australia for 21 years.

His comrades in the London Convention send him on his way with a copy of Byron's poetry "as a token of their sincere regard and affection for his genuine patriotism and moral worth."

This year, on February 21, we celebrated Red Books Day, following the example set by left-wing Indian publishers who, in 2020, suggested that people throughout the world should mark Red Books Day with readings of the *Communist Manifesto* in their own languages.

More than 30,000 people from South Korea to



Venezuela joined the public reading of the *Manifesto* in their own languages.

The epicentre of Red Books Day was in the four Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana, where the bulk of the public readings took place.

In Tamil Nadu, 10,000 participated in a Red Books festival.

Peasant organisations led by the Communist Party of Nepal, and the Landless Workers' Movement in Brazil held readings.

In Havana, Lesotho, Argentina and South Africa the idea caught on.

At Studio Safdar in Delhi, the *Manifesto* was read in many Indian and European languages, a tribute not only to the text itself but to International Mother Language Day, which also falls on February 21.

Accounts have it that many people reported that this was the first time that they opened a book by Marx and that they were enthused to read the captivating prose; this has drawn them to start study circles of Marxist literature.

The success of the initiative has given birth to the idea of an International Union of Left Publishers as a network which will anchor an annual Red Books Day celebration.

Britain's left-wing publishers Manifesto Press will celebrate Red Books Day with a giveaway of five free e-books from its catalogue.

The exorbitant costs of posting books abroad mean Manifesto Press, for the moment, can only offer our titles to overseas readers as e-books.

The launch of our new website makes the bulk of its backlist available to a global readership in affordable e-book form and introduces new lines of apparel with a progressive message.

To mark the launch, every book in print is offered to the British market with a 10 per cent discount.

Available for free to download are *An Economy for the People* edited by Jonathan White, which brought together a collective of radical economists and writers to anticipate the 2017 Labour manifesto; Alexandra Kollantai's essay on "International Women's Day"; the first English publication of *The Woman Worker* by NK Krupskaya; John Foster's *The Councils of Action 1920 and the British Labour Movement's Defence of Soviet Russia* and *US interventions in Latin America* by Henry Suarez.

Visit Manifesto Press at **www.manifestopress.coop**.

Morning Star ✪

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Complexities /kəmplˈɛksɪtiz/

Readers who lived in a share house during their student days may remember instant tidying for parties. One top tip for student house-dwellers in a hurry to make the place look nice is to pile all the rubbish in one corner of the room and throw a nice blanket over it, hoping your guests will think it's a charming piece of furniture, albeit probably one they shouldn't try sitting on.

In speaking about the terrifying possibility that people with large superannuation balances *might* lose the tiniest part of the massive tax concessions they get, some commentators like to talk about the complexities of the super system. Nice blanket thrown, let's move on, and hope nobody looks underneath.

Class-focused /klˈɑːs - /fˈəʊkəsd/

We Australians like to think we are an egalitarian bunch. Classes and castes are for other countries. Ruling class Australians especially like the rest of us to think that. So it's considered bad manners to talk about a class system in this country. However, there is one situation in which the dreaded word "class" will often be deployed – when it looks as though the class with the most is in danger of losing a privilege. Hence two of our lovely progressive (cough) Teal Independents have piped up to show that they know who lives in the seats they represent, and which side their bread is buttered on.

Take a bow Allegra Spender, Independent Member for Wentworth in NSW (the nation's wealthiest electorate) who has called the government "class-focused" for daring to mention how much the extremely rich are going to avoid in tax. Say hi, Zoe Daniels, Independent member for Goldstein in Melbourne (also well-heeled) who has described the mere possibility of making superannuation less of a rort as a "class war tactic".

If only, Allegra and Zoe, if only.

Families /fˈæmɪlɪz/

Some people miss their families if they're away. Others wish they could get away from their families. Australian conservative politicians have the best families of all. No, no, not the actual families who grin like maniacs in the pictures that pollies release, beaming while the would-be leader sings *April Sun In Cuba* or stands next to a hills hoist. Not the families politicians go to spend more time with when they've been forced to resign. The best families are the invisible ones politicians can talk about when they want some imaginary wholesomeness on their side. Just like "millions of Australians" (see previous Weasle Words), but not much like real families, these families are on your side without any arguments.

