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Inequality deepens

Photo: Australian Unemployed Workers' Union – facebook.com/ausunemployment

New research shows one million people in NSW are living in poverty. With Western Sydney going backwards while Eastern Sydney is improving, inequality across the city is deepening. Commissioned by the state's peak social services body NCOSS, the preliminary findings from the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) at the University of Canberra draw on 2021 census data to reveal the dire state of poverty across NSW.

NCOSS CEO Joanna Quilty said the initial findings provide further evidence that your postcode can dictate the quality of your life in this city, and that something needs to be done. "We have known for many years that people in Western Sydney are doing it tough, but this data shines a light on just how tough, and the fact it's getting worse," Quilty said. "The so-called 'latte line' is becoming an impenetrable wall between those sitting pretty and those whose day-to-day lives are a constant struggle."

The data shows that poverty rates in eastern suburbs like Woollahra, Bondi Beach,and Clovelly have declined. While in western suburbs like Penrith, Ashcroft, and Smithfield it has gone the other way. "It tells us that we have not shifted the dial on poverty rates over the past five years," Quilty said.

"In fact, we've seen more than 100,000 additional people slip into poverty in NSW compared to 2016. As our population has grown, so too has the number of people living in poverty."

Quilty said increased cost of living pressures and relentless rate and rental hikes over the past 18 months have compounded these issues – so the reality is likely far worse today than the data shows.

Older people are the age group experiencing the biggest increase in poverty levels in NSW. Almost 50,000 more older people are living in poverty in NSW than in 2016, an increase of 43 per cent state-wide. In Metro Sydney the increase is 50 per cent. This means that of the 100,000 additional people in poverty since 2016, older people make up half that number.

In some areas, particularly in South-Western and Western Sydney, the rate of older people in poverty has more than doubled. The areas with the biggest growth in poverty for older people include Horsley Park (220 per cent increase), Lurnea-Cartwright (131 per cent increase), and Liverpool (106 per cent increase).

"It is shocking to know that older people, some of whom are among our most vulnerable, are facing the biggest increases in poverty," Quilty said. "The state and federal governments need to be looking after our older community members, not leaving them to languish below the poverty line."

The preliminary findings also reveal that children experience the highest rate of poverty of all age groups – 15 per cent. Some of the highest rates of children in poverty are in Western Sydney, with 41 per cent in South Granville and 38 per cent in Auburn.

It is important that the newly elected NSW Premier Chris Minns and his Ministers address these issues by building public housing, investing in essential social infrastructure, and prioritising policies that help those doing it tough.

Other key preliminary findings include:

- Being a single parent substantially increases the likelihood of living in poverty. 23 per cent of single parents live in poverty, compared to 11 per cent of couples with dependent children.
- Having a job does not inoculate you from poverty – particularly if it is a part-time job. 27 per cent of part-time workers in Liverpool are living in poverty, up from 16 per cent. In Penrith it is 18 per cent, up from seven per cent.

Across NSW, there has been an increase in people renting and an increase in poverty amongst this group, driven by a shortage of rental accommodation and rising rent. More than 40 per cent of people living in poverty rent in the private rental market (412,800).

Another 30 per cent own their own home with a mortgage (296,100). Parts of Regional NSW continue to do it particularly tough. The highest poverty rates are found along the Mid and Far North coasts, North-West NSW and parts of New England and Central West. We've also seen poverty significantly deepen in the Riverina compared to 2016.

Public housing is no longer the safety net it once was. Across all demographic groups, people living in public housing experienced the highest rates of poverty and the biggest increases since 2016.

Quilty said NCOSS will closely examine the final report when it is completed, and then release a set of recommendations to the NSW government to address these findings. An interactive mapping tool will also be released with the final report, allowing policy makers, state and local government, and community organisations to better understand how poverty affects different locations and groups, and target their efforts accordingly.

"We thank NATSEM for its thorough work on this report, and we look forward to reviewing the final report and putting some clear and actionable solutions on the table."

While this report looks at NSW data, a similar situation exists across Australia where mortgage repayments have been driven up by rising interest rates and shortages of rental accommodation, which have played a role in rent increases. ✪

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Guardian

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Voice to Parliament: the progressive YES

You're going to hear a lot of negative things about the Voice to Parliament in the months between now, and when the referendum is held sometime after September this year. The Liberal/National party Coalition has trotted out a mixture of blatant and inaccurate scaremongering (the Voice will usurp Parliament! The Voice will paralyse Australia with High Court challenges!). The Liberals have also mounted a very transparent pretence that they want something better than the Voice, something really good for Aboriginal people, but which the Liberals somehow didn't get around to doing during almost a decade in power.

There are others who are sceptical of the Voice because they genuinely want real progress for Aboriginal people, but have seen many government policies come and go, initiatives which have been paternalistic and opportunistic. The scepticism is understandable after this lived experience. Others want other things first, such as Makaratta, or Truth Telling, as recommended by the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and a Treaty. Later this year, our choice will be between the Voice to Parliament and how things are now.

The Communist Party of Australia strongly supports voting Yes to the Voice. Here are some positive reasons why you should vote Yes and encourage your friends and fellow workers to vote Yes too.

The first and principal reason is momentum for change. When the Voice to Parliament is established, we will still need to fight for justice for Aboriginal people. We will be fighting knowing that big changes are possible. Australia does not change its constitution lightly. With this change behind us, we will know that "better things are possible" is more than just a slogan. Of course, there will be a struggle. It will be a struggle with the wind behind it, and with a higher public profile in an Indigenous Voice.

The second reason is that when the Voice is established in the Australian Constitution, the government will have to adhere to it. When the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait people are something the government would rather overlook, a way of expressing those needs will be in the constitution. The Voice will be something government cannot legislate out of existence. This almost certainly explains why the Liberal and National Party Coalition hates the idea of the Voice so much.

Does this mean that it will all be smooth sailing once the Yes vote gets up? Of course it doesn't. The CPA is not starry-eyed about Australian governments. Our bourgeois parliament has a history of passing laws in the interests of big donors, and an interest in putting big capital ahead of the real owners of this country. As the CPA's statement in support of the Yes vote says, we know that: " ... Land Rights, real recognition, prosperity, and control over the affairs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will not be gifted or bestowed on them by Australia's dominant capitalist class. Change only happens by consistent and ongoing campaigning, struggle, and the solidarity with the people."

The CPA's Central Committee goes on to say that the Voice will be "a platform to speak out, challenge, rally campaigns and build solidarity in the community."

The CPA calls for a Yes vote on the Voice to Parliament, and urges members and supporters to encourage others to vote Yes. The Voice getting up will give momentum to struggles that will advance the interests of Indigenous Australians. The Voice will be a platform for campaigns.

Show solidarity with first Australians and support the Voice to the utmost!

(The CPA Central Committee statement on the Voice can be found at tinyurl.com/cpa-voice.)

Palm Sunday Peace Rally 2023 Adelaide

A gathering of dedicated peace activists met on the steps of Parliament House in North Terrace (Adelaide) in advocacy for peace which seems so fragile at the moment. Strong demands were for termination of AUKUS and the nuclear submarines deal. Instead, Australia should sign the treaty to ban nuclear weapons and heal the country with no nuclear dumps.

In line with the Communist Party's peace budget policy, military spending should instead fund important social needs including housing, health and education.

No Nuclear Subs SA, a group who have steadfastly argued against the nuclear option, declared that the nuclear submarines ultimately will be offensive rather than defensive in their use, and in fact, escalate the dangers of conventional as well as nuclear conflict, notably war between the United States and China. Global proliferation of nuclear military technology will be another certain consequence along with firmly entrenching the nuclear industry in Australia, and, at the same time, its attendant dangers around nuclear waste storage, including particularly hazardous high level waste.

First Nations Australians, the traditional owners of land targeted for dumps and military activities, for example the Barngarla people near Kimba in South Australia, have consistently protested against the violation of First Nations' wishes to preserve their land and waters for the enjoyment of future generations.

No Nuclear Subs SA, remain emphatic about the virtual waste of "billions of dollars that should be providing jobs for the true needs of the Australian population, including climate safety, health, housing and education."

Information at the rally quoted from a range of sources: Hugh White AO, Emeritus Professor of Strategic Studies at the Australian University and a long-time defence and intelligence analyst, argues that there is no threat from China:

China today is certainly strategically ambitious, but there is no serious reason to fear that – the special case of Taiwan apart, its claim to which the rest of the world acknowledges – it seeks to conquer and absorb others' territory.

Malayasian Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob offers this warning:

> AUKUS could potentially be a catalyst towards a nuclear arms race in the Indo-Pacific region, as well as provoke other powers to act more aggressively, especially within the South China Sea region.

Dave Sweeney from the Australian Conservation Foundation also warns:

> This arrangement further entangles Australia in the USA's war-fighting plans. It raises serious non-proliferation concerns relating to access to highly enriched weapons grade uranium, and sets a disturbing precedent for imitation and escalation.

Former federal politician and minister for the environment, Peter Garret, has stated:

> Australia will now be the only non-nuclear nation that is in possession of nuclear submarines. This raises a series of critical questions in relation to the nuclear non-proliferation regime, and the management and disposal of nuclear waste.

Former prime minister, Paul Keating, thinks that:

> ... through AUKUS, Australia is providing expensive support to the UK and US defence companies. The Australian Prime Minister, the US President and the UK Prime Minister could barely conceal their joy with A$368 billion heading the way to their defence companies – in the UK, BAE Systems, in the US the east coast submarine shipyards.

Former Senator Rex Patrick (former submariner) on the cost of AUKUS, stated:

> The AUKUS nuclear submarine project will bleed the Australian Defence Force white, topping the billions in Defence spending waste this year.

