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"Defuse climate time-bomb"

Anna Pha

"This is the earth's last chance to avoid climate disaster," warns the Intergovernmental UN Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The IPCC in its latest report calls for "Deep, rapid, and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions." The collective failure of world governments to keep even their inadequate promises, says the IPCC, has the world heading towards a catastrophic 3.2 degree rise by 2100.

Launching the IPCC's Synthesis Report on 20th March 2023, UN Secretary-General António Guterres described it as a "survival guide for humanity," a "how-to-guide to defuse the climate time tomb."

The Synthesis Report caps off seven years of in-depth assessments on various topics and six previous reports, involving 700 scientists over six years, drawing on tens of thousands of scientific studies. It was signed off by 195 countries, including Australia. (See page 4 for background to report.)

"The challenge today has become even greater due to a continued increase in greenhouse gas emissions. The pace and scale of what has been done so far, and current plans, are insufficient to tackle climate change," the IPCC warns.

"Vulnerable communities who have historically contributed the least to current climate change are disproportionately affected."

More than a century of burning fossil fuels has resulted in more frequent and more intense extreme weather events that have caused increasingly dangerous impacts on nature and people in every region of the world.

This has had profound adverse effects on food and water security, human health and on economies and society with related losses and damages to nature and people.

The report attributes human-caused climate change to more than a century of net greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from energy use, land use and land-use change, lifestyle and patterns of consumption, and production.

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MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION

"Mitigation policies have contributed to a decrease in global energy and carbon intensity, with several countries achieving GHG emission reductions for over a decade. Low-emission technologies are becoming more affordable, with many low or zero emissions options now available for energy, buildings, transport, and industry."

"Adaptation planning and implementation progress has generated multiple benefits, with effective adaptation options having the potential to reduce climate risks and contribute to sustainable development."

There has been an increase in finance for mitigation and adaptation, but it falls short of needs, which is constraining the implementation of adaptation options, especially in developing countries.

"Climate resilient development integrates adaptation and mitigation to advance sustainable development for all, and is enabled by increased international cooperation including improved access to adequate financial resources, particularly for vulnerable regions, sectors and groups, and inclusive governance and coordinated policies ..."

"The choices and actions implemented in this decade will have impacts now and for thousands of years."

The report calls for the sharing of policy measures and adequate finance with significant investment in adaptation.

It says that changes in the food sector, electricity, transport, industry, buildings, and land-use can reduce greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, they can make it easier for people to lead low-carbon lifestyles, which will also improve health and wellbeing.

EQUITY

"Almost half of the world's population lives in regions that are highly vulnerable to climate change. In the last decade, deaths from floods, droughts and storms were 15 times higher in highly vulnerable regions," said Aditi Mukherji, one of the 93 authors of the Synthesis Report.

"We live in a diverse world in which everyone has different responsibilities and different opportunities to bring about change. Some can do a lot while others will need support to help them manage the change," the report said.

"Prioritising equity, climate justice, social justice, inclusion and just transition processes can enable adaptation and ambitious mitigation actions and climate resilient development."

The report also looks at the impact on Indigenous peoples. "Cultural losses, related to tangible and intangible heritage, threaten adaptive capacity and may result in irrevocable losses of sense of belonging, valued cultural practices, identity and home, particularly for Indigenous Peoples and those more directly reliant on the environment for subsistence."

COMMON BUT DIFFERENTIATED

It is thirty years since the Rio Earth Summit which adopted the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC) which recognised "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities" of its signatories. These differentiated responsibilities are based on the difference in social and economic conditions between developed countries and developing and least developed ones. They take into consideration the level of development, circumstances, and capacity of parties to the UNFCC.

Continued on page 2

5

Right to housing

7

Nuclear waste in South Australia

8

Queensland police corruption report

There will be no *Guardian* on 10th April due to the Easter long weekend.

Guardian

Issue 2047 3rd April, 2023

Rules-based international order: Whose rules?

Having rules and keeping them sounds like a good thing. Rules keep our roads safe. All our sports have rules. Rules mean other people don't just do what they like when they like. So if rules are usually good, a rules-based international order should be good too. As with all other kinds of rules, the questions to ask before we accept the rules are: Whose rules is the order based on? Who enforces the rules? How are the rules enforced?

You're not going to win any prizes for guessing that international rules serve the interests of the USA. It's our planet's main superpower despite having less than five percent of the world's population. The US has the world's largest economy, spends more on its military than the next four countries, and through its transnational corporations, has business interests and employees almost everywhere.

It has 800 military bases in 80 countries. Through one-sided sanctions, it can punish other countries from doing business in ways it doesn't like – for example if Australian companies decide to trade with Cuba, the supposedly free-market loving US will come down upon them like a sack full of hammers, in support of their 63-years-and-counting blockade.

With all this power, you might wonder why the US bothers supporting any kind of rules other than "do what we like." Well, its power is not infinite – just ask the Vietnamese. The US uses the "rules-based order" to extend its power, and to lean on and bully other countries to cooperate where it would be a hassle to force them to do it.

There are carrots as well as sticks, in terms of access to US markets (some readers may remember when John Howard accepted some concessions on wheat imports in return for Australia's full support of the disastrous and criminal Gulf War in 2003).

Countries that do the United States' bidding dress the subservience as an "alliance," and claim it's something we choose. Of course, Australians never ever get to vote on this. We get to choose between the two major parties that both think the "alliance" is a fact of nature.

The rules-based order is rationalised as a good trade-off, cooperation with the US in return for peace and security. Right-wing Lowy Institute writes that the Rules-Based International Order is "often credited with having delivered 70 years of peace and security," providing we're willing to overlook Vietnam (where the US dropped more bombs than had been dropped in all of WW2 in a single year). Or Korea. Or Afghanistan. Or… you get the picture.

The Rules-Based International Order has been in the press lately because it's threatened. Apparently China is threatening the Order by being an "indispensable nation" but hostile to "liberal values." These are the values that are important to the United States except when they aren't. China is a direct challenge to the so-called order because it provides a living alternative to the profit-based system of capitalism.

President Xi Jinping recently said: "We should work together to reform and develop the global governance system and make the international order more just and equitable as we advance humanity's modernisation in an environment of equal rights, equal opportunities, and fair rules for all."

There's nothing there that an Australian politician couldn't comfortably say. The difference is in actions. Australia is about to spend millions on making runways modified for American B-52 bombers, and billions on buying nuclear-powered submarines from them.

The Peoples Republic of China, on the other hand, acts in the interests of the Chinese people. No wonder the US thinks it's out of order.

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STOP AUKUS!

WA protest

A vocal and forceful protest demonstration took place at 8 in the morning of 21st March outside the Western Australian Defence Forum (admevents.com.au/western-australia-defence-forum) in Rockingham WA, on the shore of Cockburn Sound not far from where American and British nuclear armed submarines now come and go at an increased frequency.

Organised by the growing Stop AUKUS - WA organisation, the demonstration, with colourful hand-painted banners, reminded army, navy, and arms industry delegates entering the conference hall about the dangers of nuclear weapons and nuclear waste in Cockburn Sound.

Among the speakers of the budding partners in an emergent military-industrial complex were: The Minister for Defence Industry; BAE Systems; Brigadier Chaloner; Commander Ingham, Navy; Lieutenant Colonel Bryden; Defence & Space, AUSTRADE; USAsia Centre; Babcock; SME Connect; the Mayor, City of Rockingham; Lendlease; Ventia; Director, Defence Science Centre; Defence West; Defence Research & Engagement, Edith Cowan University; Director, UWA Defence & Security Institute; ALARP Director; Defence & Space, Curtin University; WA Defence Workforce Strategy; Ai Group; and WSP.

This shows the growing investment in and the coalescing of those interested in war industries, now seeking to benefit from the cash splash by the government in weapons of war.

Jo Vallentine (ex-Senator of the Nuclear Disarmament Party, then the Greens) and STOP AUKUS WA organisers Sam Wainwright and James Mumme, spoke about the dangers of war, nuclear waste, and the waste of resources on weapons that could be used for health; they were interviewed by the media, and led chants that emphasised "Money for hospitals, not war" and no nuclear submarines.

CPA activists were well represented as were those from Socialist Alliance, the Quakers, Greens WA, environmental groups, and others. Future planned actions include participation in the Palm Sunday rally on 2nd April, which has reinserted peace as one of its twin-themes this year, as well as May Day on 30th April. ✪

"Defuse climate time-bomb"

Continued from page 1

The developed countries have a responsibility to assist developing and least developed ones by funding insurance and transfer of technology to enable poorer and less developed ones meet to specific needs and concerns arising from the adverse effects of climate change and to implement response measures.

From the very outset, at the Rio Earth Summit and every summit since, there has been a fierce struggle between the rich polluting countries and the developing and least developed countries who feel the brunt of climate change.

The rich countries are still holding humanity back.

ACCELERATE ACTIONS

The IPCC calls for "climate resilient development" which involves integrating measures to adapt to climate change with actions to reduce or avoid GHG emissions in ways that provide wider benefits.

At the launch of the report, Guterres presented a plan for countries to hit the fast-forward button on their net-zero deadlines, in line with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in light of different national circumstances.

In particular, leaders of developed countries must commit to reaching net-zero as close as possible to 2040 and emerging economies as close as possible to 2050. Australia's target of net zero by 2050 falls short of what is called for.

"Every country must be part of the solution. Demanding others move first only ensures humanity comes last," Guterres said. The Secretary-General also called for a number of other necessary actions:

No new coal, the phasing out of coal by 2030 in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, and 2040 in all other countries.

Ending all international public and private funding of coal.

Ensuring net-zero electricity generation by 2035 for all developed countries and 2040 for the rest of the world.

Ceasing all licensing or funding of new oil and gas – consistent with the findings of the International Energy Agency.

Stopping any expansion of existing oil and gas reserves.

Shifting subsidies from fossil fuels to a just energy transition.

Establishing a global phase down of existing oil and gas production, compatible with the 2050 global net-zero target.

AUSTRALIA

The Communist Party of Australia strongly advocates for these measures as do the Australian Greens and a number of teal independents in Parliament.

Both Labor and the Coalition remain steadfast in their opposition to halting new or phasing out existing fossil fuel extraction. Australia's 43 per cent emissions reduction target by 2030, along with net zero by 2050, does not meet the demands of science. Yet the Australian government's representatives signed onto the final IPCC report.

Australia is the world's biggest exporter of liquefied natural gas and the second-largest coal exporter. There are 116 new fossil fuel projects on the federal government's list waiting for approval.

Last week the Australian Greens successfully negotiated with the government for the 215 biggest polluters to have a hard cap on emissions under the safeguards mechanism. Coal and gas corporations will not be able to buy their way out of the cap with offsets under the safeguard mechanism.

"We've stopped many of the 116 new coal and gas projects in the pipeline from going ahead, pollution will actually go down, and we've derailed the Beetaloo and Barossa gas fields," Greens leader Adam Bandt said.

This a significant breakthrough considering the hold the fossil fuel sector has over governments, but it is only the beginning. The government's priorities are still wrong. The $368 billion AUKUS submarines must be cancelled and measures to address climate change prioritised.

Capitalism, driven by the profit motive and corrupted politicians cannot save humanity. Only socialism with a planned economy has the potential to do so.