Wars /wˈɔːz/ (over)

Actual wars are no joking matter. They're a deeply horrible thing, which is why everyone is usually quite happy when they're over. When a war finishes, it can seem quite offensive to ask questions about it.

Wanting a bit of that seriousness is probably why Australian politicians and their attendant commentators quite like declaring that some argument is, not just a war, but a series of wars. More than one war! That sounds like something we should be really glad is over. Hence we've had history wars, education wars, culture wars, and climate wars.

The history wars either fizzled out because the guys who kept saying Aboriginals hadn't been warred against or stolen paused for breath, or kept going on depending on how you view things. Julia Gillard announced the end of the education wars with a typically timid attempt to make education funding a mite fairer. The Albanese government and various optimistic commentators are announcing the end of the climate wars because instead of a Coalition government that is actively hostile to any form of carbon emissions reduction, we have an ALP government that pretends it's reducing carbon emissions, a step in the right direction that we hope the atmosphere appreciates (it won't). The culture wars have been quiet since Matt Canavan berated the Wiggles for giving a Black Australian a job, but it's only a matter of time. When someone announces the end of a non-war War, we are expected to feel the same sort of unquestioning gratitude that people feel towards great leaders who end real wars. As the song had it: War! What is it good for?

(turns out the answer is "distraction")

Lumumba
The murder of an African hero

Marcus Browning

The Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba in Brussels, 26th January 1960. Photo: Herbert Behrens (ANEFO) – Public domain.

17th January marked 62 years since the brutal assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the leader of the Congolese independence struggle and one of the most impassioned critics of the colonial oppression of Africa.

Lumumba was among the most courageous and principled figures in a generation of young nationalist leaders who came forward in the second half of the 20th century to claim freedom from European colonialism.

His assassination took place less than seven months after the Congo had declared its independence, with Lumumba as its first Prime Minister.

Determined to deny supporters of Congolese liberation even a corpse around which they could rally, the order was given to obliterate every physical trace of Lumumba. So the Belgian soldiers set about the grisly task of destroying the remains using axes, saws, acid and fire.

Belgian colonialism had deliberately kept the African population of the Congo untrained and uneducated, reduced to the status of beasts of burden for the extractive industries that looted the country's vast mineral and other natural wealth.

On the eve of independence, the Congo, a territory larger than Western Europe, had no African army officers, only three African managers in the entire civil service, and only 30 university graduates.

Yet Western investments in Congo's mineral resources (uranium, copper, gold, tin, cobalt, diamonds, manganese, zinc) were colossal. These investments meant that the West was determined to keep control over the country beyond independence.

The Belgians attempted to organise the transfer of power in a way that would ensure that "independence" would at best be a formal fiction. They fostered tribal and ethnic differences to splinter the independence movement.

Of 120 different parties, most of them regionally or ethnically based, only one, the Mouvement National Congolais or the MNC, led by Lumumba, favoured a centralised government and a Congo united across ethnic and regional lines.

Following widespread rioting and strikes in 1959, the colonial power plucked Lumumba from a Belgian colonial jail where he had been beaten and tortured for advocating independence. He was flown to Brussels to participate in round-table discussions on Congolese independence.

The Belgians hoped the talks would smooth the way for a painless transition to a regime that would leave Belgium's financial interests in the Congo intact, while transferring the trappings of state power from the white colonialists to a new, pliable native elite.

In the midst of a ceremony in which the Belgians had congratulated themselves on successfully civilising the Congolese and preparing them for self-rule, Lumumba spelled out in graphic terms the reality of colonial oppression. Describing Belgian rule as 80 years of "humiliating slavery which was imposed upon us by force," Lumumba went on:

"We have known harassing work, exacted in exchange for salaries which did not permit us to eat enough to drive away hunger, to clothe ourselves, or to house ourselves decently, or to raise our children as creatures dear to us ...