Palm Sunday 2nd April 2023, Adelaide. Photo: CPA

Palm Sunday 2023, Adelaide. Photo: © Fernando M Gonçalves.

Rental crisis requires bold government action

Everybody's Home

As a new report reveals hundreds of thousands of Australians are in need of public housing while rents are expected to remain high for years, Everybody's Home is urging the Federal Government to take bold action to fix the mess.

The National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation estimates that conservatively 377,600 households are in need of social and affordable housing either due to rental stress or homelessness. Other estimates put that figure as high as 640,0000.

The Corporation also anticipates rents will remain high over the next couple of years as demand rises while shortages of multi-density dwellings for rent are expected.

Everybody's Home spokesperson Maiy Azize said the government's actions needed to match the scale of the worsening crisis.

"Report after report shows how dire the housing crisis is in Australia yet the national response is slow-moving. Hundreds of thousands of Australians are suffering due to their inability to secure a safe, affordable place to call home and that won't change without drastic federal government action," Ms Azize said.

"To tackle the housing crisis and end the massive shortfall in social housing, the government must build 25,000 social homes every year for the next 20 years.

"The government must also fix the housing tax system by ending handouts for landlords and using the money to build social and affordable homes.

"With the budget only weeks away, the federal government must take this opportunity to improve the lives of Australians doing it tough. The government knows what the solutions are to fix the housing crisis, and it has the money. Now they need to show that they care enough to act." ✪

Photo: rawpixel.com – Public domain.

Hunter PPK workers walk off the job, rally for fairer deal

Dale McNamara, Director of PPK Group Ltd, and serial unsuccessful One Nation Candidate likes to claim he's a friend to workers in the Hunter but he has betrayed the trust of his employees at PKK Mining Equipment.

He froze the pay of PKK employees at the beginning of 2021, and when they objected he told them he just needed them to stick with him until a big merger went through. He said as soon as PPK returned to profitability he'd make it up them.

Well since then the merger with Valley Longwall International has gone through, profits are massively up, and yet workers are being asked to accept a deal that does not come close to keeping pace with the cost of living.

It's easy to talk about how you're a friend to workers when you're driving around in fancy cars, but tougher to put your money where your mouth is. Instead of constantly running for office maybe he should take care of his ethical responsibilities much closer to home.

PKK workers won't accept a sub par deal that doesn't give them a fair cut of the profitability they've helped create. Workers walked off the job on 5th April, and will continue to campaign for a fairer deal. ✪

War Powers

Albanese Rejects Change

A parliamentary report released 31st March on War Powers has failed to recommend the genuine reform many in the community expect.

"The first recommendation confirms our worst fears – it reaffirms the status quo by insisting that decisions regarding armed conflict are fundamentally up to the PM and the executive," said Dr Alison Broinowski AM, President of Australians for War Powers Reform (AWPR)

"This means that MP's and Senators will continue to have no right to vote on a war decision before troops are sent overseas."

"In effect this means that the Prime Minister and a small group of ministers will still make the decisions just as John Howard did in 2003 with his 'captain's call' on going to Iraq."

"This inquiry has made these recommendations despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of submissions favoured giving MPs a vote. There were 94 submissions in favour out of a total of 111 submissions."

"While some of the recommendations are welcome, such as the requirement that parliament must be given a statement of compliance with international law about military action, such advice is not much use if parliamentarians are only 'consulted.'"

"The sad fact is that even if the Albanese government accepted all of the committee's recommendations, Australia could still be sent to a "war of choice" overseas, and our elected representatives – MPs and Senators, would have almost no say."

"AWPR had great hopes that after more than a decade of coalition rule the new Albanese government would bring progressive change to defence and foreign affairs. But [this] decision, along with the AUKUS agreement and the decision to spend an obscene amount of money on nuclear submarines, has well and truly dashed those hopes." ✪

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COMMUNIST PARTY OF AUSTRALIA

NSW: Coalition booted out

Anna Pha

The message from NSW voters on 25th March was loud and clear. The Perrottet Coalition government took a hit, losing twelve of its 47 seats in the 92-seat Legislative Assembly. Its loss was Labor's gain. At the time of writing, the Minns Labor government looks to be two seats short of a majority.

Labor made gains of up to 18 per cent in different seats, barely losing ground in any electorates. The Greens held onto their three seats, with another nine MPs on the cross-bench – unchanged from the 2019 election. The teal-style independents failed to win a seat. Three former Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party members were re-elected.

The Coalition's defeat hardly came as a surprise. Teachers, nurses, aged care workers, and early childhood education and care workers had been fighting for a wage rise. Public servants have been subject to arbitrary caps on wage rises that were driving their real wages down. These mainly female workforces were applauded as frontline workers during the peak of COVID, but their value was not recognised in real terms wages and working conditions.

The public health system is in crisis as is the public transport system. Buses had been privatised, routes and services cut. Train services could no longer be relied on.

Public housing is in tatters. What little the Coalition state government did in housing was geared towards people who could afford to buy a home. There was no relief for tens of thousands on public housing waiting lists. Neither major party offered any prospect of tackling the rental crisis.

In the lead-up to the elections, Perrottet went to great lengths to try to buy off the electorate with schemes such as children's savings accounts and action on gambling. After 12 years in government, it was too little, too late.

Labor committed to no further privatisations of essential public assets, including Sydney Water, which the Coalition had earmarked for sale. It promised to increase staffing levels for public hospitals and paramedics, and remove the cap on public sector wage increases. The ALP left it open as to what that would mean in practice. At present there is a wage cap of three per cent this year and two per cent in the coming two years – less than a third of inflation.

Minns made it clear that while lifting the wage cap, wage rises would not match inflation.

The Greens had by far the most progressive program. This included no new coal or gas projects, an end to logging of public native forests, banning no-cause evictions, rent controls, mandated ratios for nurses and midwives, scrapping the public sector wage cap, and delivering real wage increases.

Importantly, the Greens called for the repeal of the repressive anti-protest laws which can be used to criminalise peaceful protests with the possibility of fines or even imprisonment for exercising a fundamental democratic right.

They advocated for the commencement of a community-led Truth and Treaty process, led by First Nation people in NSW.

Labor has been left with a budget deficit of more than $12 billion with net debt forecast to reach $118 billion by mid-2026. It remains to be seen what it actually delivers.

Counting was continuing at the time of writing for the Legislative Council, but it appeared that the Coalition had lost a seat, Labor gained one. The Greens' result was unchanged winning two. One Nation lost one of its seats, Animal Justice lost its seat, the Liberal Democrats gained a seat as did the Legalise Cannabis Party.

Meanwhile in Victoria, to add to the Coalition's humiliation, it lost the federal seat of Astor in a byelection; the first party to do so in 100 years while in opposition. ✪

Chris Minns. Photo: nswlabor.org.au

Action for jobs, pay, safety

Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union members launched major rallies across Australia on Wednesday 5th April as anger mounts over serious issues facing the nation including the cost-of-living crisis, workers' safety, and the need for an effective workplace watchdog.

Action in Perth. Photo: CPA

Tens of thousands of union members hit the streets for a national day of action across Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Canberra, Adelaide, Perth, and Cairns.

CFMEU National Secretary Zach Smith used the rallies to ramp up calls for the Fair Work Ombudsman to be abolished and replaced with a watchdog which prioritises workers.

"The Fair Work Ombudsman has been a dismal failure on wage theft, sham contracting, and corporate insolvencies – three of the biggest issues in the construction industry," said Smith.

"Australian workers deserve a watchdog with teeth, not one that tickles the tummy of corporations who do the wrong thing while pursuing anti-union ideological fights left over from the Coalition government."

The CFMEU and its officials face millions of dollars in fines as the FWO continues to pursue court cases commenced by the union-busting former Australian Building and Construction Commission.

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

"Yet another major builder went under last week and where was the Ombudsman? Either the FWO doesn't care or doesn't have the power to act. That leaves workers and subcontractors carrying the can when corporate insolvencies bite," Smith said.

"This national day of action is a pivotal moment for CFMEU members to make their voices heard on the issues that are stoking white-hot anger in the community.

"We are in the midst of the most serious cost-of-living crisis in decades while corporate greed pours petrol on an inflationary bonfire.

"It's time we challenged the broken economic paradigm that calls for wage restraint at a time of skyrocketing profits for the big end of town."

CFMEU officials around Australia also used the national day of action to stress the importance of the union's ongoing Stop The Killer Stone campaign.

The CFMEU is pushing for federal and state governments to ban the use and importation of engineered stone, which causes deadly lung diseases increasingly being diagnosed in workers.

"Every day we wait to ban engineered stone is another day Australians could be given a death sentence at work," Smith said.

"While governments have started a process which is working towards a ban, our union's hard deadline of 1st July next year remains in place.

"If governments won't ban the asbestos of the 2020s, the CFMEU will." ✪

The Victorian government has been urged to list the fat-tailed dunnart as vulnerable, with the last surviving small marsupial of the state's volcanic plains under serious threat of extinction. The government's Scientific Advisory Committee has made the grim recommendation to list the diminutive but ruthless predator as vulnerable under the Fauna and Flora Guarantee Act. Environment Minister Ingrid Stitt and Agriculture Minister Gayle Tierney are expected to decide on whether to accept the committee's recommendation by the end of April. The 15-gram fat-tailed dunnart shelters under rocks, fallen timber and in cracks in the ground. They store fat in their tail as an energy reserve, much like a camel's hump. They are known to share a nest with mice to keep warm over winter, but then turn on their bedfellows and eat them. The dunnart is from the same family as the Tasmanian Devil and quoll. PhD researcher Emily (Millie) Scicluna has led the charge to list the dunnart as vulnerable. "The situation is critical. Without listing the fat-tailed dunnart as vulnerable, we could lose yet another precious Australian marsupial to extinction," she said.