Evo Morales, Bolivian President told the first World People's Congress on Climate Change in 2009: "There are two ways forward: Either save capitalism or save Mother Earth."

This is humanity's last chance. ✪

"Worst deal in all history"

Prabir Purkayastha

The recent Australia, US, and UK $368 billion deal on buying nuclear submarines has been termed by Paul Keating, a former Australian Labor prime minister, as the "worst deal in all history." It commits Australia to buy conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines that will be delivered *in the early 2040s*. These will be based on new nuclear reactor designs yet to be developed by the UK.

Meanwhile, starting from the 2030s, "*pending approval from the US Congress*, the United States intends to sell Australia three Virginia class submarines, with the potential to sell up to two more if needed." (Trilateral Australia-UK-US Partnership on Nuclear-Powered Submarines, 13th March 2023; emphasis mine)

According to the details, this agreement commits Australia to buy from the US eight new nuclear submarines, to be delivered from the 2040s through the end of the 2050s. If nuclear submarines were so crucial for Australia's security, for which it broke its existing diesel-powered submarine deal with France, this agreement provides no credible answers.

For those who have been following the nuclear proliferation issues, the deal raises a different red flag. If submarine nuclear reactor technology and weapons-grade (highly enriched) uranium are shared with Australia, it is a breach of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to which Australia is a signatory *as a non-nuclear power*. Even the supplying of such nuclear reactors by the US and the UK would constitute a breach of the NPT. This is even if such submarines do not carry nuclear but conventional weapons as stated in this agreement.

So why did Australia renege on its contract with France, which was to buy 12 diesel submarines from France at a cost of $67 billion, a small fraction of its gargantuan $368 billion deal with the US? What does it gain, and what does the US gain by crossing France, one of its close NATO allies?

FIVE EYES

To understand, we have to see how the US looks at the geostrategy, and how the Five Eyes – the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand – fit into this larger picture. Clearly, the US believes that the core of the NATO alliance is the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada for the Atlantic and the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia for the Indo-Pacific. The rest of its allies, NATO allies in Europe and Japan and South Korea in East and South Asia, are around this Five Eyes core.

What does the US get out of this deal? On the promise of eight nuclear submarines that will be given to Australia two to four decades down the line, the US gets access to Australia to be used as a base for supporting its naval fleet, air force, and even US soldiers.

The words used by the White House are, "As early as 2027, the United Kingdom and the United States plan to establish a rotational presence of one UK Astute class submarine and up to four US Virginia class submarines at HMAS *Stirling* near Perth, Western Australia." Clearly, all the support structures required for such rotations are what a foreign military base has, therefore they will function as US bases.

Who is the target of the AUKUS alliance? This is explicit in all the writing on the subject and what all the leaders of AUKUS have said: it is China. In other words, this is a containment of China policy with the South China Sea and the Taiwanese Strait as the key contested oceanic regions. Positioning US naval ships including its nuclear submarines armed with nuclear weapons makes Australia a front-line state in the current US plans for the containment of China. Additionally, it creates pressure on most Southeast Asian countries who would like to stay out of such a US versus China contest being carried out in the South China Sea.

What is difficult to understand is what Australia gains from such an alignment. China is not only the biggest importer of Australian goods, but also its biggest supplier. In other words, if Australia is worried about the safety of its trade through the South China Sea from Chinese attacks, *the bulk of this trade is with China*. So why would China be mad enough to attack its own trade with Australia?

For the US it makes eminent sense to get a whole continent, Australia, to host its forces much closer to China than 8,000-9,000 miles away in the US. Though it already has bases in Hawaii and Guam in the Pacific Ocean, Australia and Japan provide two anchor points, one to the north and one to the south in the eastern Pacific Ocean region. The game is an old-fashioned game of containment, the one that the US played with its NATO, Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO), and Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) military alliances after World War II.

The problem that the US has today is that even countries like India, who have their issues with China, are not signing up with the US in a military alliance. Particularly, as the US is now in an economic war with a number of countries, not just Russia and China, such as Cuba, Iran, Venezuela, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Somalia. While India was willing to join the Quad – the US, Australia, Japan, and India – and participate in military exercises, it backed off from the Quad becoming a military alliance. This explains the pressure on Australia to partner with the US militarily, particularly in Southeast Asia.

It still fails to explain what is in it for Australia.

It makes sense only if we understand that Australia now sees itself as a cog in the US wheel for this region. And it is a vision of US naval power projection in the region that today Australia shares. The vision is that settler colonial and ex-colonial powers – the G7-AUKUS – should be the ones making the rules of the current international order. And behind the talk of international order is the mailed fist of the US, NATO, and AUKUS. This is what Australia's nuclear submarine deal really means.

Globetrotter ✪

"No AUKUS" rally, Melbourne.

If submarine nuclear reactor technology and weapons-grade (highly enriched) uranium are shared with Australia, it is a breach of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to which Australia is a signatory as a non-nuclear power.

"Port Kembla, not Fort Kembla"

Last month the Maritime Union of Australia's (MUA) Southern NSW Branch Secretary Mick Cross welcomed news that Port Kembla will become a large-scale venue for renewable energy projects with a new proposal for the Port's Outer Harbour to support offshore wind development and other renewable energy projects.

"As the state shifts towards a greater dependency on renewable energy and the price of coal- and gas-fired energy soars, the demand for affordable, sustainable, and clean energy will only increase. Port Kembla's maritime workforce has a massive role to play in that space," said Cross.

NSW Ports' proposal for Port Kembla includes new infrastructure to support the importation and installation of wind turbine equipment for offshore renewable energy projects, as well as meeting future demand for hydrogen projects, and to support green steel production at the nearby Bluescope steelworks.

"The Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone will deliver new investment in offshore and land-based wind farms, large-scale solar projects, battery storage schemes and pumped hydro, all of which will depend on port infrastructure, port services and port workers," Cross explained.

"It's a massive opportunity for our sector to grow and deliver long-term, rewarding and fulfilling employment right here in the Illawarra to generations of seafarers and waterside workers," he said.

However, the union cautioned against Port Kembla becoming the site of one particular potential development, warning that the proposal floated by the former Morrison government to base new nuclear submarines in the harbour would be incompatible with existing operations, let alone any expanded shipping activity arising from renewable energy projects in the region.

"The union's members are excited by the economic and social opportunities on the horizon for Port Kembla in renewable energy, but we also need to ensure those opportunities aren't blocked by the dangerous proposal to turn our harbour nuclear and build a base here for the AUKUS submarines," Cross said.

"The physical and regulatory changes required in Port Kembla to build and operate a nuclear submarine base would not just scare off investor interest in renewable energy, it would put at risk the status quo and all of the jobs that depend on reliable, efficient shipping through our terminals," he explained.

"The MUA wants to secure our region's future through sustainable renewable energy projects that deliver safe, secure, and rewarding jobs throughout the supply chain. Nuclear submarines aren't the future we want for our harbour or the community that depends on it."

Last week the South Coast Labour Council announced that this year's May Day march in Wollongong would take place in Port Kembla. "The battle for Port Kembla has begun," said Labour Council secretary Arthur Rorris, in response to the Albanese government's plans to station AUKUS nuclear submarines at the port.

"The name is Port Kembla, not Fort Kembla," said Rorris. "We will not cop lectures about national interests from the spooks and arms dealers." ✪

The ghost of the ABCC lives on

The federal Labor government might have abolished the union-bashing Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) but its dirty work has been taken up by the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO). The FWO has taken carriage of 35 court cases against the construction union and its officials that had been commenced by the ABCC.

While Labor has reduced the maximum penalties, they are still hefty. The Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) and its officials have been hit by millions of dollars in penalties during the existence of the ABCC and face the possibility of ongoing fines amounting to millions more.

Earlier this month the Federal Court handed down two decisions with penalties totalling hundreds of thousands of dollars.

In the first case the court imposed $114,000 in penalties against the CFMEU and three current and former officials after they "unlawfully disrupted" a Sunshine Coast project site in Queensland. Of that, $88,000 was against the CFMEU, $12,000 against Blake Hynes, and $7,000 against each of Te Aranui Albert and Michael Ravbar.

In addition, the court made "personal payment" orders against Hynes and Ravbar. This means the union cannot pay the fines of these officials.

The first decision of a court to impose "personal payment" orders was appealed against by the union in 2017. In February 2018, the Federal Court found the Fair Work Act empowers courts to impose "personal payment" penalties in relation to monetary penalties under the Act.

"It brings home to that person the reality of a pecuniary penalty which is critical to the attainment of the deterrent effect which is the very point of the penalty," the Federal Court stated in its finding to the appeal brought by the CFMEU.

The aim is to intimidate others with fear of having their homes or other property seized. Maximum penalties for individuals can run into tens of thousands of dollars.

In the second case, the Federal Court imposed $179,000 in penalties against the CFMEU and seven current and former officials – Kurt Pauls, Beau Seiffert, Te Aranui Albert, Blake Hynes, Luke Gibson, Matthew Parfitt, and Royce Kupsch – over alleged breaches of right of entry laws.

This included $85,000 against the CFMEU, $30,000 against Pauls, and $25,000 against Seiffert. The court made personal payment orders in relation to Seiffert and Hynes "given the record of previous contraventions."

The CFMEU has called for the Fair Work Ombudsman to be abolished and replaced with a regulator that is focused on the real issues affecting workers. Incoming CFMEU National Secretary Zach Smith said "Australia's industrial watchdog [FWO] is more like a toothless Chihuahua than any serious workplace regulator.

"The Fair Work Ombudsman's priorities are all wrong. It is fundamentally broken beyond repair. Australian construction workers are facing endemic corporate insolvency, wage theft, and sham contracting. But the ombudsman is prioritising the anti-worker ideological fights of the previous Coalition government. According to PwC's 2019 estimate, construction workers are underpaid $320 million each year.

"We need to scrap the Fair Work Ombudsman and start again. It's time to start from scratch with a body that puts workers first."

The new regulator would:

- Not commence or continue prosecutions against unions and their members for activity that is protected under the relevant ILO conventions;
- Be armed with the power to effectively address security of payment issues;
- Make compliance and enforcement activity a priority including protecting workers' rights and the recovery of unpaid wages and entitlements;
- Be supervised by a board including at least 50 per cent workers' representatives.

The union and its organisers were punished to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars for doing their job – protecting the interests of their members.

Without the ability to take industrial action or the threat of taking such action, trade unions and workers are powerless when confronting employers. The right to take industrial action is a basic human right, recognised under international law, but not under Australian law.

The courts are increasingly applying maximum penalties for union representatives and workers and have introduced the vindictive concept of "personal payments."

Labor has abolished the ABCC. It is time to take the next step of legalising trade union rights such as the right to take industrial action and the right of entry of trade union representatives.

The Communist Party of Australia stands in solidarity with construction workers and their union the CFMEU. In the current environment workers must take it to the streets and demand the Albanese government abolish the ABCC and Registered Organisations Commission in practice. Actions not words!

