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Restore real wages

Anna Pha

The Fair Work Commission's (FWC) decision to award a 5.75 per cent wage rise for those on minimum award wage rates was higher than expected by many. However, it still sold workers short in the face of decades of stagnating and falling wages. It also failed to match an inflation rate of around 7 per cent.

This national minimum wage decision should be seen as a start in the struggle to restore real wages and win real wage rises for workers and a living income for social security recipients.

As the FWC stated in its decision: "We acknowledge that this increase will not maintain the real value of modern award minimum wages nor reverse the reduction in real value which has occurred over recent years."

The national minimum wage for workers not covered by an award or agreement will be increased by 8.65 per cent. Consequently 184,000 lowest paid workers stand to get an extra $70.20 a week, with their hourly wage rising from $21.38 per hour to $23.23 or from $812.60 to $882.80 per week.

The increase will be effective from 1st July 2023. There will also be a flow-on effect to some state awards and enterprise agreements.

ACTU Secretary Sally McManus said it was a critical increase during this cost-of-living crisis. The ACTU had campaigned for a 7 per cent increase. McManus pointed out that big business had pushed hard for a cut that would see Australia's lowest paid workers go backwards by at least $1,350 a year.

The decision applies directly to the just over 20 per cent of Australian workers who are paid in accordance with minimum wage rates in modern awards.

The FWC noted that these workers "... are significantly different to the workforce as a whole."

"They mostly work part-time hours, are predominantly female, and almost half are casual employees. They are also much more likely to be low paid." The FWC said it would be looking to do a review into wage gender inequity, hopefully in time for next year's minimum wage case.

Amendments to the *Fair Work Act* made by Labor in 2022 require the FWC to give greater emphasis to the issues of gender equality and job security.

"We have also taken into account the recent robustness of the labour market, and the fact that increases to modern award minimum wage rates will provide a disproportionate benefit to female workers and thus may contribute to reducing the aggregate gender pay gap across the workforce," the FWC said.

"The Commission will soon commence a research project to identify occupations and industries in which there is potential gender pay inequity and gender undervaluation of work and qualifications, and once completed this will underpin the consideration and determination of the identified issues," the FWC said.

"With last year's [wage] increase of 5 per cent and inflation at 6.8 per cent, we clearly do not have a wage-price spiral. Increases to the minimum wage over the past 20 years have had no discernible impact on inflation in the following year, recent research from the Australia Institute reveals. It is time to put the outdated wage-price spiral myth to bed," McManus said.

As usual businesses are bleating that the decision will cause them to go bust as they post record profits.

The wage decision should be seen as a start; the FWC itself states it does not maintain or restore real wages. Prices continue to spiral. Charities continue to be overwhelmed with increasing numbers of people seeking assistance as the cost of living crisis continues to intensify.

RBA LUNACY

One has to wonder what planet the Reserve Bank of Australia is on increasing interest rates yet again by 0.25 per cent. Is it trying to drive the economy into recession? The impact on people with home loans and renters as it is passed on by landlords will be horrendous.

This will leave households with even less to spend on necessities, and result in increased housing stress and pressure on charities which already cannot meet demand.

An annual housing snapshot released by Anglicare in April found that less than 1 per cent of listings were affordable for renters earning the minimum wage. Governments at all levels are failing to address the housing crisis. Rents continue to rise. The new minimum wage will do little if anything to change the precarious situation that those on low wages face.

There is a shortfall of 640,00 in low-cost housing across Australia according to Anglicare. The lowest median rents in Sydney, for example, for a two-bedroom home are upwards of $350 per week and for a three-bedroom home are $500, $600, $700 or higher depending on the suburb. Then there is availability, there is a scarcity of rentals on the market.

The crisis is not just in Sydney. Rental accommodation in other capital cities and regional areas is also in short supply and unaffordable for someone on the new minimum wage of $882.80. Anglicare defines affordable rent as being no more than 30 per cent of a household budget.

There is an urgent need for substantial increases in government funding from all three levels of government for the construction of public housing, restoration of existing public housing and purchase of additional homes from the private sector.

The money to do this could be found if the government put people's interests first.

Photo: CPA

It should cancel the Stage Three tax cuts and the nuclear submarine order, thus saving more than half a trillion dollars.