"After that crucial first step, we need an action plan to save the dunnart within six months and a commitment to crunching long-term data to work out where its strongholds are. In under 200 years we have decimated the once-bountiful grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plain after traditional custodians cared for the environment for 60,000 years. We have destroyed habitat, introduced predators, poisoned and hunted the fauna that they are home to. This has taken a grave toll on the continent's native animals."

Grassy Plains Network facilitator Adrian Marshall issued a dire warning about the dunnart's habitat, which is under threat from urban sprawl and development. "The Victorian Volcanic Plains were once home to bandicoots, potoroos, quolls, bilbies, marsupial mice, and more," he said. "The vast majority of these never-to-be-seen-again creatures relied on grassland habitat. The last surviving small marsupial of the grasslands is now on the road to extinction. Fat-tailed dunnarts can thrive in degraded grasslands and on grazing land. But faced with a changing climate and economic factors, Victorian farmers are under pressure to switch from livestock to cropping. This brings rock and shelter-belt removal, ploughing, drainage modification, fertilising, biocide use, and unnatural burning regimes. These activities, along with Melbourne's urban sprawl, and rapid expansion, are a death knell for the dunnart."

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: Here's what forking out $368 billion of taxpayers' money for nuke subs will get you: "... it's great to see the unity and the way we work with our Asia-Pacific partners and Australia being, of course, an important and extremely vital partner for NATO." Thus spoke NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg last week from Brussels announcing that senior NATO officials will join the Sydney-based war planning body Australian Strategic and Policy Institute. Stoltenberg also confirmed that NATO was now a global military strike force with Australia in its deathly embrace.

ASIO powers revisited

Marcus Browning

In 2002 legislation introduced by the Howard Coalition government represented the most dangerous offensive against civil liberties and democratic rights yet seen in Australia. The Espionage and Related Offences Bill gives the government and its agencies, particularly the spy organisation ASIO, broad powers to arrest, detain, and interrogate suspects.

Law enforcement bodies and spy organisations were given free rein to trample on basic freedoms. These laws remain on the books today.

The legislation shifted the burden of proof onto defendants, allows for the prosecution and jailing of public servant "whistleblowers" and takes away the right to remain silent.

These new powers effectively turned ASIO into a secret police body, totally unaccountable while adding to the draconian "shoot to kill" powers the Howard government gave the military in the lead-up to the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

The "shoot to kill" powers were contained in the Defence Legislation Amendment (Aid to the Civil Authorities) Bill, which allows for the use of the armed forces against Australian citizens engaged in "domestic violence," a vague term which includes strikes, demonstrations, and riots.

It allows the military to use "deadly force," i.e. shoot people with impunity. It contains a new offence of terrorism which is a deadly catch-all. According to the then Attorney-General Philip Ruddock, "These offences will cover violent attacks and threats of violent attacks intended to advance a political, religious or ideological cause which is directed against or endanger Commonwealth interests."

The offence of terrorism will carry a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. This wide-ranging definition directly attacks fundamental democratic rights, such as the right to political discourse (freedom of speech), dissent – all basic rights, including trade union protests and non-government organisations who are "ideologically" opposed to the government of the day.

The right to remain silent was scrapped. Refusal to answer questions under interrogation can bring a penalty of five years' jail. "Interrogation" is open-ended to take on different forms, including torture.

It allows ASIO to detain suspects for 48 hours without charge and be allowed to question people not themselves suspected of terrorist activity but who "may have information that may be relevant to ASIO's investigations into politically motivated violence."

The legislation also "authorises the State or Federal police, acting in conjunction with ASIO, to arrest a person and bring that person before the prescribed authority." ASIO will merely have to go through the formality of obtaining an arrest warrant from a federal magistrate.

Previously ASIO had no powers of arrest. The only reason to give ASIO these new powers is so that they fall under the veil of secrecy surrounding the organisation.

Image: Setreset – Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0)

The legislation contains a section that allows the government of the day to use the threat of jail to silence potential whistle-blowers, and journalists who publish the leaked information:

> "Information concerning the security or defence of another country, being information that is, or has been, in the possession or control of the Commonwealth; and ...
>
> "(b) the person does so intending to prejudice the Commonwealth's security or defence; and
>
> "(c) the person's act results in, or is likely to result in, the information being disclosed to another country or a foreign organisation, or to a person acting on behalf of such a country or organisation."

"PENALTY: IMPRISONMENT FOR 25 YEARS"

Further down the Bill we find:

> "A person commits an offence if the person communicates, or makes available, an official record of information, or official information:
>
> "(a) to a person to whom he or she is not authorised to communicate it or make it available; or
>
> "(b) to a person to whom it is, in the interest of the Commonwealth, his or her duty not to communicate it or make it available. Penalty: Imprisonment for 2 years."

A public servant may also be jailed for six months if they hold onto potentially damaging information even if it has not been leaked. The Attorney-General also claims that the Bill was: "simply intended to restate the existing provisions under the Crimes Act in more modern language..."

"That's a load of rubbish", Cameron Murphy, at the time president of the NSW Council for Civil Liberties, told the *Guardian*. "It's not modernising at all. It's extending it in a new way by removing a defence of public interest.

"Previously if you published an unauthorised government document, you could mount the defence that it was 'in the public interest' to do so. That will be removed. It increases the penalty for people who pass on this information to 25 years. So it's a significant stick to wave at people who might be thinking of leaking information."

Said Murphy: "The objective of the legislation is to stop anyone who comes across government information which is damaging to the government, from exposing it through the media."

The Attorney-General assured the public that: "In each case, safeguards apply to ensure that legitimate transfers of information can continue."

Yet no safeguards are apparent in the Bill. Just the opposite. It says: "A prosecution under this Chapter may be instituted only by, or with the consent of, the Attorney-General," but that "a person charged with an offence against this Chapter may be arrested ... even if the consent of the Attorney-General ... has not been obtained."

It also contains provisions for trials held in secret: "At any time bft, the judge or magistrate ... may, if satisfied that it is in the interest of the security or defence of the Commonwealth:

> "(a) order that some or all of the members of the public be excluded during the whole or a part of the hearing; or
>
> "(b) order that no report of the whole or a specified part of, or relating to, the application or proceedings be published."In some sections of the Bill it also states: "The defendant bears a legal burden in relation to the matter."

(A legal burden of proof on the defendant in this case must be discharged on the balance of probabilities, a lesser burden than "beyond all reasonable doubt.")

This legislation, along with beefed up police and military forces that have been given broad new powers to search, detain arrest and use force against "suspects," will not be used to protect Australia from an external threat.

It will inevitably be used to suppress the growing discontent of the people themselves. ✪

GREEN NOTES

Anna Pha

The horrendous spectacle of a carpet of millions of dead fish floating on the Darling River at Menindee is yet another wake-up call that climate change is here. It is the second such mass fish kill and even worse than the one in 2018-2019. The fish died in both instances because of a lack of oxygen with the most recent kill being more serious than the previous, not just because of the number of dead fish, but because of the slowness of the former NSW Coalition government to remove the fish from the water. In 2018 the fish were left high and dry on a river that had almost dried up. In part this was the result of drought. In 2023, flooding resulted in a massive increase in microorganisms that sucked the oxygen out of the water.

But drought and flooding were not the only causes. The stench goes way beyond the fish to the abject failure of the Murray-Darling Basin Scheme, a disaster made by mismanagement, theft, deception, political interference, and corporate profiteering at the expense of regional communities, Indigenous people, and farmers. The Murray Darling Basin has been all-but destroyed by human vandalism. The rot set in with the Howard government's Water Act of 2007 midst the Millennium Drought (2001-2010). According to the Bureau of Meteorology, the Murray River has experienced its ten driest years in the past century since 2000. As the drought took its toll economically, socially, and environmentally, urgent measures were required to address the crisis. The rate at which water was being pumped from the Basin was unsustainable. The growing of water-guzzling cotton, almond, and rice crops on an industrial scale, resulted in massive shortages of water downstream to the point where the mouth of the Murray River had to be dredged to avoid it drying up. Adelaide's water supply was threatened, and some towns were left without drinking water.

The Water Act established the Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) to develop an integrated plan for the sustainable use of the Basin's water resources. Under the influence of irrigation lobbyists, the MDBA watered down its original plan for the return of water to the Northern Basin thus permitting over-extraction of water. It failed to act on illegal syphoning off of water. State governments (Qld, Vic, SA) issue water entitlements annually, but the actual allocation is a percentage of that entitlement, depending on the amount of water available. Allocations can be bought and sold, with the price depending on the scarcity. The commodification and trading of water has become big business driven by profit-making. The needs of rural and regional communities, Indigenous people, and farmers are overlooked.

The Murray Darling Basin on which so much life and so many livelihoods are dependent cannot be saved without cooperation between the states and planning in consultation with affected communities. This should include the conversion of almond, rice, and cotton to climate appropriate crops.

For a sanitised official explanation of how water is allocated see www.mdba.gov.au

Something to say?