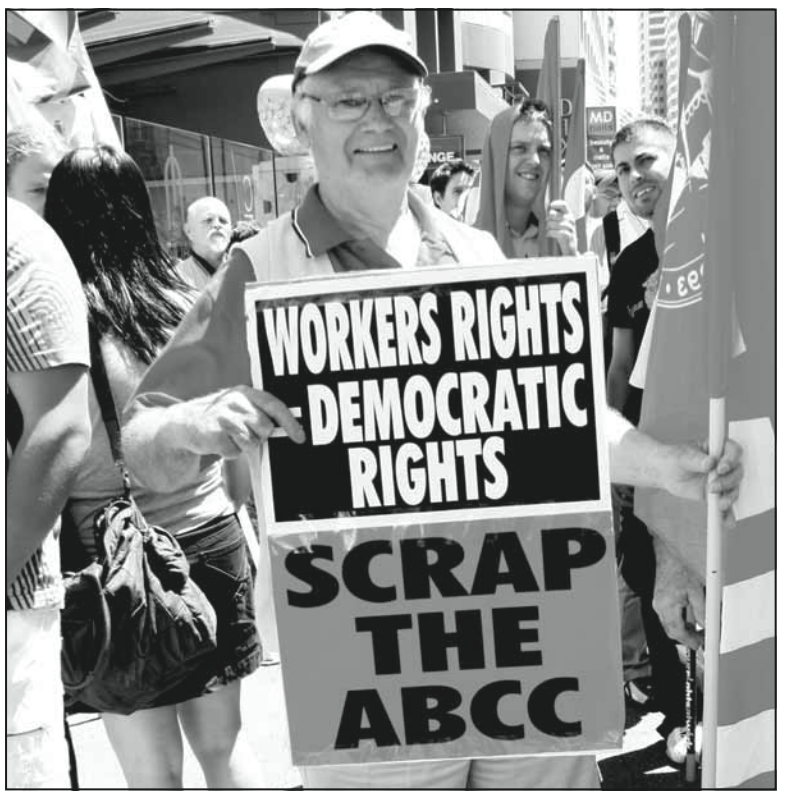


Photo: Anna Pha

Background to IPCC report

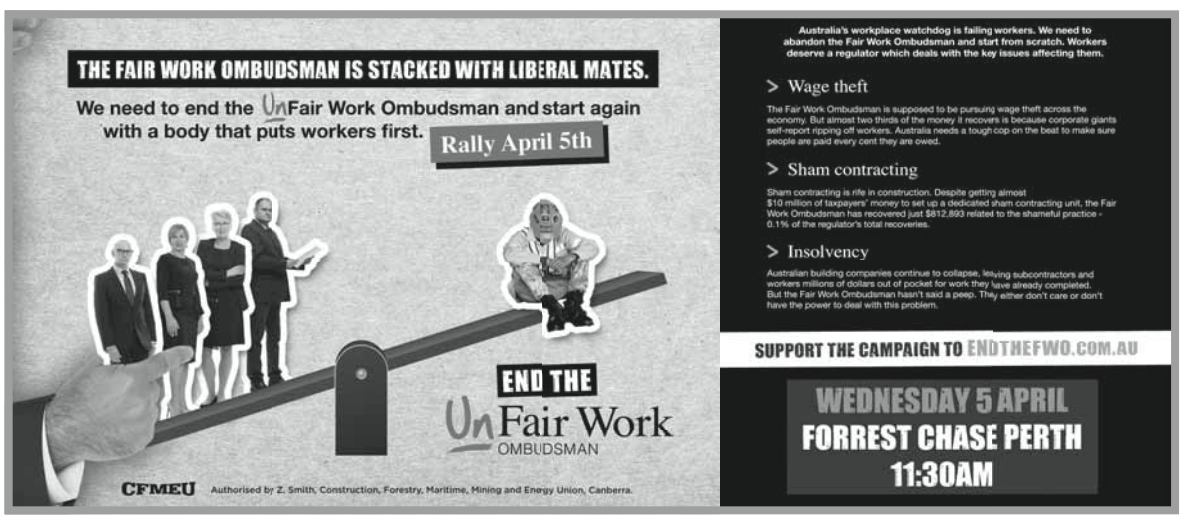
The production of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports by consensus, by scientists and governments means that statements that appear in the report summaries are justified by multiple lines of scientific evidence.

The IPCC is comprised of 195 member countries charged with producing comprehensive and objective assessments of the scientific evidence for climate change under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Work on the latest series of reports commenced in 2015.

Its reports provide governments with scientific information that they can use to develop climate policies and they are also a key input into international climate change negotiations.

In 2021 and 2022 the IPCC produced a series of reports on the physical science basis of climate change: impacts, adaptation and vulnerability, and mitigation. There were three other special reports that tackled focused topics, where governments requested rapid assessments to aid in their decision making. They covered: global warming of 1.5°C, climate change and land, and the ocean and cryosphere in a changing climate.

The Synthesis Report brings together the findings of the previous six reports for policy advisers.



Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) members at the ABC have secured big wins after reaching agreement with management for their new EBA. The deal was reached on 21st March, following marathon talks with managing director David Anderson and a commitment from management that unions would be involved in the final drafting of the agreement before it was put to a staff vote for endorsement. Consequently, two one-hour strikes planned for 22nd March were called off. The new offer provides pay rises totalling 11 per cent over three years, backdated to 1st October last year, plus a $1500 sign-on bonus. Management has also agreed to conduct a transparent audit of the gender and CALD pay gap, to fix the broken buyout system, and to put in place a new pathway for career progression for early and mid-career journalists. Bargaining for the new agreement began in 2022. MEAA members overwhelmingly rejected a first offer from management in November, and in February 90 per cent of members voted in favour of taking protected industrial action up to and including indefinite strikes if a deal could not be reached. Throughout the bargaining campaign, MEAA's membership at the ABC has continued to grow and members have been united in their determination to keep pushing for an acceptable offer. MEAA Media Director Cassie Derrick congratulated union members for their solidarity during the long bargaining period with management. "Clearly, the threat of industrial action has helped to focus ABC management's minds, as has the outpouring of support for our members from ABC viewers and listeners," she said. "ABC management now must begin to rebuild trust with its workforce." Derrick said the new agreement must mark a turning point for the ABC, which for years has been running on a business model of overwork, underpayments, and inequality. "This has never been just about pay," said Derrick. "It's about ensuring a fair go at forging a career at the public broadcaster. The public need and deserve an ABC that is diverse, fair, and equal. It must invest in a workforce that is supported and have sustainable careers in the cities and the regions and for people from diverse backgrounds and women."

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: The mass media response to the meeting in March between Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping was to surround it with a fog of innuendo conjuring up sinister plotting. To clear the fog here's what the two said back in February 2022, when Ukraine's fascist coup government gave the go ahead to host NATO nuclear missiles: "The parties oppose the further expansion of NATO and call for the North Atlantic Alliance to refrain from ideological approaches from the time of the Cold War." The joint Russian-Chinese statement also urged NATO "to respect the sovereignty, security, and interests of other countries."

Right to housing

WA Public Forum at Trades Hall

Photo: Sardaka – Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Richard Titelius

On any given night in Western Australia over 9,000 people can be considered homeless, though many more are homeless and not counted as such. How in such a prosperous state as Western Australia and especially its capital city, Perth, does such a situation arise?

On 5th March 2023, Workers Solidarity WA organised a public forum on the right to housing at Trades Hall in Perth, centring on housing as a right. This forum featured local activists that work in the area bringing first-hand knowledge to share with attendees about what is being done currently in WA and also to provide an opportunity to have a conversation about why Australia is failing to provide basic shelter to its people.

Over 30 people attended the forum, and following the main presentation engaged in a lively question and answer session on the housing question. The session was chaired by the the CPA, who strongly advocated for public housing and against the commodification of housing.

John Berger, the Chair of the Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (WAAEH) said it was a shortcoming of the way homelessness is dealt with in Western Australia that it costs more to have people live in homelessness than to end homelessness by housing people.

People are considered to be chronically homeless if they haven't found a permanent home within six months. People can fall into homelessness for a variety of reasons including losing a job, which is the source of income, mental health reasons, and other personal or family reasons.

It was important to deal with the resourcing of housing provision, to have accurate evidence-based information about who was going into homelessness and who is coming out of homelessness. This would help to determine the type and location of homes to be made available to those requiring a home. The persistence of homelessness and the solutions offered in WA or personal failing that a person becomes homeless.

In countries such as Canada and the United States there are also similar initiatives from the non-government sector to identify and deal with homelessness with a goal to end homelessness rather than just apply band-aid or short-term solutions. In WA the WAAEH has also dealt with regional homelessness for instance in Mandurah, Geraldton, Exmouth, and Albany.

It is not a one size fits all approach, as different groups or cohorts of people have different housing needs, and some groups also require proximity to support services. It's not enough to put put people in renovated shipping containers, apartment blocks, or outer suburban fringe or even as the Lord Mayor of Perth, Basil Zempilas once suggested; to put mattresses in public car parks.

Berger said that that our Western liberal democratic society had lost the notion of housing as a human right and that the profit motive had become paramount.

The second speaker was Sean Kelly of Community Housing Limited whose group provides emergency housing for various groups of people. Sean said that at present much of Perth's emergency housing was located in the Perth city centre and some of it on the city's urban fringe.

It is not helpful for people seeking to maintain their housing if they required support services when they have special needs or a further crisis or incident occurs. Well-developed life skills help people to resist homelessness.

Looking after someone's mental health while they are in community housing helps those people save money as well as those services required when things go off the rails. Sean Kelly said that community housing was provided in remote communities for Aboriginal people in the Western desert close to the South Australian border, to the Kimberley, and to high rise accommodation in Perth.

Housing is managed as an investment proposition rather than a human right like it is in countries such as Finland and Norway. Having property inspections every three months is part of this discourse of managing houses as an investment rather than a sustainable right which all people should have.

In Australia, said Sean Kelly, community housing amounted to only four per cent of the nation's housing stock and was allocated on the basis of economic need rather than social need.

Today in Australia, state and federal governments share the cost of funding social and community housing, but competitiveness is encouraged in the provision of social/community housing to help drive down the cost, instead of providing a comprehensive needs based service.

At present, high interest rates driving up the servicing costs of purchasing a home, is pushing the dream or expectation of owning your own home out of the reach of an ever increasing number of people. It is also unrealistic to keep pushing the urban fringe ever outwards as this increases the cost of living and uses more public and private resources. Social and community housing is the most desirable goal as it will make housing more affordable for a greater number of people.

To achieve this aim said Berger we needed to have longer term leases (i.e. ten years) on more flexible terms which includes tenants not having such frequent inspections and can also being able to make minor alterations to the home and becoming responsible for minor repairs such as fixing a tap or a door handle.

To solve homelessness concluded Berger we needed to shift the narrative on housing from solely being about profits from investments and tax breaks to one of housing being made available as a right to all to fit everyone's needs.

Link to the CPA stance on housing:
cpa.org.au/policy/housing ✪

www.cpa.org.au

PEACE NOTES

Peter Farmer

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has put together six years worth of work by 700 scientists. Thousands of scientific studies were used to make the report. Australia and 194 other countries have signed off on it. The "synthesis report" doesn't split hairs. Earth is well on the way to 3.2 degrees warming by 2100. For anyone thinking that 2100 is a long way away, the report also makes it clear that right now, we are highly likely to go over 1.5 degrees of warming within the next ten years. 1.5 is where the line between "uncomfortable" and "catastrophic" is drawn.

Going over 1.5 could mean "once in a century" events like the bushfires that made air in Australian cities almost unbreathable just three years ago happen on an annual basis. Other consequences would include mass migrations on a scale never before seen as millions of people try to go somewhere habitable.