WAY FORWARD

The CPA is calling for:

- The minimum wage to be increased by 40 per cent for a real living wage
- A living income, above the poverty line, for all unemployed, pensioners, carers, and others on government payments
- Job security – abolition of contract and body hire labour, no use of casual labour where work is ongoing
- Equal pay for work of equal value
- Further action by the government to reduce energy costs and bills
- Regulation of the private rental market to protect against exorbitant rent increases
- Young workers paid an adult wage where doing same work as adults
- Shorter working week without loss of pay
- A more progressive tax system so that those on high incomes pay a far higher rate of tax.

These policies cannot be won by sitting around the table in negotiations or before a commission. They will take united and militant struggle by trade unions and community organisations. At the same time industrial relations legislation should be reformed in the interests of workers, including the unfettered right to take industrial action.

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A history of US debt

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Student Debt, Class Warfare

Student debt increases with inflation. Your wage doesn't.

Students get a rough trot in the Australian media. They're out of touch, "ivory tower," not in "the real world." They also don't have much political leverage; students live all over the place, and when they vote, they usually vote Labor or Greens, not Liberal or National Party. In bourgeois politics, that means there's no downside to conservative parties giving students a hard time, and there's not much incentive for Labor to help them out.

Also students don't agitate much. The last time the mining industry faced the prospect of paying more tax, it threatened to spend $100 million a day on anti-Labor advertising. The mining industry got what it wanted. Students get poorer, and get upset, but so far they don't wield that kind of muscle.

Student debt is a relatively recent innovation in Australia, introduced by the Hawke ALP government in 1989. Starting off as a fee of $1800 per year, the debt grew like there was no tomorrow as successive governments worked out that there was no down side to increasing the amount paid, and lowering the threshold for repayments. At first, it looked like a win all round: governments saved on the cost of educating Australians, universities were funded without whoever was in power complaining about the cost, and students had an education on the never-never, to be paid off only when their income was high enough for them to pay it back through the tax system. Ruling class politicians tried to exploit divisions between working class and middle-upper class Australians. Why should people who work on building sites subsidise the education of dentists and corporate lawyers, they asked a population who are never ever asked if they mind subsidising private schools they can't afford to set foot in.

A good answer to that question is this: because the people who work on building sites need TAFE courses which are also subject to HECS-HELP. Also, because their children, and brothers and sisters need tertiary education. A lot of people who aren't planning on going to TAFE or university have children and grandchildren who are. We could also ask if you want your surgeon to be the best one in the class, or just the one who could afford to study medicine. We are rapidly approaching the point where your future surgeon, dentist, or lawyer is going to be "the one who could afford the course," not the one who's really good at it.

HECS-HELP is indexed to inflation. As everyone knows, inflation is back in a big way. Last year it grew by 3.9 per cent. This year the indexation rate is 7.1 per cent.

A rationale for charging HECS in the first place was the argument that tertiary graduates tend to have higher incomes than the rest of us. That being the case, repayments should only kick in when graduates start earning those high incomes, right?

Wrong! You start paying up when your income hits $48,361. Try working full-time at anything and not making that.

Some argue – and a lot of people accept, that the country *has* to charge students to study because there are so many tertiary students. It's true that there are a lot more post-secondary students now than there were when HECS was introduced, but it's absolutely not true that Australia has no choice here. Total student debt was around $69 billion dollars in 2020-21. As this paper has pointed out many times, the Stage 3 tax cuts will cost the budget a quarter of a trillion dollars, in cuts that will go mostly to high income earners. Anyone who tells you we can't afford to make TAFEs and universities free is wrong. The system that is putting the boot into Australia's young people is a choice, *not* a "have to." Let's change that choice.

BHP wage theft

Union win delivers $430 million public holiday back pay

BHP has admitted underpaying mineworkers US$280 million (A$430 million) since 2010 due to wrongly deducting leave on public holidays.

The Mining and Energy Union said that underpayment had been uncovered as a result of a major union win in the Federal Court clarifying employee rights around public holidays under the National Employment Standards.

The March Full Court decision in a matter brought by the Mining and Energy Union against BHP's labour hire subsidiary Operations Services found that companies could not automatically treat public holidays as work days without first asking employees to work the days, and employees having the opportunity to refuse that request.

Mining and Energy Union General Secretary Grahame Kelly said BHP had been sprung ripping workers off, and the union would ensure affected members received their full entitlements.

"BHP has been sprung ripping workers off by hundreds of millions of dollars," said Mr Kelly.

"Today's revelation goes to show that we need to keep up the pressure on big companies like BHP to do the right thing.