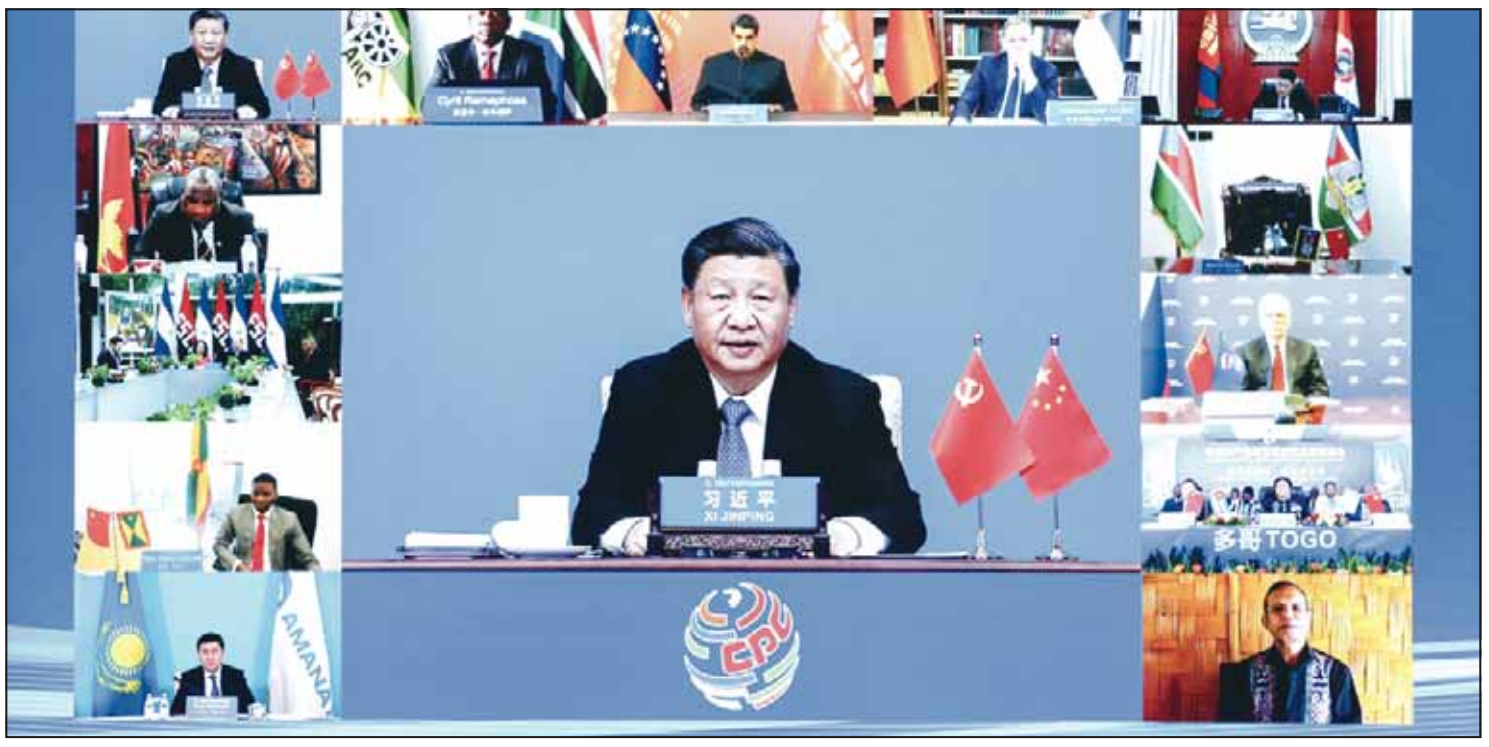
Write to the Editor!

editor@cpa.org.au

On the path towar

The Communist Party of China (CPC) kindly invited the CPA to participate in the online forum of the CPC in dialogue with World Political Parties high-level. Four CPA members of the Central Committee joined the event held on 15th March 2023. The more than 650 attendees listened to contributions by President Xi Jinping outlining China's path to modernisation and proposal for a Global Civilisation Initiative. Several other presidents made contributions including Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, Nicaragua President Daniel Ortega. and other high level participants from across the continents.

Full text of President Xi Jinping's keynote address:



Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China. Photo: Xinhua

Leaders of political parties from around the world,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Friends,
It gives me great pleasure to join all of you for the discussion on "Path Towards Modernisation: The Responsibility of Political Parties."

The history of human development is full of twists and turns. Similarly, the journey of each country to explore the path to modernisation is also arduous. In today's world, multiple challenges and crises are intertwined. The global economic recovery remains sluggish, the development gap is widening, ecological environment is deteriorating, and the Cold War mentality is lingering. Humanity's modernisation process has once again reached a crossroads of history.

Polarisation or common prosperity? Pure materialistic pursuit or coordinated material and cultural-ethical advancement? Draining the pond to catch the fish or creating harmony between man and nature? Zero-sum game or win-win cooperation? Copying other countries' development model or achieving independent development in light of national conditions? What kind of modernisation do we need and how can we achieve it?

Confronted with these questions, political parties as an important force steering and driving the modernisation process are duty bound to provide answers. Here, I wish to share some of my observations.

We must put the people first and ensure modernisation is people-centred. The people are the creators of history and are the strongest bedrock and force in advancing modernisation. The ultimate goal of modernisation is people's free and well-rounded development.

For a modernisation path to work and work well, it must put the people first. Modernisation is not only about indicators and statistics on paper but more about the delivery of a happy and stable life for the people. With a focus on the people's aspirations for a better life and further progress of civilisation, political parties should strive to achieve material abundance, political integrity, cultural-ethical enrichment, social stability, and secure and pleasant living environments so that modernisation will better address the concerns and meet diversified needs of the people. In this way, modernisation will promote the sustainable development of humanity by not only increasing the well-being of this generation but also protecting the rights and interest of future generations.

INDEPENDENCE AND DIVERSITY

We must uphold the principle of independence and explore diversified paths towards modernisation. Modernisation is not "an exclusive patent" of a small handful of countries, nor is it a single answer question. It cannot be realised by a cookie cutter approach or simple "copy and paste." For any country to achieve modernisation, it needs not only to follow the general laws governing the process, but more importantly consider its own national conditions and unique features.

It is the people of a country that are in the best position to tell what kind of modernisation best suits them. Developing countries have the right and ability to independently explore the modernisation path with their distinctive features based on their national realities.

We must develop our country and our nation with our own strength, and we must maintain a firm grasp on the future of our country's development and progress. We should respect and support the development paths independently chosen by different peoples to jointly usher in a new prospect for humanity's modernisation that is like a garden where a hundred flowers bloom.

We must uphold fundamental principles and break new ground and ensure the continuity of the modernisation process. In the face of various new issues, conditions and challenges in the modernisation process, political parties should boldly take on responsibilities and excel in their work.

HUMANITY'S SHARED FUTURE

We should break the shackles of stale thinking, remove institutional barriers, explore new methods and new approaches, and break new ground in theories and practices to instil unceasing dynamism into the modernisation process. 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.

We must help others to succeed while seeking our own success and ensure all can enjoy the outcomes of modernisation. Humanity lives in a community with a shared future where we rise and fall together. For any country to achieve modernisation, it should pursue common development through solidarity and cooperation and follow the principles of joint contribution, shared benefits, and win-win outcome. The frontrunners should sincerely support other countries in their development.

One will not be seen in a more favourable light after blowing out others' lamp; nor will they go farther by blocking others' paths. We should share opportunities, create a future together and make the pie of humanity's modernisation bigger to ensure more people enjoy the outcomes of modernisation in a fairer way. We stand firmly opposed to the practice of preserving one's own development privilege by suppressing and containing other countries' endeavour to achieve modernisation.

We must forge ahead with enterprise and ensure firm leadership over modernisation. Modernisation does not fall into our lap automatically. It is the result of hard work with the strong historical initiative. Political parties are the leading and driving force for modernisation. Their values, ability to lead and govern, ethos, willpower and character have a direct bearing on the orientation and future of the modernisation process. As an ancient Chinese philosopher said, "He who conquers himself is strong."

Political parties should integrate party building with national modernisation, forge ahead with enterprise and resolve, and excel themselves. In this way, they will have the confidence, determination, and capability to respond to the challenges and questions presented by the times, meet people's expectations, and steer the course and marshal strength for the modernisation cause.

CHINA'S REJUVENATION

Ladies and gentlemen,
Friends,

Achieving modernisation is a dream that the Chinese people have strived to fulfil since modern times. The journey of over 100 years that the Party has traversed to unite and lead the Chinese people in pursuing national rejuvenation is also an exploration of a path towards modernisation. Thanks to the unremitting efforts of generation after generation, we have found our own path to modernisation.

The 20th National Congress of the CPC has proposed advancing the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts through a Chinese path to modernisation. Chinese modernisation is one of a huge population, of common prosperity for all, of material and cultural-ethical advancement, of harmony between humanity and nature, and of peaceful development. It is rooted in our national conditions and also draws on the experience of other countries.

It carries the imprint of history and traditional culture and also contains modern elements. It delivers benefit to the Chinese people and also advances common development of the world. It is a sure path for us to build a stronger nation and realise the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. It is also a path we must take to seek progress for humanity and harmony for the entire world.

We will stay committed to the right direction, right theories, and the right path. We will not veer off course by changing our nature or abandoning our system. As our own future is closely connected with that of other countries and peoples, we will strive to provide new opportunities for world development, add new impetus to humanity's exploration of paths towards modernisation and make new contributions to the theory and practice of humanity's modernisation as we make new progress in Chinese modernisation.

The CPC will continue to pursue

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high-quality development and promote global growth and prosperity. We will accelerate the building of a new development paradigm that promotes high-standard opening up and steady expansion of market access. China's door will only open wider. As we further modernise our industrial system, we will provide the world with more and better products made and created in China, and with a Chinese market of a larger scale and stronger demand.

We will continue to support and help developing countries in their pursuit of faster development, industrialisation and modernisation and offer Chinese solutions and strength for narrowing the North-South gap and achieving common development. The Communist Party of China stands ready to work with political parties of all other countries to advance high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, accelerate the solid implementation of the Global Development Initiative, foster new drivers for global development and build a global community of development.

The CPC will continue to safeguard international fairness and justice and promote world peace and stability. In advancing modernisation, China will neither tread the old path of colonisation and plunder, nor the crooked path taken by some countries to seek hegemony once they grow strong. What China pursues is the right course of peaceful development. We seek to settle differences through dialogue and resolve disputes through cooperation.