There is hope. It's possible to keep the temperature rise under 1.5 degrees.

By now, alert readers will wonder why this information is appearing under the title of "Peace Notes," and not "Green Notes." Has there been a mix up? No there hasn't. Here's why.

The IPCC synthesis report is really serious stuff. It requires all developed countries to stop funding coal, and stop using the stuff to generate power by 2030. Developed countries need to get their electricity generation to net zero by 2035. That's going to cost a lot of money. Here's where the Peace Notes headline is justified.

Something else that costs a lot of money is military spending. That's $43 billion a year at last count. Another thing that costs more money than Australia has ever sent overseas in one go, is AUKUS. The starting price of $368 billion, has been called "the biggest transfer of wealth from Australia to another country in its history".

You may have already thought about what we could do with $368 billion. We could certainly spend a quarter of the amount having low cost reliable power from a grid with zero carbon emissions. Modelling from the Australian National University has shown that spending $100 billion to make a national electricity market based on renewables would take 80 per cent of the greenhouse gas emissions out of our economy. That's a lot less money than our government spends subsidising fossil fuel production ($11.6 billion a year), but it's a drop in the ocean compared to AUKUS.

Of course "compared to AUKUS" is the tough part, because most Australian media, with a few honourable exceptions, doesn't compare the spending we have to do to make our planet livable to spending on war. The two issues just aren't in the same box for a lot of commentators who see themselves as mature and serious while they argue for spending more on making war more likely than we have ever spent on trying to stop catastrophic climate change.

So did the *Guardian* get its Peace and Green Notes columns mixed up? No we did not. The money the Albanese government is spending on war is money that can't be spent making Australia a safe place to live in. If you join the CPA in the Peace Budget campaign, if you email politicians about AUKUS, if you attend anti-AUKUS actions, you're not just doing it because you find war unpleasant. You could be opposing AUKUS because you remember the 2019-2020 bushfires, and you don't want that to be an annual event.

Settlers and colonisers

Ahmed Abu Artema*

Photo: pxfuel.com – Public domain

Bezalel Smotrich is one of the main pillars in the current Israeli government. Although generally described as the Finance Minister, his work is not confined to curbing inflation.

His broad portfolio gives him partial responsibility for the defence ministry and a major role in administering Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

A far-right extremist, Smotrich has used his platform to incite violence. Just days after Israeli settlers carried out a pogrom in Huwwara – killing one Palestinian and inflicting huge destruction on homes, businesses and vehicles – Smotrich called for that West Bank village to be "wiped out" by the Israeli state.

That racist statement was denounced internationally. Ned Price, spokesperson for the US State Department, called it "irresponsible" and "repugnant."

Smotrich is not the only member of the Israeli government who supported the crimes of settlers in Huwwara.

Itamar Ben-Gvir, the national Security Minister, was initially silent after the pogrom. Yet it did not take long before his admiration for the perpetrators became clear. Ben-Gvir denounced the detention of two settlers accused of taking part in the pogrom.

Members of Israel's parliament, the Knesset, from Ben-Gvir's Jewish Power party have openly applauded the pogrom. One such lawmaker Zvika Fogel said, "A closed, burnt Huwwara – that's what I want to see."

Limor Son Har-Melech, another Jewish Power elected representative, called the pogrom "the righteous cry of hundreds of Samaria residents." Israel refers to the West Bank as Judea and Samaria.

The Huwwara pogrom took place during a time of mass protests by Israelis against Benjamin Netanyahu and the government he leads, which has declared a war of sorts on the state's high court.

An estimated 250,000 people took to the streets in one day of protest this month, part of an ongoing series of demonstrations. Among those joining the protests have been Yair Lapid, the former Prime Minister, and Benny Gantz, the former Defence Minister. Gantz, then heading Israel's military, oversaw a 2014 attack on Gaza that – in his own words – caused so much destruction that parts of the territory were "returned to the stone ages."

Lapid, Gantz and other politicians now in opposition are seeking to isolate Ben-Gvir and Smotrich. The opposition has portrayed the violence in Huwwara as an example of the extreme racism that is supposedly at odds with its liberal values.

ABNORMAL?

From the Palestinian perspective, the Huwwara pogrom is not something abnormal. Rather, it is the logical result of the Zionist colonial project in Palestine.

Israeli settlers – colonisers would be a more accurate word – are not an outlaw group in Israel. They are a strategic tool in the implementation of policies pursued by successive Israeli governments.

The objectives of those policies have been to steal land and to expel Palestinians.

What is new is that the most hard-line colonisers now occupy a position of immense power. Ben-Gvir and Smotrich are both colonisers themselves, living in settlements that are illegal under international law.

The settlers do not act alone. B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights group, has pointed to how settlers benefit from cooperation. "The settlers carry out the attack, the military secures it, the politicians back it."

B'Tselem has rejected the notion that the Israeli state has somehow lost control. "This is exactly what Israeli control looks like," the group stated, adding that "the Huwwara pogrom was an extreme manifestation of a longstanding Israeli policy."

Violence is necessary to achieve the state's aim of emptying Palestine of its Indigenous population, so that it may be replaced by foreign settlers.

FOUNDED ON MASSACRES

Settlers often do not represent official institutions.

They are, therefore, not confined by rules. They are unrestrained in committing crimes against Palestinians.

The Huwwara pogrom is eerily reminiscent of the violence which occurred in the period leading to Israel's establishment in 1948.

A whole series of massacres were carried out by Zionist forces around that time. The most infamous was the massacre at Deir Yassin, a village in the Jerusalem area.

The April 1948 bloodbath at Deir Yassin placed terror in the hearts of civilians. It was a significant factor in the Nakba, the huge displacement of Palestinians.

Israel is a state founded on massacres.

The current Israeli political dispute is between two camps.

One camp – the hard-line settlers epitomised by Ben-Gvir and Smotrich – clearly and explicitly expresses the truth of the Zionist colonial project. The other camp also believes in the same strategy of relentless colonial violence against Palestinians but paints itself with a coating of liberal values.

That coating makes the second camp preferable for Western governments.

Israel's most prominent "liberals" of the past few decades – Benny Gantz, Ehud Barak, Ehud Olmert, Tzipi Livni – were all involved in killing Palestinian civilians, collective punishment, the construction and expansion of settlements and other efforts to deny basic rights to Palestinians when they were in power.

Jonathan Ofir, a trenchant anti-Zionist commentator, has put it well: "Israelis and everyone else are right to be shocked by the explicit genocidal nature of Smotrich's words. But the righteous, liberal, and indignant Israelis should take a good look in the mirror, to see how much of Smotrich's fascistic vein lives in them."

For more than a year now, there has been a noticeable uptick in Israeli violence in the West Bank. The formation of a new and overtly racist Israeli government, which clearly supports the settlers and encourages more violence against Palestinians, has helped create a certain atmosphere.

That atmosphere is ripe for more depravity on the part of settlers. Nobody would be surprised if the Huwwara pogrom is followed by similar acts of aggression by settlers, who now have greater access to government and feel stronger politically than before.

But there is another story to be told. It is the story of Palestinians, determined to prevent a new Nakba.

The past seven decades have taught Palestinians that the price of resistance is much lower than the price of fear or the price of fleeing.

There has been a noticeable upsurge in resistance activities by Palestinians in recent times. Palestinians are constantly confronting Israel's forces of occupation.

The coming months and years will undoubtedly be painful. We are witnessing an increase in the level of terror practiced by the Israeli colonisers.

But this period also carries many opportunities for a new phase in the Palestinian struggle against the colonisers.

*Ahmed Abu Artema is a Palestinian writer, activist, and refugee from Ramle.

The Electronic Intifada

Hideous purveyor of genocide

Albert Bender

NASHVILLE: Indigenous people and their supporters gathered here on 15th March to protest a celebration for the 256th birthday of the deservedly-maligned seventh president of the United States, Andrew Jackson.

The infamous leader's birthday party was held at the Hermitage, Jackson's historic home in Nashville. The event included children's activities, gallery talks, an annual presidential wreath-laying ceremony at Jackson's tomb, and a keynote address from Nashville Mayor John Cooper.

It must be noted that March is the Memorial Month of the Creek War. The protest started at 11:00 am to coincide with the wreath-laying and the keynote address given by Cooper. The main speaker for the protest was Melba Checote-Eads, a citizen of the Muscogee Creek Nation of Oklahoma who has long resided in Tennessee.

Checote-Eads spoke of the Creek War of 1813-14 in which thousands of the Indigenous were killed by Jackson's armies. The 210th anniversary of the last battle of the war, the Battle of Horseshoe Bend (Tohopeka in the Muscogee Creek language), is on 27th March. At that battle between US militia forces, mostly from Tennessee, and the Muscogee Creeks, hundreds of Indigenous people were killed and hundreds of women and children were taken prisoner.

Throughout the Creek War, Jackson led a war of extermination against non-combatants – women and children – that included the battles of Emuckfaw, Enotochopcq, Tallushatchee, Talladega, and Autosse, culminating with the slaughter at Tohopeka.

After the last battle at Horseshoe Bend/Tohopeka, Jackson's soldiers made bridle reins and razor strops from Indigenous corpses, and further mutilations included cutting off the noses of the dead. Much of the clothing of the slaughtered was sent as souvenirs to the "ladies of Tennessee."

At least three Creek children who survived the battle were taken as "trophies" by Jackson himself. Creek children, particularly little boys, were sold for $20 each as "pets." There is a story current to this very day among Muscogee Creeks that the origin of Jackson appearing on the $20 bill stems from Creek children taken captive being sold as slaves for that price.

Checote-Eads also spoke of the post-war Treaty of Fort Jackson that the Creeks were forced to sign. It ceded over 23 million acres of tribal land to the United States.

Article Nine of the Treaty of Ghent between the US and England ending the War of 1812 (of which the Creek War was considered a part) proclaimed that Indigenous nations who fought against the United States in the war would not lose any land to the US.

What this means is that the Treaty of Fort Jackson was illegal and the Muscogee Creek Nation is still the legal owner of the 23 million acres stolen in southern Georgia and central Alabama.

The so-called celebration of Jackson's birthday was regarded by the protesters as a gross racist insult, as Jackson was a hideous purveyor of genocide against Native people – Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Seminoles – in the 19th century.

His legacy remains to this very day, and many descendants of his victims regard Jackson as an early-day American Hitler. In fact, the German leader is said to have studied the career of Jackson in fashioning the genocidal policies of his Holocaust.

In 2017, then-President Donald Trump showed up in Nashville to celebrate Jackson, calling him his "hero."

The celebration of the birthday of this mass murderer is a racist, reprehensible insult to all Indigenous people of this country in the 21st century. He was also a notorious slaveholder of captive African Americans.

There was an alternative wreath-laying ceremony by Checote-Eads, commemorating not Jackson but rather the Creek people massacred in the war. The signs of the protesters at the event included: "Andrew Jackson Guilty of Genocide," "Andrew Jackson Indian Killer," "Andrew Jackson, an American Hitler," and "Andrew Jackson, Indian Hater."