"We have known ironies, insults, blows that we endured morning, noon and night, because we are negroes ... We have seen our lands seized in the name of allegedly legal laws, which in fact recognised only that might is right ...

"We will never forget the massacres where so many perished, the cells into which those who refused to submit to a regime of oppression and exploitation were thrown."

Lumumba's forthright demands for economic independence, social justice, and political self-determination, and his hostility to a political set-up based upon tribal divisions, which the colonialists had effectively used to divide and rule Africa, sealed his fate.

Shortly after independence, Katanga province, the main mining region, declared itself a separate state under Moises Tshombe, who acted under the protection of Western mining interests and the Belgian military. Belgium sent its army back into the former colony, with the alleged aim of protecting its nationals.

Lumumba's threat to appeal for Soviet aid as a last resort in his effort to free the country of the continuing domination of the Belgian mining interests and Belgian troops, gave Washington the pretext for allying with the old colonial power in seeking his elimination.

Lumumba invited in UN peacekeeping forces, but they too subordinated themselves to the machinations of Belgium and the US, refusing to take any action to prevent the murder of the new Prime Minister.

In 2001 an all-party Belgian Parliamentary commission of inquiry acknowledged that Belgium had covertly channelled funds and arms to Katanga. It concluded that authorities in Brussels and Belgium's King Baudouin in particular knew of the plans to kill Lumumba but did nothing to save him.

The report put much of the blame on Baudouin, who had conveniently died in 1993. It alleged that the King pursued his own post-colonial policy without the knowledge of the Belgian government.

Unfortunately for this facile explanation, other investigations have clearly revealed that the assassination of Lumumba was the direct result of orders given by the Belgian government and the Eisenhower administration in the US, acting through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and local clients financed and "advised" by Brussels and Washington.

A book by Flemish historian Ludo de Witte, *De Moord Op Lumumba* (*The Murder of Lumumba*), cites a telegram sent three months before Lumumba's death from Count Harold d'Aspremont Lynden, then Belgium's Minister for African Affairs, to Belgian officials in the Congo:

"The main aim to pursue in the interests of the Congo, Katanga, and Belgium is clearly Lumumba's definitive elimination," said the memorandum.

Given that the Congolese leader had already been deposed from power and placed under house arrest at the time, there was no mistaking the meaning of these words.

Also in 2001, the US government released archival material related to the Kennedy assassination that included an interview with the White House minute-taker under the Eisenhower administration, Robert Johnson.

In a meeting held with security advisers in August 1960, only two months after Congo achieved its formal independence from Belgium, Eisenhower ordered the CIA to "eliminate" Lumumba, according to Johnson's account. There was a stunned silence for about 15 seconds and the meeting continued," Johnson recalled.

The CIA's director, Allen Dulles, referred to the Congolese leader as a "mad dog". Among the American agents on the ground in the Congo was a young CIA man working under diplomatic cover, Frank Carlucci, who tried to work his way into Lumumba's confidence in the months before the murder.

Carlucci went on to become National Security Advisor and Defence Secretary in the Reagan administration and the chairman of the Carlyle Group, the influential merchant bank that included George Bush Sr among its directors.

According to Larry Devlin, then the CIA station chief in Leopoldville (now Kinshasa), the agency's chief technical officer arrived in the African nation shortly after the "elimination" order from Eisenhower. With him he brought a tube of poisoned toothpaste that was to be placed in the Congolese leader's bathroom.

The improbable plot was dropped, however, in favour of a more direct method. Lumumba was delivered into the hands of his bitterest political enemy, Moises Tshombe, the secessionist leader of Katanga.

While Tshombe became Prime Minister after Lumumba's murder, his reign did not last long. In 1965, Joseph Mobutu, the Congolese army leader who handed Lumumba over to his executioners, staged a bloodless coup, inaugurating a 32-year dictatorship which was legendary for its corruption and greed.

Under Mobutu, the Congo – renamed Zaire – became Washington's closest ally on the continent and served as a staging area for the USA's counter-revolutionary interventions against liberation movements in southern Africa. ✪

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