We firmly oppose hegemony and power politics in all their forms. We advocate solidarity and win-win mentality in handling complex and intertwined security challenges to set up a fair and just security architecture that is built and shared by all. The world does not need a new Cold War.

PEACE AND JUSTICE

The practice of stoking division and confrontation in the name of democracy is in itself a violation of the spirit of democracy. It will not receive any support. What it brings is only endless harm. A modernised China will strengthen the force for world peace and international justice. No matter what level of development China achieves, it will never seek hegemony or expansion.

The CPC will continue to promote inter-civilisation exchanges and mutual learning and advance the progress of human civilisations. Around the world, countries and regions have chosen different paths to modernisation, which are rooted in their unique and long civilisations.

All civilisations created by human society are splendid. They are where each country's modernisation drive draws its strength and where its unique feature comes from. They, transcending time and space, have jointly made important contribution to humanity's modernisation process. Chinese modernisation, as a new form of human advancement, will draw upon the merits of other civilisations and make the garden of world civilisations more vibrant.

GLOBAL CIVILISATION INITIATIVE

Ladies and gentlemen,

Friends,

A single flower does not make spring, while one hundred flowers in full blossom bring spring to the garden. As the future of all countries is closely connected, tolerance, coexistence, exchanges, and mutual learning among different civilisations play an irreplaceable role in advancing humanity's modernisation process and making the garden of world civilisations flourish. Here, I wish to propose the Global Civilisation Initiative.

We advocate the respect for the diversity of civilisations. Countries need to uphold the principles of equality, mutual learning, dialogue and inclusiveness among civilisations, and let cultural exchanges transcend estrangement, mutual learning transcend clashes, and coexistence transcend feelings of superiority.

We advocate the common values of humanity. Peace, development, equity, justice, democracy, and freedom are the common aspirations of all peoples. Countries need to keep an open mind in appreciating the perceptions of values by different civilisations, and refrain from imposing their own values or models on others and from stoking ideological confrontation.

We advocate the importance of inheritance and innovation of civilisations. Countries need to fully harness the relevance of their histories and cultures to the present times, and push for creative transformation and innovative development of their fine traditional cultures.

We advocate robust international people-to-people exchanges and cooperation. Countries need to explore the building of a global network for inter-civilisation dialogue and cooperation, enrich the contents of exchanges and expand avenues of cooperation to promote mutual understanding and friendship among people of all countries and jointly advance the progress of human civilisations.

We are ready to work together with the international community to open up a new prospect of enhanced exchanges and understanding among different peoples and better interactions and integration of diversified cultures. Together we can make the garden of world civilisations colourful and vibrant.

The CPC is committed to strengthening exchanges and cooperation with other political parties to pursue the just cause together. We are ready to deepen interactions with political parties and organisations in other countries to expand the convergence of ideas and interests. Let us leverage the strength of a new type of party-to-party relations for the building of a new type of international relations and expand global partnerships by fostering stronger partners with world political parties.

The CPC stands ready to share governance experience with political parties and organisations of other countries so that together we can make big strides on the path to modernisation toward the goal of building a community with a shared future for mankind.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Friends,

There are bound to be setbacks on humanity's journey to modernisation, but the future is bright. The CPC is willing to work with all of you to ensure that different modernisation drives form a mighty force driving prosperity and progress of the world and forge ahead nonstop in the long river of history!

Thank you.

Xinhua

Elizabeth Hulm – CPA CC member.

Andrew Irving – CPA General Secretary.

Vinnie Molina – CPA National President.

Khalil Ibrahim.

able development of ing of this generation of future generations.

Without charge or trial

Tamara Nassar

Israeli prison authorities are holding more Palestinians without charge or trial simultaneously than they have in 20 years. Known as administrative detention, the practice is a direct continuation of British colonial rule.

Administrative detention orders are typically issued for six-month periods but can be renewed indefinitely. Under such orders, detainees are held without charge or trial and they and their attorneys are unable to see evidence against them.

Israel currently imprisons over 1,000 Palestinians under such orders, including children and former prisoners, according to figures documented by HaMoked, an organisation that campaigns against Israel's abuses of Palestinians living under occupation.

The last time Israel was holding that many Palestinians without charge or trial was during the second Intifada in 2003.

Israel is imprisoning four Jewish Israelis under administrative detention, the highest number since 1994.

One Palestinian currently held under such orders is Khader Adnan. In protest of the Israeli order, he has refused food for 60 days since he was arrested in February.

Adnan is a veteran hunger striker who has taken part in several long-term hunger strikes in protest of similar orders over the years. Those include 66 days in 2012, 55 days in 2015 and 58 days in 2018.

The father of nine is experiencing severe health deterioration and has prepared his will in the event of his death.

From the occupied West Bank village of Arraba near Jenin, Adnan spent some eight years in Israeli detention, the majority of which he was held without charge or trial.

Israeli occupation forces target Adnan for being a known activist with affiliations to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad resistance group.

Photo: Romerito Pontes – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

TORTURE OF PRISONERS

Meanwhile, two Palestinian human rights organisations delivered last month an oral intervention to the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council regarding Israel's torturous, cruel, and degrading treatment of Palestinian prisoners.

Israel's use of torture against Palestinian detainees, and the attempt by Israeli state institutions to hide these crimes, were highlighted by Al-Haq and Addameer, leading Palestinian human rights groups.

The intervention also emphasised the psychological distress and helplessness that Palestinians who are held without charge or trial and without an end in sight must endure.

Medical staff in Israeli prisons provide a green light to Palestinian detainees for interrogation, ignoring the evidence of torture on their bodies, the groups emphasised.

The intervention highlighted the Israeli government's "limitations on medical treatment" – which prisoners' rights groups cited as the cause of deaths of prisoners over the years.

A group of Palestinian human rights groups is calling for the release of a political activist and intellectual who was diagnosed with a bone marrow cancer last year.

Israel has imprisoned Walid Daqqa for 37 years. He is among the 23 Palestinians who have been held by Israel since before the Oslo accords were signed in the 1990s.

Doctors have insinuated that Israeli prison authorities' deliberate medical neglect is worsening Daqqa's health.

When Daqqa experienced a stroke recently, Israeli prison authorities denied him an emergency hospital transfer. He was only hospitalised 11 days after he experienced the stroke. The groups are calling for Daqqa's immediate release.

PUNITIVE MEASURES

Israeli ultra-far-right police minister Itamar Ben-Gvir has taken brutal measures against Palestinian prisoners since taking office. Ben-Gvir demanded that Israeli prison authorities limit the time that certain Palestinian prisoners are allowed to use the shower.

As part of Israeli prison authorities' punitive measures against Palestinian detainees, they are serving them stale and frozen bread, conducting frequent raids and searches of cells and increasing the use of solitary confinement.

Israeli lawmakers advanced a bill in Israel's parliament, the Knesset, last month that would allow the execution of Palestinians who kill Israelis.

The bill would not apply to Israelis who kill Palestinians, however, underscoring the openly racist and apartheid nature of Israel's rule over the Palestinian people.

If passed into law, the government-backed bill would permit courts to put Palestinians who killed Israelis to death if they did so out of so-called nationalistic motivations.

The Electronic Intifada ✪

A united Ireland is possible

So-called "world leaders" past and present descended on Northern Ireland last week to mark the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement.

Biden and Clinton, Sunak, and Blair joined Irish republican and Ulster unionist leaders involved in negotiating the deal – all the while promoting what the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) calls the "fallacious" assertion that Britain's role has been that of an "honest broker keeping the peace between Catholics and Protestants, while ignoring the fact that these divisions were fostered by British imperialism."

Hundreds of British police officers were drafted to guard the assembled dignitaries. Officials talk up the threat from "dissident republicans," ignoring the long and bloody record of loyalist terror.

Attempts to celebrate the pact as a triumph will be squashed by the elephant in the room. The Good Friday Agreement did not create a viable political settlement. Northern Ireland has been without a functioning government for more than a third of its existence as a "devolved" administration.

It's without one now. Just this last week British ministers were being pressed on whether they would reimpose direct rule.

The impasse is a direct result of the sectarian set-up built into 1998's deal: the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) cannot stomach the idea of a republican, First Minister, so it's boycotting the Assembly since Sinn Fein, now the largest party, has the right to the post; using post-Brexit customs arrangements as an excuse. The terms of power-sharing mean a government can't be formed so long as the DUP won't play ball.

The Alliance party, which does not designate as unionist or nationalist, warned against seeing the agreement as "written in tablets of stone" and pointed to the way the "mandatory form of coalition" it dictates "institutionalises division in society [and is] too rigid."

Alliance is not a socialist party but the Communist Party of Ireland makes much the same point in a class context: 1998 "allocated the entire population into separate sectarian camps ... [made] competition 'between the two communities' the main dynamic for politics ... It cements rather than weakens the sectarian division and makes the achievement of working-class unity more difficult."

The Good Friday Agreement is credited with ending the armed struggle in Northern Ireland. Peace is not an achievement to be underrated.

But there is a distinction between avoiding a return to violence and acting as if the terms of the settlement are sacrosanct. From the start it involved serious problems, from the institutionalised sectarianism already mentioned to the subsequent amendment of the Republic of Ireland's own constitution to change clauses that had asserted sovereignty over the whole island of Ireland.

Any anti-imperialist should be committed to the liberation of Britain's oldest colony and the cause of a united, independent Ireland.

Treating the Agreement as untouchable puts a block on progress towards that. It traps Northern Ireland in a moment of time, making the direst predictions of disaster should it be compromised in any way.

This tendency was taken to the point of absurdity during the Brexit debate, when some Remain advocates used uncertainty over the future of the British border in Ireland as a reason to oppose Britain itself leaving the EU – in effect asserting that Britain had no right to leave a supranational bloc if doing so might disrupt the terms on which it continues to rule a large chunk of Irish land.