People's World

Nuclear waste in South Australia

A saga of mismanagement and First Nations suffering

Holding the largest single deposit of uranium anywhere in the world located at Olympic Dam, inevitably, South Australia has been set on the road to involvement with the nuclear industry worldwide. Uranium was first discovered in South Australia at Radium Hill 1906. Since then, apart from mining at Radium Hill and Olympic Dam, there have been atomic weapon tests at Maralinga and rocket firing at Woomera. In addition, there have been restoration attempts at Maralinga in the wake of radioactive contamination and, currently, radioactive waste storage at Woomera on federal government "owned" land.

CPA members marked Hiroshima Day 2012 with a banner drop.

NUCLEAR FUEL CYCLE

During the past century for South Australia the fortunes of the radioactive materials industry have fluctuated, but with steady production, between 2000 and 2021 the value of uranium exports from South Australia amounted to $6.7 billion. However, along with this "achievement" comes an implied obligation to receive spent nuclear material for storage as part of a developing involvement in the nuclear fuel cycle. In fact, during this recent period suggestions were being made in SA, in particular to Labor Party members, that rivers of nuclear waste could become rivers of financial gold for the SA economy as a result of deeper involvement in the nuclear fuel industry. The logistics of the necessary handling and storage processes involved were conveniently lacking in detail, as only the supposed financial benefits were emphasised.

Consequently, an enquiry was sought to address what could be seen as partly a political problem with the state government examining the issue in 2016 when former governor Kevin Scarce, a retired rear admiral, headed a royal commission that recommended the creation of a nuclear waste storage industry in SA.

MARALINGA – "MINOR TRIALS, MAJOR CONTAMINATION"

Since the Maralinga tests conducted by the United Kingdom in 1966 and 1967, South Australia has been facing a significant imposed waste management challenge mainly focused on the Maralinga site. Besides this, there has arisen the human factor which involves not only military personnel from two nations, but more especially miners, for instance from Radium Hill, local inhabitants, notably the true Australian owners of the land and most vulnerable group, the Maralinga Tjarutja people. Miners families have suffered increased rates of lung cancer, stillbirths and higher mortality. In the case of the Maralinga people, many received no warning of the imminent nuclear testing due to cursory pre-testing surveys of the area involved. Post-testing, many have suffered a wide range of serious reactions ranging from flu-like symptoms to blindness, and higher cancer mortality rates.

A commentary on Maralinga by the National Museum of Australia contains this disturbing revelation:

> A letter from Alan Butement, Chief Scientist, Commonwealth Department of Supply, to Walter MacDougall's manager in 1956 stated, "Your memorandum discloses a lamentable lack of balance in Mr McDougall's outlook, in that he is apparently placing the affairs of a handful of natives above those of the British Commonwealth of Nations."

According to *The Nuclear Chain*, "The people, whose health has been compromised for the production of nuclear weapons, they are also Hibakusha."*

Predictably, secrecy levels were strict for the personnel involved. At the risk of imprisonment, "nuclear veteran,"Avon Hudson, virtually became a whistle blower during the 1970s with revelations of inadequate restoration procedures at Maralinga which led to the McLelland Royal Commission (1984–1985). This inquiry exposed not only "significant residual contamination" of the country, but also the deliberate subjection of British and Australian servicemen to fallout from the blasts in order to study "radiological effects." Pilots with inadequate protective gear were ordered to fly through the mushroom cloud as sampling exercises.

As a result of a claim by the traditional owners of poisoning by the tests, in 1994 the Australian government reached a compensation settlement with $13.5 million in settlement with the Maralinga Tjarutja people. As a result of studies by an international multi-disciplinary team it was found that plutonium contamination had persisted in the desert environment despite two major clean-up attempts.

WOOMERA ROCKET RANGE – MISSILES AMID WASTE

Currently, 10 000 drums of mainly low level nuclear waste is being stored at the Woomera Rocket Range, a location principally being used for the testing of such items as missiles, aircraft weapons, drone aircraft, and rockets. The rocket range, the land of ten Aboriginal groups: Maralinga Tjarutja, Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yunkunytjatjara, Antakirinja Matu-Yankunytjatjara Arabana, Gawler Ranges, and Kokatha peoples, is technically held under a crown lease from the SA government to the Department of Defence. Continued waste storage at Woomera seems a distinct possibility; however, transport requirements need to be taken into account. In the past the Port Adelaide CPA Branch has staged protests opposing the shipment of radioactive material through Port Adelaide. As an alternative to Woomera, the proposed Kimba site, possibly for high level waste, has been staunchly challenged in the federal Court by the area's traditional owners, the Barngarla people.

In the 1990s the Royal Australian Air Force realised that Woomera possessed one key advantage in that it was the only land-based test range within the nations of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) large enough for the testing of the new generation of weaponry required for Australia's headlong rush to militarisation, as well as to meet nuclear waste storage obligations.

Current militaristic developments, such as purchasing nuclear powered submarines and AUKUS involvement stand out among the key pressures now linking Australia even more tightly with the international nuclear fuel cycle, whereby South Australia seems targeted to become the national, if not an international, nuclear waste dump.

* Hibakusha – a Japanese word referring to a "bomb affected person."

US maternal death rate highest in developed world

Graham Holton

According to a recent report by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) maternal mortality rose by 40 per cent at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The CDC defines maternal mortality as a death that occurs while pregnant or within 42 days of the end of a pregnancy. The majority of maternal deaths happen shortly after giving birth, when many women return to work, unable to pay for postpartum care.

In the USA the death rate increased to 33.0 women dying per 100,000 live births in 2021, up from 23.8 in 2020. The death rate of Black mothers was three times that of white women. Black women are often employed in low-income jobs that offer little or no health insurance coverage and allow minimal time off with pay for maternity leave. They often work in industries with high chances of exposure to COVID-19, contributing to their higher death rate. In the UK and Europe, the medical procedures associated with childbirth are free. In the US childbirth costs thousands of dollars, even for those covered by insurance. Insurance payments towards pregnancy screenings and post-natal care are minimal.

The maternal mortality rate in the USA was twice that of the UK, Germany and France, and three times higher than in Spain, Italy and Japan. The rate in the USA has been consistently increasing since 2000, while the maternal mortality rate among 37 other developed countries has declined over the same time period.

Joan Costa-i-Font, Professor of Health Economics, Department of Health Policy at the London School of Economics, said much of the blame goes to the systemic problems of high healthcare costs and to the persistent racial and socio-economic divides in the US. This means that low-income populations have higher needs, due to poor health and preventable diseases. Poor diet and limited exercise lead to a high rate of obesity, meaning they have a 20 per cent higher chance of hypertension and heart disease. According to Dr Rochanda Mitchell, "Women are saying, I can't come in for this bleeding, for this headache, because I don't have the support afterward." Without the systems in place to support low-income workers, mothers are forced to ignore these serious health warnings. As the CDC analysis shows, more than 80 per cent of maternal deaths are preventable. There is a need for a vast overhaul of the US health care system.

Further Reading:
US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *Pregnancy-Related Deaths: Data from Maternal Mortality Review Committees in 36 US States, 2017–2019*
cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternal-mortality/docs/pdf/Pregnancy-Related-Deaths-Data-MMRCs-2017-2019-H.pdf

Queensland police corruption report

Graham Holton

In 1987 the Fitzgerald Inquiry, *The Commission of Inquiry into Possible Illegal Activities and Associated Police Misconduct*, began investigations into the corruption by the Queensland police and government ministers.

The inquiry lasted 2 years, with three members of parliament imprisoned and the police commissioner, Sir Terry Lewis, who was also jailed, losing his knighthood. The commission tabled more than 100 recommendations in the Queensland parliament, including the establishment of the electoral and administrative review commission, the criminal justice commission and the need to reform the police force.

The findings contributed to the end of the National Party of Australia's 32 years in power in Queensland. The corruption within the police force was so bad that in an Australian film, *Dirty Deeds* (2002), the American gangster, played by John Goodman, says the corruption was worse than in Chicago. Unfortunately, much needed changes were still forthcoming.

In January 2022 Qld Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk, and Attorney-General and Minister for Justice Shannon Fentiman, announced a new Commission of Inquiry (COI), under Queensland's Crime and Corruption Commission (CCC), to be chaired by retired Supreme Court Judge, Alan Wilson QC and conducted by Tony Fitzgerald QC, who had headed the earlier inquiry into systemic corruption in the Queensland police force 36 years earlier. Fitzgerald QC established the Criminal Justice Commission, renamed the Parliamentary Crime and Corruption Committee, to continue the inquiry. The new commission of inquiry, with the powers of a royal commission, originated from the Palaszczuk government's response to a damning report into the CCC's handling of a Logan City Council case.

In August 2022 Fitzgerald QC handed down 32 recommendations to correct the systemic issues within the CCC, including the need for investigators to seek legal advice before laying charges and strategies to reduce the number of police officers seconded to investigate CCC cases. The Corruption Operations unit included 18 seconded police officers and 11 civilian staff with policing backgrounds. The percentage of seconded police making up the Queensland CCC's workforce was 23 per cent, compared with South Australia's ICAC with 12 per cent, the ACT's Integrity Commission with 6 per cent, WA's CCC with 2 per cent and the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC) at just 3 per cent.

On the 8th March 2023 the CCC delivered its second quarterly report, *Implementation and Delivery of COI Recommendations*, covering 9th November 2022 to 20th January 2023. Its investigation found the Queensland Police Service (QPS) engaged in discriminatory recruitment practices to address the low number of women, 26 per cent, within the QPS to achieve a 50 per cent female recruitment target by October 2018. Females were recruited over male applicants, who had "performed to a higher standard across entry assessments," to achieve the target. It lowered the cognitive assessment standard for female applicants, allowing female applicants, who had failed aspects of the physical assessment, to progress. Such discriminatory practices prevented 2000 male applicants from progressing through the recruitment process. The senior executive of the QPS were allegedly unwavering in their pursuit of the 50 per cent female figure. Disciplinary action against senior

Photo: Kgbo – Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0)

staff was taken to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Services.

On 13th February 2023 the Councillor Conduct Tribunal (CCT) published its findings of misconduct against Toowoomba Regional Council Councillor, Wayne William Cahill, and Brisbane barrister, Salvatore "Sam" Di Carlo. At a Council Meeting in 2017, Cr Cahill allegedly failed to declare that his wife owned land close to land proposed to be acquired by the Toowoomba Regional Council for development. The CCT held that Mr and Mrs Cahill were likely to gain a benefit from the proposed acquisition and development of the land.

In January 2023, a senior Queensland Police officer, from the Operations Support Command, was charged following allegations of "serious" misconduct, allegedly driving under the influence while on duty. The male senior constable, after a two-vehicle crash in Yamanto, had a blood alcohol concentration of 0.177 per cent. The officer was stood down from duty and appeared at Ipswich Magistrates Court in February. The QPS said the Queensland Police Integrity Framework, 2020, commits all members to "consciously being an ethical role model for their peers" requiring them to act "professionally at all times and operating within the boundaries of legal, policy, and organisational constraints."

Following the death in Custody of a 51-year-old Aboriginal man on 9th November 2022, at the Aboriginal Shire of Kowanyama in north Queensland, three police officers were transferred. The Ethical Standards CCC investigation continues.

Further Reading:
Complaints against the behaviour of police officers can be made to the Queensland Police Service and the Crime and Corruption Commission.
Reports can be found at:
ccc.qld.gov.au/publications ✪

Say no to mining between Albany and Denmark, WA

The region between Albany and Denmark WA is under threat due to pending silica sand mining exploration applications, which could severely impact the environment, agriculture, tourism, and water security.