"BHP has assumed that because they want round-the-clock profits from their mining operations, their workers aren't entitled to their public holiday rights.

"It's yet another example of dodgy maths and dodgy employment practices from BHP. We will make sure all our affected members receive every cent they are owed due to this stuff-up."

MEU ✪

Seeing (and wearing) red

Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) members made a powerful statement on Wednesday, 7th June, as they wore red to express their disappointment with the pay and pay equity proposals tabled by the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC).

This day of action by union members, highlights the urgency for fair compensation for public sector employees who have faced years of pay caps and wage freezes.

The decision to hold a day of action follows an overwhelming response from CPSU members in a recent union ballot.

An overwhelming 86 per cent of union members who participated in the vote rejected the initial offer put forward by the APSC. The proposed offer, spanning a three-year period, included pay increases of 4 per cent in the first year, 3.5 per cent in the second year, and 3 per cent in the third year, totalling a mere 10.5 per cent increase overall.

The response to the government's highly anticipated pay equity proposal was similarly disappointing.

The union expects negotiations on pay and pay equity to continue in future weeks, where they'll be pushing the APSC to up their offer.

According to Melissa Donnelly, CPSU National Secretary, "members wanted to see numbers that recognise the dedication and hard work of public sector employees, that address the attraction and retention crisis in the APS, and that go some way in easing financial pressures ... the pay and pay equity proposals have been overwhelmingly rejected by union members who expected more from the APSC." ✪

AWU kicks a goal for fruit pickers

The Australian Workers' Union (AWU) has won another crucial case on behalf of horticulture workers, this time centring on the rights of casual workers to receive fair overtime payments.

On 9th August 2022, Emma Treves applied to amend the Horticulture Award, challenging the overtime payments to casual workers. Ms Treves was backed by employer groups including the National Farmers Federation (NFF) and AiGroup. She argued that the current regulations were preventing workers from gaining additional work and consequently reducing their overall income.

Defending the overtime entitlements of workers, the AWU countered Ms Treves' claims with substantial evidence. The union showed that many casual workers are not getting enough hours to meet the overtime thresholds. The AWU also emphasised the lack of financial evidence provided by Ms Treves or employers indicating that their labour decisions were affected by the overtime requirements.

The Fair Work Commission supported the AWU's stance finding that Ms Treves's case lacked merit, dismissing it, and leaving the current award overtime provisions unchanged.

"Once again, we have shown that we will not back down when the rights and livelihoods of horticulture workers are at stake," AWU's Assistant National Secretary Paul Farrow said.

"This case was a challenge, but it illustrates yet again how the AWU is an essential advocate for farmworkers. We've seen three significant victories in the last six years, each one reinforcing the rights of workers in an industry where employer misbehaviour is all too common.

"We are proud of our strong legal expertise and industry knowledge, and we owe this to the ongoing support of our AWU members."

Mr Farrow noted that the major employers failed to provide any evidence supporting their claims that overtime was hindering the horticulture industry. Rather, the independent evidence provided by the AWU to the commission showed that the industry was thriving.

"The employers' submissions were difficult to reconcile with the public reports showing a decrease in the overall number of workers alongside growth in production," Farrow pointed out.

"The fact is that the industry is booming, and that's why the AWU is here – to ensure that our workers reap the benefits of that growth."

"We will continue to fight for justice for our members and for all workers in the agricultural sector." ✪

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Industrial action looms at Queensland power stations

Kogan Creek Power Station, Queensland. Photo: Coachcapt – Creative Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0)

The union representing workers at the Callide and Kogan power stations will apply to the Fair Work Commission to take industrial action after negotiations broke down with contractor Programmed Services.

Programmed Services are contracted to undertake industrial and domestic cleaning at the sites where enterprise agreement negotiations have dragged on for over two years.

Members of the Mining and Energy Union (MEU) are concerned cleaners at the Kogan power station have been offered $5.00 an hour less than those undertaking the same duties at the Callide power station.

MEU members have been frustrated by Programmed Services and CS Energy, who own the site, blaming each other for delays in negotiations.

Industrial action will affect CS Energy's health and hygiene requirements under the Work Health and Safety Act which will have flow-on effects for power generation workers and may mean they will be unable to perform their work.

MEU Queensland District Vice-President Shane Brunker says the situation has the capacity to escalate quickly and affect power generation across Queensland.