The more obstinate liberals still see the back and forth over Irish Sea customs borders as evidence of the historic folly of leaving the EU.

In reality, like Sinn Fein's growth into the largest party north and south of the border and the reactions to it – unwieldy pro-status quo coalitions in Dublin, the DUP boycott of the institutions in Belfast – it is a sign that the current set-up cannot be sustained much longer. Irish reunification is now a present political task.

Morning Star ✪

Youth oppose military build-up

Shimbun Akahata

TOKYO: Shouting in chorus, "No to Japan's possession of enemy base strike capabilities!," "No to a war-fighting Japan!," hundreds of young people marched in a demonstration through Tokyo's famous shopping district of Shinjuku on 18th March.

The action was called for by an organising committee consisting of various youth groups, including the Democratic Youth League of Japan (DYLJ), and the National Confederation of Trade Unions (Zenroren) youth section.

The aim was to increase public support for opposition to Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's move to impose higher taxes on the people of Japan to finance a planned huge expansion of the armed forces.

Holding a placard reading, "No to tax hikes for military build-up!," a 22-year-old college student said, "I think government policies using a large amount of tax money for a military build-up rather than for education, social services, and people's livelihoods are wrong.

"When thinking Japan may turn into a war-fighting nation, I get depressed. However, in today's action, I met with many people feeling the same way about the government policies and received positive energy from them."

Under direction from the US, the Japanese government has been making moves to strengthen its military as another component of the encirclement of China. Kishida is up against Japan's anti-war constitution, however. Its Article 9 forbids Japan from building up an offensive military force and effectively outlaws participation in launching wars.

A 31-year-old protester who came from Kanagawa Prefecture said, "I hope Japan, as the nation having the war-renouncing Article 9 of the Constitution, will make efforts to pursue peace diplomacy and not to strengthen its military capability."

Democratic Youth League of Japan Vice Chair Nakayama Ayumi expressed her determination to work hard to attract more young people to the movement opposing the government move to turn Japan into a war-fighting nation.

Similar demonstrations also took place in Kyoto and other cities.

Morning Star ✪

Profit bonanza from conflict

Medea Benjamin and Nicolas JS Davies

With the Ukraine war having reached its one-year mark on 24th February, the Russians have not achieved a military victory, but neither has the West achieved its goals on the economic front. When Russia invaded Ukraine, the United States and its European allies vowed to impose crippling sanctions that would bring Russia to its knees and force it to withdraw.

Western sanctions would erect a new Iron Curtain, hundreds of miles to the east of the old one, separating an isolated, defeated, bankrupt Russia from a reunited, triumphant and prosperous West. Not only has Russia withstood the economic assault, but the sanctions have boomeranged – hitting the very countries that imposed them.

Western sanctions on Russia reduced the global supply of oil and natural gas, but also pushed up prices. So Russia profited from the higher prices, even as its export volume decreased. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) reports that Russia's economy only contracted by 2.2 per cent in 2022, compared with the 8.5 per cent contraction it had forecast. The IMF now predicts that the Russian economy will actually grow by 0.3 per cent in 2023.

On the other hand, Ukraine's economy has shrunk by 35 per cent or more, despite US$46 billion in economic aid from generous US taxpayers, on top of US$67 billion in military aid.

European economies are also taking a hit. After growing by 3.5 per cent in 2022, the euro area economy is expected to stagnate and grow only 0.7 per cent in 2023, while the British economy is projected to actually contract by 0.6 per cent. Germany was more dependent on imported Russian energy than other large European countries so, after growing a meagre 1.9 per cent in 2022, it is predicted to have negligible 0.1 per cent growth in 2023. German industry is set to pay about 40 per cent more for energy in 2023 than it did in 2021.

The United States is less directly impacted than Europe, but its growth shrank from 5.9 per cent in 2021 to 2 per cent in 2022 and is projected to keep shrinking, to 1.4 per cent in 2023 and 1 per cent in 2024. Meanwhile, India, which has remained neutral while buying oil from Russia at a discounted price, is projected to maintain its 2022 growth rate of over 6 per cent per year all through 2023 and 2024. China has also benefited from buying discounted Russian oil and from an overall trade increase with Russia of 30 per cent in 2022. China's economy is expected to grow at 5 per cent this year.

Other oil and gas producers reaped windfall profits from the effects of the sanctions. Saudi Arabia's GDP grew by 8.7 per cent, the fastest of all large economies, while Western oil companies laughed all the way to the bank to deposit US$200 billion in profits: ExxonMobil made US$56 billion, an all-time record for an oil company, while Shell made US$40 billion and Chevron and Total gained US$36 billion each. BP made "only" US$28 billion, as it closed down its operations in Russia, but still doubled its 2021 profits.

As for natural gas, US LNG (liquefied natural gas) suppliers like Cheniere and companies like Total that distribute the gas in Europe are replacing Europe's supply of Russian natural gas with fracked gas from the United States, at about four times the prices US customers pay, and with the dreadful climate impacts of fracking. A mild winter in Europe and a whopping US$850 billion in European government subsidies to households and companies brought retail energy prices back down to 2021 levels, but only after they spiked five times higher over the summer of 2022.

An even more unfriendly act was the sabotage of the Nord Stream undersea gas pipelines that brought Russian gas to Germany. The investigative journalist Seymour Hersh reported that the pipelines were blown up by the United States, with the help of Norway – the two countries that have displaced Russia as Europe's two largest natural gas suppliers. Coupled with the high price of US fracked gas, this has fuelled anger among the European public. In the long term, European leaders may well conclude that the region's future lies in political and economic independence from countries that launch military attacks on it. That would include the United States as well as Russia.

The other big winners of the war in Ukraine will of course be the weapons makers, dominated globally by the US "big five": Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon and General Dynamics. Most of the weapons so far sent to Ukraine have come from existing stockpiles in the United States and NATO countries. Authorisation to build even bigger new stockpiles flew through the US Congress in December, but the resulting contracts have not yet shown up in the arms firms' sales figures or profit statements.

The scale of war profits anticipated by the arms industry is best reflected, for now, in the 2022 increases in their stock prices: Lockheed Martin, up 37 per cent; Northrop Grumman, up 41 per cent; Raytheon, up 17 per cent; and General Dynamics, up 19 per cent.

While a few countries and companies have profited from the war, countries far from the scene of the conflict have been reeling from the economic fallout. Russia and Ukraine have been critical suppliers of wheat, corn, cooking oil and fertilisers to much of the world. The war and sanctions have caused shortages in all these commodities, as well as fuel to transport them, pushing global food prices to all-time highs.

So the other big losers in this war are people in the Global South who depend on imports of food and fertilisers from Russia and Ukraine simply to feed their families. Egypt and Turkey are the largest importers of Russian and Ukrainian wheat, while a dozen other highly vulnerable countries depend almost entirely on Russia and Ukraine for their wheat supply, from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Laos to Benin, Rwanda and Somalia. Fifteen African countries imported more than half their supply of wheat from Russia and Ukraine in 2020.

After a year of slaughter and destruction in Ukraine, we can declare that the economic winners of this war are: Saudi Arabia, ExxonMobil and its fellow oil giants, Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman.

The losers are, first and foremost, the sacrificed people of Ukraine, on both sides of the frontlines, all the soldiers who have lost their lives and families who have lost their loved ones. But also, in the losing column are working and poor people everywhere, especially in the countries of the Global South that are most dependent on imported food and energy. Last but not least is the Earth, its atmosphere and its climate – all sacrificed to the God of War.

That is why, as the war enters its second year, there is a mounting global outcry for the parties to the conflict to find solutions. The words of Brazil's President Lula reflect that growing sentiment. When pressured by US President Joe Biden to send weapons to Ukraine, he said, "I don't want to join this war, I want to end it."

Third World Resurgence ✪

Global Briefs

YEMEN: Saudi and Omani delegations arrived in Yemen to negotiate a permanent ceasefire deal with Houthi officials. The visit follows the Oman-mediated consultations between Saudi Arabia and Yemen, combined with UN peace efforts. The peace process gained momentum after Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to re-establish ties in a deal brokered by China. The Houthis control north Yemen and have been fighting against the Saudi-led military alliance since 2015. The Saudi-led coalition had imposed severe restrictions on the flow of goods to Yemen. This blockade devastated the economy and led to the situation described by the UN as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Recently the Saudis have lifted an eight-year-old ban on imports headed for southern ports; it allows commercial ships to dock there. The proposed negotiations will focus on a full re-opening of Yemen's ports and airports, payment of wages for public servants, a rebuilding process, and a political transition. If an agreement is reached, it could ultimately lead to a transitional unity government.

LEBANON: The Litany River authority condemned Israeli airstrikes on a vital irrigation system. The damaged canal carries the water of the Litany River to more than 1,200 acres of farmland. The strike hit an ancient Roman aqueduct listed as a historical monument by UNESCO. The loss of water threatens food security in a country already experiencing huge economic and social hardship. "Strikes carried out by Israeli foes are aimed at the Lebanese infrastructure. Their goal is to punish Lebanese farmers by cutting their access to water used for irrigation because the militant groups used their gardens as launch pads," said Sami Alawiya, head of the Litany River authority.

UKRAINE: According to the Russian Defence Ministry the US has recommenced its biological laboratories program on Ukrainian territory. The primary focus of the program is on the construction of new secret facilities and the training of personnel. The program was originally referred to as "Joint Biological Research" to be renamed later as "Biological Control Research".

GERMANY: Traditional Easter peace marches took place in over 120 cities and towns across the country. The march organisers in Berlin estimated that up to 3000 people took part. The participants carried banners with peace doves, placards, and banners reading "US and NATO get out of Ukraine," "Diplomacy not Arms," "Against pointless sanctions, cheap energy now", "Tanks never bring peace." The performance before the march included a peace song in Russian, German, and Yiddish, and speakers called for prompt peace negotiations on Ukraine. A small number of pro-Ukrainian activists made an attempt to disrupt the march, but failed.