There are pending silica sand mining exploration applications covering an area very close to the beautiful and iconic West Cape Howe National Park, and nearby beaches, located between Albany and Denmark.

The area between Albany and Denmark is known for its rugged coastlines, beautiful beaches, agricultural value, and environment, being part of the South-west biodiversity hotspot. Hundreds of thousands of visitors choose this region every year for experiences such as enjoying the natural beauty, hiking the Bibbulmun Track, cycling the Munda Biddi trail, swimming, surfing, bird watching, rock climbing, paragliding, hang gliding, bushwalking, camping, and fishing. The area includes priority agriculture and general agriculture zones to safeguard the shrinking areas where our food can be grown.

The pending exploration licenses cover parts of Marbelup, Elleker, Torbay, Bornholm and Kronkup. They include over 200 private properties that are mainly farmers and 28 reserves. These licenses would cover parts of Marbelup Brook, and the Albany groundwater area, a Public Drinking Water Source Area that feeds into a designated drinking water catchment, one of the most significant aquifers in this region.

The area of the four proposed licenses extends:

- close to Cosy Corner Beach and the campground;
- close to Lake Powell Nature Reserve, global bird watching hotspot;
- along the Lower Denmark Road, a designated scenic route;
- across multiple tourism-based businesses;
- across the Munda Biddi off-road cycling trail.

Mining in the area puts at risk important agricultural land, water catchments and native habitat.

Threats of mining in this area include:

- dieback spread, biosecurity risks;
- impacts on the Critically Endangered Western Ringtail Possum;
- acid sulfate soil disturbance, contamination of our priority drinking water, lowered water table, land clearing, and run-off into inlets and national parks;
- public health effects due to dust pollution (silicosis), water pollution and noise pollution.

Silica mines typically operate 24 hours a day, with significant infrastructure, noise, lights, and heavy vehicle operations. Silica mines can be expected to have:

- a minimum life of 21 years;
- the use of significant amounts of water per day;
- a processing facility (pollution and emissions) on site;
- road trains to transport processed product to the port of Albany.

The exploration company, Mac Sand Pty Ltd, registered in Western Australia on 21st May 2021 with 4 shareholders from Hong Kong, British Virgin Islands, Coolgardie and Willeton. Just under 80 per cent of shares are held by investors in Hong Kong and the British Virgin Islands, known tax havens. It is probable that mining profits will go overseas, without benefitting Australians.

Change.org
(petition can be signed at
change.org/p/say-no-to-mining-between-albany-and-denmark)

Union workers at popular sushi restaurant "Sushiro" go on strike

"Kaitenzushi Union," a restaurant chapter of the Tokyo Metropolitan Youth Union, went on strike between 17th March and March 19th at "Sushiro" (the largest conveyer belt sushi chain in Japan) outlets in Tokyo and in the prefectures of Miyagi and Saitama.

The Kaitenzushi Union on the final day of the strike made representations to Sushiro establishments where union workers work, demanding a 10 per cent hike in hourly wages.

In front of JR Tokyo Station, Sushiro workers presented the reality of working conditions at their stores, and expressed their determination to increase their efforts in the 2023 "shunto" labor-management wage bargaining negotiations to win an increase in hourly wages by 10 per cent so that they can adequately deal with the ongoing price surge.

A 19-year-old part-time worker at a Sushiro outlet in Tokyo Station's underground mall said, "Our hourly wage of 1,200 yen is nearly 200 yen lower than that of part-time workers at nearby restaurants. Due to a staff shortage, we are always very busy."

A 20-year-old part-time worker at a Saitama outlet said, "Sushiro recently had a 10 per cent discount sale, making us extremely busy with work. I want the company to pay us 10 per cent more in wages."

Youth Union Chair Harada Niki said, "Many non-regular workers are struggling to make a living because of rising prices. They need much higher wages."

Japan Press Weekly ✪

New Cold War: TikTok bans

Like Denmark and the European Commission before it, Belgium is the latest government to ban TikTok. Civil servants are no longer allowed to use the app. According to the relevant ministers, the app should even be removed from all mobile phones used professionally in government departments.

TikTok is wildly popular among young people. It is a platform that distributes short and light-hearted videos.

Initially, it was mainly about viral dances, but it quickly grew into a major news source for young people. In the US, nearly 100 million people use the app.

The popular video app has been under fire for a while now. In Europe, some are pushing for such a ban, and in Canada and the US, the app has been banned for government officials for some time. In the US, a national ban prohibiting everyone in the country from being able to download and use the app is even on the agenda in the Senate.

Two reasons are given for banning the app. The first claim is that TikTok could collect massive data from Western users. Secondly, there is the supposed fear that the platform might be used for "Chinese propaganda" purposes. There are fears that ByteDance, the company behind TikTok, "could be forced to cooperate with the Chinese government."

UNFOUNDED

The measures being taken by Western governments are unfounded for several reasons. First, it is obvious that senior state officials do leave sensitive information on their mobile phones or PCs. But they do not use an app for this. Sensitive info is protected by encryption, not by allowing or removing some apps.

In that context, it is significant that Belgian Deputy Prime Minister Petra De Sutter and Defense Minister Ludivine Dedonder have said they will continue using TikTok. Second, for any app to work in Europe today, it must comply with privacy protection rules, better known by the acronym GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation).

There is no 100 per cent guarantee, but regarding this, TikTok is as safe as other apps.

Ethical hacker Baptiste Robert observes: "As far as we can see, in its current state, TikTok doesn't have suspicious behaviour and is not exfiltrating unusual data. Getting data about the user device is quite common in the mobile world, and we would obtain similar results with Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and others."

And yes, TikTok has been found to have violated journalists' privacy in the past. But that equally applies to other apps (which are sometimes worse in this respect).

There is little doubt that the CIA directly or indirectly monitors social media platforms it deems interesting. Google, for instance, is known to be teeming with ex-CIA agents. In other countries, intelligence agencies are bound to do their jobs, too. In 2020, it was revealed that Israeli intelligence was spying through WhatsApp.

Thirdly, the State Security of Belgium has not yet been able to identify any case of spying through TikTok. In any case, the app does not contain explicit spying software.

Finally, the Chinese government does not need such an app to spy. If it wants to do so, it will use something different and more sophisticated than a simple hot air balloon or funny video app.

In reality, the problem is not about spying. It's about privacy. There is no doubt that TikTok collects a lot of information about users. But they are not the only ones. Apps like Facebook and Instagram and many other seemingly innocuous ones collect data and sell it on to data brokers, who in turn sell it on to companies that can make a profit from this treasure trove of consumer behaviour.

In an article in *Foreign Policy*, two professors put it this way: "If we want to address the real problem, we need to enact serious privacy laws, not security theatre, to stop our data from being collected, analyzed, and sold – by anyone. Such laws would protect us in the long term, and not just from the app of the week."

REAL REASONS

The real reasons for the ban on TikTok have nothing to do with spying or security. They are dictated by other considerations.

The first reason is of a commercial nature. TikTok has managed to break the monopoly of its chief US competitors. They are Alphabet (YouTube) and Meta (Facebook and Instagram). Last year, they made huge profits, $279 billion and $117 billion respectively.

Recently, famous rapper and actor Snoop Dogg signed an exclusivity deal with TikTok and not Spotify or Apple Music. Given the huge profit potential, the stakes are very high here.

These corporations and their political backers don't like to see those profit opportunities lost in the US. As was the case earlier with Huawei (5G), Washington wants to literally eliminate Chinese competitors by banning them.

Economic warfare is the name of the game. As has been customary in recent years, the European Union dances to the tune of the US, and now so does Belgium.

The second reason is geopolitical. In the eyes of US imperialism, China is increasingly seen as a threat and a malevolent power. Just think of the balloon hysteria and the increased war rhetoric around the Taiwan issue. We are experiencing a new Cold War.

All around China, the US has built a military encirclement. Washington is also making one military alliance after another with countries in the region. It seems like the US is rushing to prepare for an armed conflict with China.

The whole fuss around TikTok serves to develop or reinforce a hostile image of China. For engaging in military conflict, it is important to have public opinion on your side. The ban on TikTok fits into this and is therefore far from an innocent issue.

Again, Europe and Belgium are neatly in step with Big Brother. For China expert Rogier Creemers, who teaches at Leiden University, banning TikTok on civil servants' service phones is akin to symbol politics.

"In this, we are following the US, which currently demonises anything to do with China." ✪

Global Briefs

America: The Pentagon has blocked attempts by the US federal government to share alleged Russian war crimes in Ukraine with the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, according to an 8th March report by the *New York Times*.

The rationale behind this decision, according to the paper, is that "American military leaders oppose helping the court investigate Russians because they fear setting a precedent that might help pave the way for it to prosecute Americans." This has now spawned an intra-agency battle within the administration of President Joe Biden over what's right and wrong.

Saudi Arabia: Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan and his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian will meet during Ramadan, the official Saudi Press Agency reported early Monday. Earlier this month on 10th March, Saudi Arabia and Iran, who severed ties in 2016, agreed to re-establish diplomatic ties, re-open embassies and exchange ambassadors within two months after trilateral talks hosted by China.

Public transportation throughout Germany will come to a halt, potentially leaving the 83-million-strong nation in a state of "traffic chaos," *Bild* warned. What is being called the largest nationwide strike in decades has been organised by several powerful trade unions. The strike is the result of unions demands for wage hikes. The public services union, Verdi, seeks a pay rise of 10.5 per cent, but no less than €500 for some 2.5 million public employees. The railway and transport union (EVG) demands a 12 per cent wage increase but no less than €650. The unions blame inflation and rising commodity prices for the crisis.

Britain: The British government has announced it will be sending depleted uranium (DU) rounds to Ukraine along with Challenger 2 tanks.

As has been shown in wars over the last few decades, the health consequences for Ukrainian civilians will be high. DU is a chemically toxic and radioactive heavy metal and is a by-product of the enrichment process used to make reactor-grade uranium.

Dominican Republic: Representatives of 22 Latin American countries have rejected the United States coercive policies against Cuba in the final declaration of the 28th Ibero-American Summit. Representatives condemned the US including Cuba in the list of countries that sponsor terrorism. They also urged Washington to comply with 30 resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) that called for an end to the blockade against Cuba.

"We reject the application of these measures, which violate international law and the United Nations Charter, and hinder the ability of States to meet their development needs and priorities," the representatives stated.