"Programmed Services and CS Energy need to get back to the negotiating table and finish this deal otherwise there will be dire consequences for power generation in this state," says MEU Queensland District Vice-President Shane Brunker.

"Two years is plenty of time to hammer out a deal like this, our members have had it and are ready to down tools.

"These jobs used to be permanent jobs directly with CS Energy, but now these workers are in this labour hire limbo land on substandard work conditions with Programmed Services with the two entities passing the buck between each other, it's tiresome.

"Either this is resolved in the next few working days or our members will be on the grass, and with their fellow members on site potentially right behind them.

"We are seeing this nonsense all over with unscrupulous fly by night contracting companies who don't even pay long service leave but take the money in their contracts with the Queensland government.

"The MEU is calling on the Queensland Labor government to instruct their Government Owned Corporations (GOCs) to audit their books and move full time contract labour back into permanent positions," says MEU Queensland District Vice-President Shane Brunker.

MEU ✪

Undemocratic: Lawyers slam South Australia's anti-protest laws

The Australian Lawyers Alliance (ALA) have strongly criticised anti-protest laws recently passed by the South Australian Legistlative council. The lawyers describe the laws as "unnecessary," "undemocratic," and as an "attack on the rights to freedom of speech and freedom of assembly."

"The Bill passed by the Legislative Council is undemocratic and there was no proper consultation on its development," said Tim Downie, SA ALA State President. "The legislation is too limited in its consideration of civil and political rights, and the penalties are too harsh.

"The crossbench's efforts to make amendments were critical but we are shocked that there was no proper consultation conducted before this Bill was passed."

Under the new laws, people found guilty of the new offence of "obstructing a public place" even if they do it indirectly, can face fines of up to $50,000 or three months in jail.

According to the SA state president of ALA, "A democracy relies on people getting involved, speaking up and engaging in robust debate. This helps to hold our governments and businesses to account. Unfortunately, this legislation is likely to scare people away from expressing their views and protesting at all."

Remember when Scott Morrison's response to women protesting was to point out that in unnamed other countries people would be shot for protesting? Taking a leaf out of Scott Morrison's book, the South Australian Liberal Party leader David Speirs defended the protest penalties on the basis that in some countries "your head would be cut off" for joining in a street protest.

Dale Beasley, Secretary of SA unions criticised the way the bill was "pushed" through the upper house without proper consultation. He also criticised the scope of the legislation, saying that the breadth of the legislation can "impact not just unions, but all of the community's rights to disrupt injustice." ✪

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Long Service Leave conviction

In Victoria, under the Long Service Leave Act 2018, if you've worked for an employer for seven years, permanent, part-time or casual, you get Long Service Leave. You're entitled to take it, or, if you leave the job, you should be paid any long service leave you didn't use on the last day you work for them.

Long service leave accrues at a rate of one week for every 60 weeks of continuous service. Arrangements vary in the different states and territories, but everyone should get it one way or another. This is not negotiable. It's a legal entitlement.

In Victoria, since 2021, the Wage Theft Act makes it a crime to try to get out of this by avoiding keeping records, or by falsifying records.

Employers should know this. One employer found out the hard way recently by being fined $7500 in the Melbourne Magistrates Court for not paying a former employee $15,000 when it was due. Premium Capital Finance paid up ten months too late, only after the employee went to Wage Inspectorate Victoria. The company has been fined $7500.

According to the Commissioner of Wage Inspectorate Victoria, "it shouldn't take a formal investigation for workers to be paid their entitlement."

We agree, but anyone with any experience of union struggles will know that legal entitlements don't enforce themselves. Legal entitlements certainly don't come to us through the good will of the employer class. ✪

Inequality in Australia "staggering"

In a report announcing the release of their Inequality Index, the progressive think tank Per Capita has described inequality in Australia as "staggering" and "deeply concerning." Per Capita has found that Australia is less equal that it was in 2010, and that inequality has increased noticeably since 2016.

The main reason for the growth of inequality is simple: the growth in the value of the wealthiest Australians' assets. The divide between different groups of Australians in terms of wealth is "growing at a rate not seen for generations."

In a reminder that this country really needs action on a Voice for Indigenous Australians, as well as implementing the Black Deaths in Custody Royal Commission, Per Capita found that inequality for First Nations Australians is still high, due to high rates of incarceration and suicide, and lower life expectancy.

The think tank also found that the gender pay gap and the lifetime wealth gap remain high, "although women's political representation has improved."