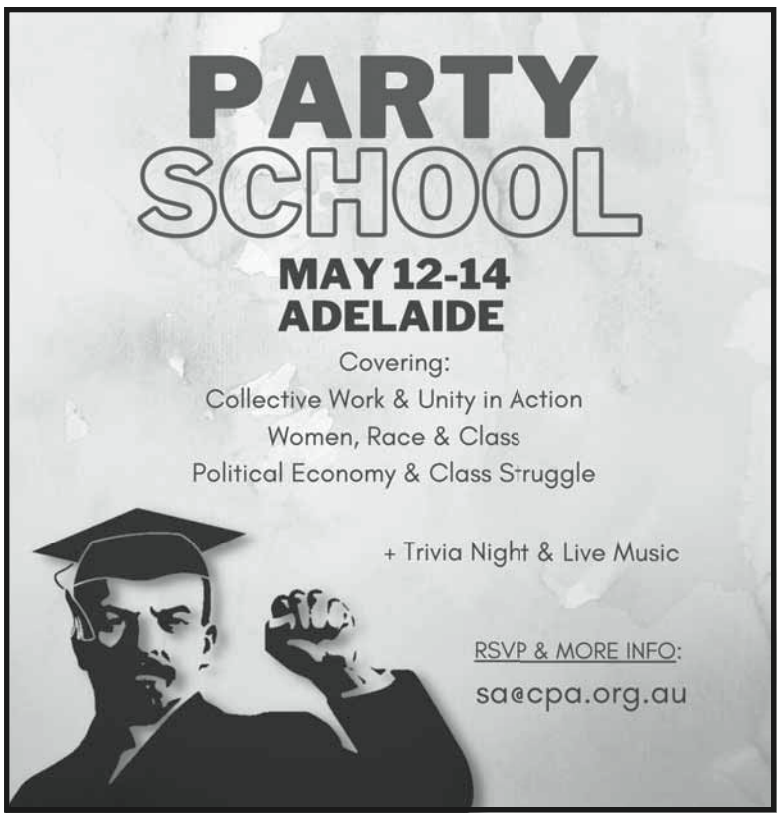
CPA Quake Appeal for the Türkiye & Syria earthquake victims

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



China's peaceful development is a great boon to the world

Long Dingbin*

Last month, China's annual Two Sessions, the National People's Congress (NPC, China's top legislature) and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (China's top political advisory body) were successfully concluded in Beijing. Nearly 3000 NPC deputies and over 2000 members of the CPPCC National Committee converged in Beijing to discuss national affairs, a major event in China's political life and a vivid demonstration of China's whole-process people's democracy.

The NPC deputies are from all walks of life and places across the country. Many are front line workers, farmers and professional personnel. Sectors of the National Committee of CPPCC basically cover all areas of society. Through the consensus building platform of the Two Sessions, the "trivial issues" of people's livelihoods are closely linked to the "significant matters of the nation," public opinions are heard by the top decision making body, and people's requests resonate with the Communist Party of China (CPC) and Chinese government's strategies and policies.

This year's NPC session unanimously elected Xi Jinping as President of the People's Republic of China (PRC), and Chairman of the PRC Central Military Commission, reflecting the common will and unity of the whole country and also reinforcing China's key advantage of political certainty and consistency.

The Two Sessions are reckoned as China's political weather vane and economic barometer. This year's Sessions carry special significance as they witness the specific implementation of the calls made during the 20th National Congress of the CPC hosted last year, outline a new growth blueprint after the country overcame COVID-19 shock waves, and expound to the world China's propositions on major international issues.

Chinese-style modernisation contributes to and inspires the development of the world. Achieving modernisation for a country of more than 1.4 billion people is an unprecedented feat in human history, one of profound global significance in itself. Making extraordinary headway and busting the myth that modernisation is westernisation, Chinese-style modernisation has brought new enlightenment to the world with its characteristics of independence, people's supremacy, common prosperity for all, material and cultural-ethical advancement, harmony between humanity and nature and peaceful development. In his report to the 20th CPC National Congress, Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, underscored the central task of the Party, calling for efforts to advance the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts through Chinese-style modernisation, which presents a correct path to realizing the Chinese dream and offers humanity a new choice for achieving modernization.

As Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang pointed out at the press conference of this year's NPC, Chinese-style modernisation is not pursued through war, colonisation or plundering, but dedicated to peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit. The process of Chinese modernisation is a boost to the force for peace, justice and progress in the world. As more and more countries begin their own journey of modernisation, the vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind will become true.

China's commitment to high quality development and high level opening up provides valuable new opportunities to the world. China has long been the biggest contributor to the world's economic development. In the period 2013-2021, China's contribution to global economic growth averaged 38.6 per cent, higher than that of G7 countries combined (25.7 per cent). The IMF said that the Chinese economy is now expected to contribute a third of global growth in 2023.

In 2022, China's GDP increased to nearly USD18 trillion, registering an annual growth rate of 5.2 per cent over the past five years and an annual growth of 6.2 per cent over the past decade. China's projected growth target in 2023 is around five percent, far higher than other major economies.

Xi Jinping stressed in his report to the 20th National Congress of the CPC that China's new journey toward modernisation features high quality development. And this year's Two Sessions have reemphasised the importance of high quality development.

High quality development means China will upgrade its economy from the lower and middle end to the middle and upper end in the industrial chain, and will prioritise low-carbon emission industries, energy-efficient infrastructure, smart transportation and high quality consumption, which will enable the country to expand practical cooperation with Australia and other countries in such areas as digital economy, renewable energy and creative industries etc.

High quality development also means a high level opening up. China will continue to optimise its business environment, expand market access, actively promote accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and other high-standard economic and trade agreements.

China's high quality development is underpinned by its profound domestic market. It is forecast that in the coming decade China will import over US$22 trillion of goods, which means huge opportunities for Australia and other countries around the world.

Photo: Nathan Hughes Hamilton – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

China is committed to safeguarding world peace and security. In his speech at the NPC, after being elected as Chinese President about one month ago, President Xi Jinping reaffirmed that China must hold high the banner of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit, and add more stability and positive energy to world peace and development.

China will stick to the path of peaceful development, build on extensive partnerships to promote greater democracy in international relations. China will dedicate itself to building a community with a shared future for mankind, and making global governance more just and equitable. China will offer more and better insights and solutions to help tackle humanity's common challenges.

President Xi Jinping has proposed the Global Security Initiative, exploring solutions to both the symptoms and the root causes of international security challenges. His recent state visit to Russia as well as China's mediation in Saudi-Iran deal to restore diplomatic ties clearly show China's international image as a peace builder and demonstrate China's role and responsibility as a responsible major country.

With leaders successfully meeting last year and high level exchanges getting intensified recently, the development of China Australia relations is gaining steam. As front runner and pacemaker in our bilateral relations, Western Australia has always been playing a leading role in pressing forward our friendship and pragmatic cooperation.

Last month, two Chinese national sport teams, namely, the Men's Water Polo and the Women's Hockey teams visited and played friendship games with a WA local club team and Australian national team respectively, which are the first China WA sport exchanges since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and mark the gradual recovery of our people to people and cultural exchanges.

More excitingly, this 22nd July in Perth, Chinese national Women's football team will play against Denmark in their first group match in the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup, the result of which will determine if the Chinese team could qualify for the knockout stage.

I am sure the significant match in Perth will catch the eyes and hearts of 1.4 billion Chinese, and the City of Light will become a familiarised place to the hundreds of millions of Chinese football fans.

The most exciting event in China WA relations this year is no doubt Premier Mark McGowan's imminent visit to China from 17th-22nd April, during which he will meet senior Chinese officials and business leaders. I sincerely wish the visit a complete success, which will ensure high quality, substantive and steady development and usher in a brighter future of China WA relations.

I myself and my colleagues will spare no efforts to work closely with people from different walks of life in WA to promote more exchanges, dialogues and cooperation between the two sides.

*Chinese Consul General (WA) ✪

Sydney University staff take two more days' industrial action after historic strike vote

In a record of sorts for our University sector, National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members at the University of Sydney went on strike for the 8th and 9th times on Friday 31st March and the following Wednesday, 5th April, in the longest-running strike campaign in any Australian university. The decision to take further industrial action follows university management's refusal to implement satisfactory controls on staff workloads.

University management and the NTEU have been in contract negotiations for over twenty months. In addition to protections against overwork, the strike campaign has among its goals measures to improve job-security for casual and professional staff, and a pay increase that recognises the very significant rise in the number of students per staff member in recent years.

The vote to strike was taken at the largest ever union meeting held at the university, which had over 700 union members present.

"Never once in the history of the university have we had so many NTEU members voting to strike," said Dr Nick Riemer, the president of the NTEU branch at the university. "Twenty one months into negotiations, that tells us something about the crisis of overwork at the university, and the lack of confidence that staff have in the Vice-Chancellor (VC), Mark Scott, and the Provost, Annamarie Jagose, neither of whom have ever bothered even coming to negotiations."

"Far too many staff are crippled with overwork," Riemer continued. "We have people paid to work thirty hours a week who are working 48, just to keep up with their teaching. This cannot go on."

"Union members will not write the Vice-Chancellor and the Provost a blank cheque to increase overwork and undo our commitment to research-led teaching. The VC thought we'd accept half measures. He was wrong. How long will he hold staff and students hostage?"

NTEU General Secretary, Dr Damien Cahill, said "On the back of several days of strikes by NTEU members, progress has been made recently in negotiations. However, University management needs to listen to concerns that staff have about Education Focused roles and reflect these in a new enterprise agreement. Given Sydney Uni's $1billion surplus, management can also afford a more generous pay rise to its staff whose sacrifices got the University through the depths of the pandemic."