CPA Quake Appeal for the Türkiye & Syria earthquake victims

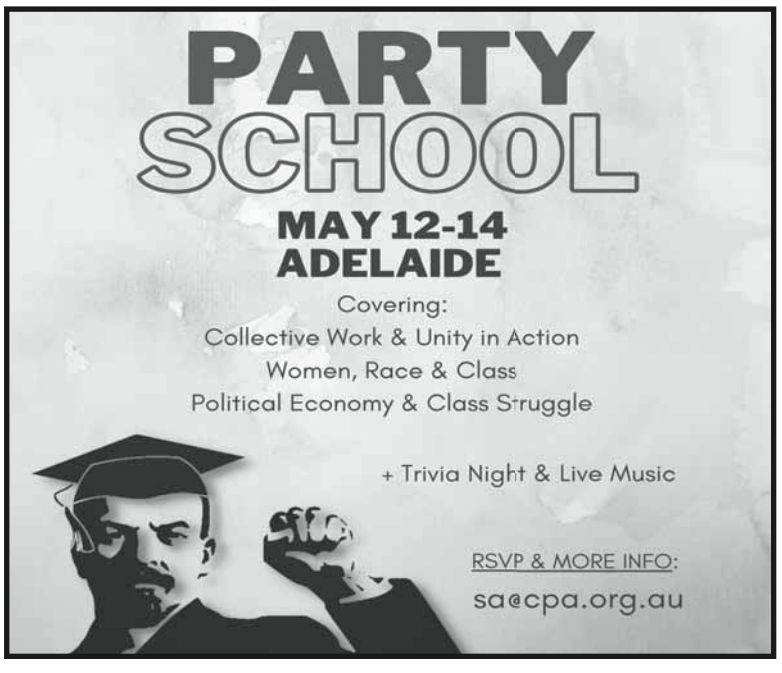
To all Party organisations

We encourage all branches and party members to dig deep and donate to the Quake Appeal by no later than 30th April 2023. We will send the funds to our fraternal organisations in May 2023.

Please send your donations to the Central Committee's bank account (details below).

Commonwealth Bank of Australia Central Committee

BSB: 062006 Account: 0080 2169 Reference: Your initials or branch name + Quake Appeal



The Sims franchise, labour alienation for the masses!

Photo: Aaron Parecki – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

Proletariat Plays

The Sims franchise is a long-running popular life simulation game series that allows players to create and control virtual characters in a simulated world. While it may seem like a harmless and entertaining pastime for people, a Marxist take on The Sims franchise reveals deeper societal implications and critiques, with some even more scary potential fascist undertones to take note of.

The Sims franchise can be seen as promoting a capitalist ideology. The game is centred on the concept of consumerism, where players must buy virtual items and build homes for their Sims. Each Sim household lives isolated from each other, showcasing their entire life as a slaves to a system which they can never escape. The virtual world of The Sims reinforces the idea that material possessions and social status are essential for a fulfilling life. This creates a false sense of ownership and reinforces the capitalist notion that life is all about accumulating and hoarding wealth.

The game also portrays the idea that hard work and individual effort are all that's needed for upward social mobility, perpetuating the myth of the American Dream. The Sims franchise was seemingly designed as a capitalist propaganda tool, promoting a false sense of agency and individualism. While players may feel like they have control over their Sims' lives, the underlying game mechanics and code ultimately dictate the limitations and possibilities within the game, just as the capitalist superstructure dictates ours. The game reinforces the idea that individual actions are the only means of achieving success and ignores the importance of collective action and solidarity.

The player's mouse cursor controls all aspects of the Sims' lives. The Sims themselves are oblivious to this control, just as through capitalist brainwashing, we are taught to trust the invisible hand of the free market to magically provide for our needs, and ignore a myriad of rules, nudges, and government interventions.

Furthermore, The Sims franchise reinforces the gendered division of labour, as female Sims are often relegated to domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children. This reinforces the patriarchal norms that exist in capitalist societies, where women are often relegated to lower-paying jobs and domestic roles.

Of course these capitalist tropes exist not just in The Sims but in nearly any form of mainstream consumer media in the Western World, but the Sims has its own specific tropes.

While the Sims does not overtly promote nationalism or ethnic superiority, it does reinforce societal norms and values that are often associated with certain cultures or national identities. For example, Sims may wear specific cultural outfits or eat foods that reflect their cultural background, which can be seen as promoting nationalistic or ethnic identity (or stereotypes). This allows players to create Sims with different cultural aspects which they prefer, allowing certain Sims with cultural norms to be seen as superior while underplaying others. The tendency to make Anglophone traditions celebrations the dominant default option reinforces a view of them as superior, or at least more natural.

The Sims reinforces our society's instrumental view of human beings, whereby workers and other people are just means to an end for employers. In the game Sims are nothing but pawns which the player uses to achieve their own satisfaction, mere movable objects, like putty in the player's mouse cursor/hand.

A disturbing trend amongst Sims players is torture, allowing The Sims to die of exhaustion in their virtual prisons. A common execution method which malevolent player-gods are known to perform is to build pools, manipulate their Sims into entering the pool ("voluntarily" walking the plank) and then removing all exits. This forces the unfortunate Sim to agonisingly tread water for days on end, as they are unable to leave pools unless they have a specific pool ladder to escape from. Eventually the Sim drowns, with its energy depleted from the constant swimming. Meanwhile, the player laughs at the suffering unleashed by their cruel and unusual punishment of wayward (or simply in the wrong place at the wrong time) Sims from behind their computer monitor.

The game can reinforce the myth of the "angel investor": The infamous "motherlode" hack means that players who cannot be bothered earning money through forcing their Sims into laborious work can game the system and get rich quick. Even this simple cheat code embodies the fantasy of building the American Dream which is only tangibly available through conjuring up cash from thin air.

This is not to demonise this popular game, which can be played on any laptop, but rather to highlight how it is produced from our culture and reinforces the myths of that culture. As communists know, we can't help being subjected to the myths of the free-market individualists, but we work to free our world from them. ✪

Warrior /ˈwriər/ (for)

What comes to your mind when you hear the word "warrior?" Conan the Barbarian? Boadacea, with cool pagan woad painted on her face slaying Roman centurions? Russell Crowe in his Gladiator outfit slaying other Romans? Whatever associations this elastic word has for you, odds are they're good ones. That's why this word is so elastic, and that's why "warrior" is stretched to breaking point as a concept by applying it to a certain visiting British transphobe and bigotry-monger. Is she a warrior for women's rights, or an obnoxious extremist, asks an ABC piece on the subject, before giving us ample evidence that it's the latter.

Politics /ˈpləˌihɪks/ (playing)

Teachers don't go around accusing other teachers of "doing teaching". Plumbers don't sneer at other plumbers for practising plumbing, and football players don't get mileage out of accusing other footballers of playing football, but politicians, whose jobs involve spending their every waking moment being political regularly try to score points by berating their fellow politicians for, umm, being political. This seems to be more prevalent on the right side of politics, possibly a hangover from the days when running the country was something only the already well-off could afford to do. Examples are myriad, the latest being Stuart Roberts, who has been in politics since 1991. Stuart thinks having various glaring conflicts of interest from his time as a dodgy Services Australia minister investigated by Bill Shorten would mean Shorten was "playing politics." We think he's misspelt "doing his job."

Moderate /ˈmdərət/

Moderate is weirdly seen as a good thing in all circumstances, despite this not standing up to a moment's thought. Really whether or not a person's moderation is a good thing depends on what they're being moderate about. Would a moderate Darth Vader have merely given a warning shot with the Death Star instead of destroying an entire planet with it? Or just destroyed the planet a little bit? Were there moderate Storm Troopers on the Death Star with him just keeping quiet about the whole "annihilate Aldebaran" thing?

We're thinking of this because whenever the Liberal party suffers a defeat, as it has just done, the question of the liberal "moderates" comes up. Allegedly moderate and hence slightly nicer liberals such as Simon Birmingham, Christopher Pyne, and Josh Frydenberg were fine with the Liberal parties at Federal and Victorian levels vilifying thousands of Australians who happened to be Black during the "African Gangs" scare campaign. It turns out "moderate" can mean that you're fine with racism, but don't like to shout about it too much.

Resolve /riˈzlv/

Next time you're wondering why the government can't fix the housing crisis and raise aged care workers' wages, but can afford to chuck a lazy $358 billion at a project which will make us less safe, and less independent, remember this word. We're demonstrating our resolve. Resolve, meaning determination (but sounding more noble and military) is something you've just got to have. The *Australian Financial Review* thinks AUKUS is a "momentous test of this nation's resolve." It's certainly momentous – we've never spent that much money on anything before. As with "moderation," resolve sounds so noble it's meant to trick us into not looking too closely at what we're resolved about.

Scrutiny /skrtəni/ (welcoming)

Scrutiny means someone having a close look at you. It's in that class of weasel words used when someone who couldn't lie straight in bed says "Let me be frank" in an interview. Welcoming scrutiny is something people do when they're furious that they face any scrutiny. Someone should do a chart showing the inverse relationship between how often a bourgeois politician says they have nothing to hide and how long it takes their department to handle a Freedom of Information request. Andrew Forrest, the chief of Fortescue Metals, is furious with fellow billionaire Kerry Stokes, because Stokes' media empire has started scrutinising his business deals just after he started competing with one of Stokes' outfits. We don't like to take sides in disputes between billionaires – as Stalin once said "they are both worse," but we think both Stokes and Forrest could do with a lot less money, and a lot less of that scrutiny Forrest welcomes.

175 years of reading the *Communist Manifesto*

Valentin Cartillier

Of course, we have all read, and all do read the *Communist Manifesto*. This year as we celebrate its 175th anniversary it is imperative to not only consider how we read it, but how it reads us. For how can it be that this text still accompanies us? That it can speak to us not only from the stage of world history where the victories and defeats of the class struggle have taken place and continue to do so, but also to the individual reader, or small group, enthralled by the discovery of the mechanisms of capitalist society.

The *Manifesto*'s pages are present in every revolutionary movement, in its theory and in its practice, in their successes and failures, they are also present in every reactionary part of society as they cough and splutter trying to get its words out of their mouths as they attempt to deny or refute its concrete reality. The *Manifesto* speaks to us all, and is therefore universal in its importance. For or against, it forces any and all who read it to take sides in the struggle. And we all read it. We read it alongside all those who have come before us.

Lenin who drew his concept of the vanguard from its pages: "Communists are ... the most advanced and resolute section of the working class parties of every country," the watchword of every Marxist-Leninist party the world over. He found in its pages that the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat was a necessary tactic based off revisions made by Engels and Marx in light of the Paris Commune. We read it not only in the texts and speeches made by Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky, Stalin, Ho Chi Mihn, Thomas Sankara, and Gramsci, those who claimed to be its adherents, but also in the infinite reserve of its unrelenting bourgeois detractors that capitalism dedicates to justifying its own vicious existence. For better or worse, we read it alongside them. It is imperative not only to read it, but to read it again and again, for those are its demands.

Yet, how does it read us? It is only willful negligence that prevents a reader from seeing its contemporary import. Its words do not merely echo throughout history as a quiet murmur, they have built up into a deafening roar:

> Meantime the markets kept ever growing, the demand ever rising ... It [the bourgeoisie] has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors," and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment." It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour ... in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless and indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

In this relentless pursuit of exploitation, "it has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers," and reduced families to a "mere money relation." Finally, "into their place stepped free competition, accompanied by a social and political constitution adapted to it, and by the economical and political sway of the bourgeois class." Who cannot see that these words still concretely define our contemporary situation? In the ever accelerating expansion of world markets into every domain of life, the digital and the cosmos being two newer developments, it commodifies everything in its path. The reduction of all forms of labour into merely what is profitable, not what is useful. The destruction of community, families, religion, all in the name of exploitation. The *Manifesto* rings clearly, there exists only one freedom today, the freedom of exploitation, which capitalists have rebranded as freedom of trade. The capitalist, then and now, will loudly proclaim, "but that is the greatest freedom of all, the freedom of trade!" Be not their dupe. For the capitalist, it is the freedom *of* trade, not the freedom *to* trade. For what freedom exists for the worker with nothing to trade but their labour while the capitalist trades the commodities the worker produces on the market? Freedom of trade only applies to the capitalist, who not only sells the products of labour (commodities) on the market, but also turns the labour power of the worker itself, the capacity to produce, into a commodity to be bought and sold as if it were any other item. Or, to use the *Manifesto*'s words, "these labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market." This is one of the many ways the *Manifesto* still speaks to us and diagnoses our times.