National Tertiary Education Union ✪

Equal Pay Day

In Canada, 4th April is Equal Pay Day, the date by which the average woman worker will have earned what the average man earned in 2022.

Equal Pay Day's symbolism is powerful. It is a blunt but easily understood reminder that women, on average, have to work more than 15 months to earn the same income as men earn in a year. Imagine getting hired for a job and then being handed paperwork indicating that your work year runs from January to April of the following year, that you actually have to work three extra months to get the same pay as your colleagues doing the same work. On an individual basis, practically nobody would stand for it. However, for over half the population, it's a reality they face year after year.

Being paid three months less every year leads to the problem cascading to the point where women are left further and further behind as time goes on. If a woman started working in January 2022 and had to work until April 2023 to make a "man's worth" of annual income, then the next year she has to work until early June (since she really only began earning her 2023 income after Equal Pay Day in April). Each year, her annual earnings start to accrue another three months later, so that after five years, she is a full year behind.

If you calculate this out for a woman's entire working career, assuming she works for approximately 40 years, she will have lost somewhere in the neighbourhood of eight years of income. Given that the average income in Canada in 2022 was C$59,300 (AU$65,825), she will be out nearly C$475,000 (AU$527,340).

This means the average working woman, even without factoring in adjustments for inflation, wage increases, or any promotions, can expect to lose around a half-million dollars in wages, just because she is a woman. The effects of this ripple throughout her life, impacting her retirement income, savings, quality of life, etc. The gender pay gap is substantially worse when it intersects with other forms of discrimination including those based on Indigeneity, racialisation, disability, age, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

Astonishingly, despite decades of hard work by the labour, women's, and equity-seeking movements, as well as legislation in all jurisdictions prohibiting discrimination in employment, four provinces in Canada do not have pay equity legislation.

In the provinces where equity legislation *has* been won, women and workers from other equity-seeking groups have had to remain militant to make sure equity has been maintained.

There are roughly seven million full-time working women in Canada, and with each of them losing an average of $475,000 over her working career, that means capitalism in Canada will effectively "earn" a staggering $3.3 trillion from them. A system that requires that kind of systemic theft to reproduce itself is a system that needs to be replaced.

Cut for reasons of space.

Peoples Voice ✪

US: Tik Tok, Tik Tok
Countdown to Cold War

Wei Yu, Nuvpreet and Melissa Garriga

Ten years ago, Edward Snowden told the whole world the truth about the US global surveillance program. If Congress cares about our digital privacy as some members are claiming, it should first begin by investigating the surveillance policies of its own US agencies. The campaign against TikTok is a fear-mongering tactic to wage war on China.

In 2020, the FBI used social media to monitor racial justice protesters who were targeted for arrests. For example, activist Mike Avery was arrested after posting about protests on Facebook, and his charges were dropped without explanation a few weeks later. An FBI official was so frustrated with the extensive social media surveillance that he told *The Intercept*, "Man, I don't even know what's legal anymore."

The dissonance between accusing TikTok of security concerns and working with other companies to invade people's privacy rings loudly in our ears. Social media has long been a tool used by federal agencies to target individuals and communities designated as a "threat."

The Departments of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement have monitored the social media activities of immigrant rights activists for years. The State Department used social media screening to discriminate against the Muslim, Arab, Middle Eastern, and South Asian communities under the Trump administration's "Muslim ban."

It was only last year that the post-9/11 National Security Agency phone surveillance program was reported to have finally been shut down. Major telecom companies like Verizon gave the government access to hundreds of millions of calls and texts. Dataminr, a start-up Twitter partner, provided police with data about Black Lives Matter protests. One focus on "potential gang members" targeted Black and Latinx people, including school-aged children.

Meta's (Facebook's) subsidiary WhatsApp was reportedly used by the Saudi government to hack journalist Jamal Khashoggi's phone before he was abducted and murdered. Meanwhile, Meta itself used a VPN [Virtual Private Network] to spy on users' smartphones for market research in exchange for bribes. WhatsApp is not banned on government devices, but TikTok should be?

If our lawmakers are concerned about protecting digital privacy, then Congress should start by investigating American federal agencies. Unlike China, as well as other Western countries, such as many EU member-states, the US does not have any digital privacy laws at the federal level.

Instead of targeting one social media platform in order to stoke fear in the local populace, the US could choose to cooperate with China to better ensure people's privacy is protected.

The ongoing effort to investigate and ban TikTok is not about our privacy. It is about fuelling more aggression against China. Fear-mongering about China has also caused the rise of anti-Asian racism in the US.

In banning TikTok, the US is projecting its invasive policies onto another government. Warmongers are using the issue to create paranoia and justify even more aggression towards China.

It is not a coincidence that these recent bans have come about shortly after the so-called Chinese "spy balloon" was shot down over the US. Privacy concerns are being used to wage war on China. The US should focus on passing federal data privacy laws instead of targeting one app.

Double standards and warmongering against China need to stop. China is not our enemy.

People's World ✪

Half the Sky

Elle Be

In 2020, a bipartisan effort in New South Wales finally achieved success in the long-standing struggle for the legalisation of abortion. The change is an undeniably huge milestone in reproductive rights and equal access to healthcare, where the largest positive impacts will be felt by the most vulnerable members of the community, including working class women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, members of the LGBTQI+ community, and survivors of sexual violence.

Under capitalism, those who bear children continue to carry the overwhelming burden for the care of those children. Legalisation of abortion gives back some agency to those who can't or don't want to raise children at the time of their pregnancy. This agency threatens the power and control of misogynists and capitalists alike (notwithstanding the significant overlap between these two groups). For the misogynist, they are threatened by the ability of women to control when they do and don't leave the workforce, as well as by the greater financial independence it brings. For the capitalist, they are threatened by the potential loss to the division of labour and the reserve labour forces created by pregnancy and raising children.

Unsurprisingly then, there is already a growing conservative and reactionary movement that seeks to challenge the legalisation of abortion in New South Wales. On 26th March 2023, a protest was held in the Sydney CBD for the so-called "Day of the Unborn Child." Hundreds gathered for a "pro-life" message and demanded repealing the legalisation of abortion. A counter-protester was even arrested by NSW Police for breaching the peace at the event.

The reactionary trend is not just a grassroots minority. It exists in state and federal parliaments across Australia and is often backed by the mainstream media. Shortly after the legalisation of abortion, a push began for the introduction of religious discrimination legislation, coming from One Nation in NSW and the Liberal Party at a federal level. These laws would limit access to abortion by allowing medical professionals to deny an abortion on religious grounds. While fortunately the push has not been successful, the threat posed by these types of laws is not over. Many politicians continue to support them. As the overturning of Roe v Wade in America demonstrates, our rights under capitalism are never safe.

The anti-abortion trend fits neatly within larger patterns of growing conservatism and austerity in Australia. Make no mistake, these issues will disproportionately impact working class women and LGBTQI+ people, beyond just reproductive rights. As the reactionary forces become stronger, louder, and more violent, it becomes harder for oppressed groups to fight back without genuine fear of violence. Now more than ever, the whole communist movement needs to come together to fight back the growing tide of misogyny and conservatism.

Half the Sky is a fortnightly column, written by communist women. The column will cover women's issues and experiences. We invite communist women to contribute to the column by emailing half.the.sky@cpa.org.au.

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Australia Cuba Friendship Society Inc. – South Australia

Anti US Economic & Commercial Blockade of Cuba Protest

Join the protest against
the illegal US blockade of Cuba

4:30 to 5:30 Tuesday 18th April

Parliament House Corner
North Terrace and King William Street

Information: 0416 769 555

May Day 2023 Roundup

Western Australian CPA Branch will have a stall and will march at the UnionsWA event for May Day 2023 Fremantle.

It will be great to return to the Fremantle Esplanade on Sunday 30th April for this important occasion after such a long break. Key times to note are:

- Community Festival: 10:30am - 12:00pm
- Music and Speeches: 11:30am - 12:00pm
- March: 12:00pm - 1:00pm
- Festival Close 2:00pm

To RSVP: www.unionswa.com.au/may_day_2023

Port **Adelaide** CPA Branch will have a stall and march in the main "May Day March and Family Fun Day" on 29th April in Tarntanyangga (Victoria Square). Party publications and other items will be on sale and there will be a sign-up sheet for events and other information.

Port Adelaide Branch will be using these events to promote the launch of their new Central Branch which will be formed in May this year.

South Australian comrades will also be attending the May Day Dinner on the 1st May at the Waterside Workers Hall in Port Adelaide, and predinner drinks at the Semaphore Workers Club from 3:30 pm

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Melbourne CPA Branch will have a stall at the VicTrades Hall event on Sunday 7th May, Trades Hall, corner Lygon and Victoria Streets

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Sunshine Coast CPA Branch will attend the Sunshine Coast Family Friendly May Day event on 30th April with a stall. Venue: Caloundra Sharks Rugby League Club, Gregory Street, Golden Beach, 10:00am to 1:00pm.

Comrades will also be marching in the **Brisbane** rally on 1st May

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NSW Comrades should note that there's a May Day march for Peace, Jobs and Justice on 6th May. The marchers will assemble at 12 noon in Wentworth St, **Port Kembla**.

Local group Wollongong Against War and Nukes (WAWAN) is encouraging all groups and individuals who wish to support the struggle against the siting of nuclear submarine bases in Port Kembla or anywhere on the east coast to attend the march.

Sydney Comrades: the May Day event is on Monday 1st May at 11:00am, Belmore Park (along Eddy Avenue, next to Central Station). The party contingent is meeting there at 11:00. All members in the state are expected to attend.

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