There have been numerous attempts to reduce the *Manifesto* to a mere diagnosis of capitalism and nothing more, but that is to deny that it is fundamentally a *political* text. It does not only announce the existence of class antagonisms, it calls for the organization of workers towards the struggle for their emancipation. All across Europe the text is still being read in the millions of workers who take to its streets in the name of the emancipation of the worker. The *Manifesto* does not merely speak to the Communist League for whom it was published on 21st February 1848. It is a political programme that endures until this day. Those millions who march today add pages to the history of its cause. All across Europe the struggle continues. Across all industries in all countries workers have shifted from the defensive to the offensive in the face of the capitalist class increasingly eroding their rights. A coalition of these forces could crumble the halls of the ruling class. Notions such a "living wage" or a "minimum wage" are no longer acceptable as the current economic crisis has rendered them empty and hollow. As the cost of living ever rises thanks to inflation and rising energy prices exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, a wage increase does little to ease the burden the ruling classes expect the working class to bear. This burden weighs ever more greatly on the shoulders of the working class as the ruling class, typically in times of economic crisis, brings in their so called "austerity measures" which are nothing but thinly veiled programs designed to disembowel public services such as hospitals, public transport, and social welfare programs. At a time of record corporate profits, this austerity is only for the working class, who have to scrimp and save what little money they have left, while the ruling class reaps the superprofits of brute exploitation.

What workers are calling for is an emancipation from working conditions that are dictated by the demands of the capitalist mode of production, so that they may truly and concretely obtain self-determination in not only their workplaces, but in their lives. These struggles are not localised to Europe, they exist across the world.

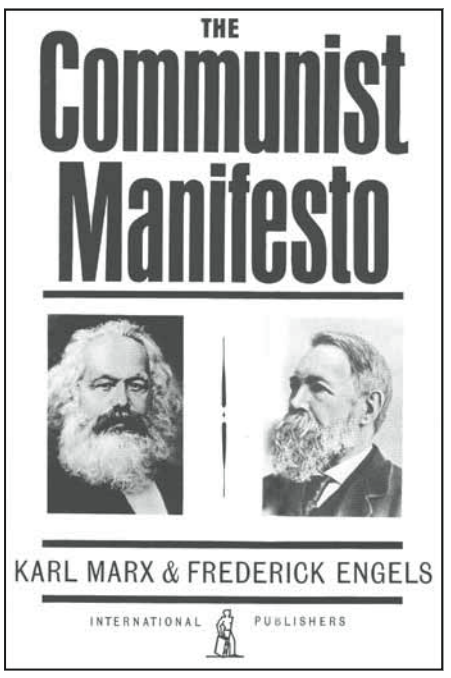
The *Manifesto* still reads us as partisans of a cause, it interpellates us as a members of particular class, the working class and the capitalist class, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, that the relation between the two is fundamentally antagonistic. However, once more, the *Manifesto* is not merely a description of class society, it also names the political force which is to guide the struggle: the Communists. Who are they? The *Manifesto* states:

> The Communists are distinguished from the other working-class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

Communists are not outside of the working class where they govern and dictate what is to be done. They *are* the working class, embedded within it, armed with the theoretical knowledge and practical ability to raise the level of class consciousness towards revolutionary activity. Indeed, communists are workers,they are not detached from the workers' immediate struggles and conditions. Against a global capitalist force, an international workers' movement is needed. One must never forget that the capitalists are also organised as a class, and bring with them all the forces of the modern world.

But numerically they will always be inferior.

Rather than concluding in the traditional way of citing the closing lines of the *Manifesto*, a poem, printed onto the Banner of Operative Painters & Decorators Union of Australasia, Victorian Branch from 1915, is in order. ✪



The *Manifesto* does not merely speak to the Communist League for whom it was published ... It is a political programme that endures until this day.

UNITY

The murmurs
that go to make
the thunders roar
Taken singly, might -
Lull an infant to repose
United their very crash
would shake the eternal
vaults of Heaven

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Sydney Vigil

STOP USA BLOCKADE ON CUBA

Join us in Sydney to demand that the USA stops the blockade on Cuba with the right to self determination.

Also stop other blockades like Venezuela and Gaza.

4:15 pm Monday April 17
50 Miller Street North Sydney

Political choices

Europe

The past week has clearly shown the confrontation between peoples and governments across Europe.

In Britain, striking workers brought London to a standstill on Budget day.

You wouldn't know it from British broadcasters, but the size of the huge union demonstrations thronging the streets of the capital was clear from aerial footage shown by European TV channels.

Closeted in the Palace of Westminster, a tin-eared Chancellor had nothing to offer on pay or public services.

In France, the streets erupted as President Emmanuel Macron rammed through a deeply unpopular attack on pensions by decree, overriding parliamentary processes.

In Germany, health workers walked out in a 48-hour strike for pay rises and against plans to cut hospital beds and jobs that form part of a wider assault on public healthcare.

In Greece, rage at a crooked political elite whose record of cuts and privatisations is rightly held responsible for the deaths of 57 people in the Tempe rail crash has seen mammoth demos sweep the country and pitched battles provoked by police.

What do these governments have in common? A cost-cutting agenda that is breaking public services, impoverishing the majority and killing people, whether through eroded safety systems or delayed ambulances.

What else? A seemingly inexhaustible supply of funds for an arms race that threatens a new world war.

The Greek government that supposedly cannot afford to maintain a safe transport network has increased military spending by more than 60 per cent since 2019.

The German government which can't help hospitals with a projected €4 billion black hole caused by soaring energy prices last year announced an extra €100bn for the armed forces.

The French government that claims its pensions are unaffordable said in January it would raise its defence budget by over a third in the next few years, and the British Chancellor who smirks that a "persuasive" Defence Secretary has convinced him to chuck another £11bn at the military have nothing in the kitty for nurses, teachers or civil servants.

These are choices, and it is vital that this message is popularised on strike demos and at union meetings.

The government's case rests on the illusion that we have no choice.

That there is no money for the National Health Service. That we have to raise arms spending in a more dangerous world.

But who is making that world more dangerous? Did years of NATO military build-ups on Russia's borders prevent the terrible war in Ukraine or provoke it? Is Britain's security enhanced by plonking aircraft carriers off the Chinese coast, or does it place us needlessly in the line of fire if the United States decides to start a Pacific war?

Pension age changes rallies in France. Photo: Valentin Cartillier

Because we face choices of another sort. Tailing along in the wake of US foreign policy is cutting Britain off from a changing world.

Last year a record 1,104 scientists and postgraduate students were denied visas to work here, a near-tenfold rise on the figure just two years earlier, and a hundred times more than in 2016, as institutional hostility to China severs ties with a scientific giant. The prospects for international co-operation in fields like climate change or eradicating disease dwindle accordingly.

The China-brokered Saudi-Iran deal shows a wider reorientation, as emerging economies move out of Washington's orbit. And the calls for a negotiated peace in Ukraine from Brazil, India and China show the NATO camp is at odds with world opinion.

Our subservience to Washington is costing the earth. Accepting the higher arms spending it dictates means accepting British workers will keep getting poorer. Its diplomatic consequences isolate us on the world stage.

An independent foreign policy – one that breaks free from a declining empire, apparently prepared to start a world war to maintain its supremacy – would give us options.

Options on trade, options on co-operation, options on spending that are currently being denied us.

Morning Star

Cuba's revolutionary Family Code

Helen Kennedy

In January, a labour delegation from Canada met with two Cuban lawyers in Holguin, to discuss the implementation of their country's new Family Code. Maité Rodriguez Tamayo and Liliana Arévalo Domínguez provided details of the revolutionary nature of the new law, which was adopted by referendum on 27th September 2022.

When Cuba's new constitution was adopted in 2019, it came with a promise to update the Family Code to reflect the modern situation of family structures and obligations. At that time, there was organised opposition to the proposal of including same-sex marriage rights in the constitution, and the proposal was withdrawn.

Understanding that the opposition would likely remain, the National Assembly, Communist Party, Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), Workers' Central Union (CTC) and Committees in Defense of the Revolution (CDR) developed an extensive process to reach out to as many Cubans as possible to encourage the widest possible support for the new Code.

Establishing love, affection, solidarity, and responsibility as among the highest of family values, the new law is referred to as the Code of the Affections. Lawmakers studied the experience of other countries, consulted with UN officials and incorporated three important UN conventions: the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Convention on Violence and Harassment. Going far beyond simply recognising same-sex marriage, the new Family Code ensures equality and provides protection for every family member.

Property rights within the family were also made equal. Previously, spouses retained all property acquired before the marriage and any gifts or inheritances received during the marriage. In the new Code, a couple – either prior to or after marriage – can decide on how they will split any assets in the case of separation or divorce. In the case of no agreement being made, the default position is equal sharing.

The Code introduced new rights in relationship to families. It gives every Cuban the right to have a family free from violence. New measures are outlined that will allow for penalties for domestic violence and promote comprehensive policies to address gender-based violence. The new Code legalises equal marriage and equal adoption rights regardless of sexual orientation, recognises the rights of surrogate mothers and legalises the process of surrogacy, referred to as "solidarity gestation." It promotes equal distribution of domestic responsibilities amongst men and women and extends labour rights to those who care full-time for children, elderly people or people with disabilities. Rights of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other members of the family are guaranteed.

The Code's adherence to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child expands Cuban children's rights. They now have the right to be involved in decisions that affect them in their home and they have the right to a childhood free of violence, negligence, abuse, and discrimination. While the old Code described "parental authority" in relation to one's children, the new one describes that relationship as "parental responsibility."

In terms of transgender rights, the new Code clearly states that children have the right to their gender identity. New information on the Family Code will be introduced in fifth-grade civics classes, and student associations have the responsibility of incorporating it into their political and civic education. As knowledge of and support for trans rights grows across the country, the community will already have the legal framework to support their rights within the family.

Over four years, the draft Code was taken to every electoral district in the country. Every Cuban, not just leaders or delegates to the National Assembly, had an opportunity to read it, attend a meeting and contribute revisions. Legal advisors were in attendance at every meeting to help explain the legal intricacies of the Code.

The main detractors were religious groups who waged a large, coordinated campaign in communities and on social media. The opposition was based on the Code's recognition of same sex marriage and new parental responsibility laws which they believed took away their rights as parents. In Baracoa, for example, some people put stickers on their doors that read "marriage as god created."

Despite the organised opposition, the comprehensive and democratic process was successful. All in all, there were twenty-five drafts of the Code, with the final one submitted to the National Assembly. The September 2022 referendum resulted in 67 percent voting yes and 33 percent voting against. While voting in Cuba is voluntary, whether for elections or referendums, more than 74 percent of Cubans voted.

The truly democratic and thorough consultation process resulted in a truly revolutionary Family Code. Cuba, once again, stands as a beacon of hope for the rest of the world still fighting for equality rights.

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