The Communist Party of Australia's Political Resolution, from the 14th Congress in 2022 says:

"It is not enough to fight for equality with men under capitalism to be equally exploited. The struggle must go beyond reforms within capitalism, where gains are never permanent, to one of replacing the exploitative system of capitalism with socialism."

The rate of inequality will come as no surprise to people who have been paying attention, but it is sometimes good to be able to quantify these things.

The Per Capita Inequality Index can be found at inequalityindex.org.au ✪

Strong opposition to gas project

Photo: Kerry Raymond – Wikimedia Commons (CC BY 4.0)

A council in regional Queensland that hosts the highest number of coal mines of any local government in the state wants the Palaszczuk government to "revoke" its recent approval of Blue Energy's planned 530 well gas field.

The Palaszczuk government approved the company's environmental authority in March. However, Isaac Regional Council has since requested the approval be revoked, due to Blue Energy's lack of social impact assessment, workforce analysis, lack of engagement with the regional council and broader local community, and probable damage to the region's roads.

The council fears the gas field will threaten the social fabric of the community. It also notes Blue Energy failed to provide sufficient information about how the project would impact the local housing market, traffic network, and existing workforce.

Last year, the traditionally resource-supportive council passed a motion condemning Adani's behaviour, alleging non-compliance with the company's infrastructure and employment conditions.

Action group Lock the Gate Alliance Queensland coordinator Ellie Smith said the council's submission showed locals were fed up with mining companies who "didn't give a stuff" about the community where they operated, and the Palaszczuk government's environmental laws let them get away with it.

"You would have thought Blue Energy would have learnt the importance of a social licence after locals kicked it out of the Wide Bay. Clearly, this hasn't happened," she said.

"Isaac Regional Council has borne the brunt of some of the most negative social and environmental impacts of Queensland's coal industry. It's clear the council is now saying enough is enough to both the Palaszczuk government and to companies that try to barge in and damage the social fabric and existing infrastructure of the region.

"It's typical of coal seam gas companies to try to run roughshod over the community in which they want to operate. It has caused heartache and community destruction on the Darling and Western Downs.

"We strongly commend Isaac Regional Council for making such a determined stand against this gas field. We urge the Palaszczuk government to heed these concerns, and revoke Blue's environmental authority as part of its internal review."

Mackay Conservation Group climate campaigner Imogen Lindenberg said, "In addition to the social damage they cause, coal seam gas projects like what Blue Energy wants to build inflict massive environmental destruction.

"They produce millions of tonnes of wastewater and also contribute to climate change, which is harming the Great Barrier Reef.

"Here in Mackay, we're particularly vulnerable to climate change-driven extreme weather, such as more severe cyclones, flooding, and bushfires.

"The Queensland Palaszczuk government should listen to concerned community groups and councils, and revoke the environmental authority for this disastrous project."

Lock the Gate Alliance is separately writing to Federal Environmental Minister Tanya Plibersek, requesting that she call in Blue Energy's gas field for assessment under the EPBC Act.

The Isaac Council's submission and revocation request was made available to all groups who made submissions against Blue Energy's gas field proposal, including Lock the Gate Alliance.

BACKGROUND

Federal and Queensland governments have spent $5 million on a pre-feasibility study for a new gas pipeline to link the north Bowen Basin, where Blue wants to build its gas field, to the pipeline network further south.

Blue Energy's application did not state how many CSG wells it would require. It proposed 530 multiwell pads, with between two and six wells on each pad. State government approval has now been given for 530 wells.

The gas field would drain more than 19 billion litres of water over 20 years.

Fifty-three water bores that farmers rely on for stock and home use lie within 10 kilometres of the project. ✪

Activists stink out Woodside HQ

On 1st June, activists from the Disrupt Burrup Hub environmental protest group forced an evacuation of the Woodside headquarters in Boorloo/Perth.

The organisation said it simulated a gas leak by releasing harmless, non-toxic 'stench gas', which is usually used on mine sites to indicate danger.

One activist, Kristen Morrissey, was arrested on site and later charged with doing an act to create a false belief.

(Editor's note: speaking of "false beliefs," the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change does not agree with Woodside and the Albanese government that, to quote our climate change minister Chris Bowen, it would be "irresponsible to start placing bans on traditional energy supply like coal and gas.")

Disrupt Burrup Hub campaigner Emma Sangalli said the protest was related to a safety incident that occurred at Woodside's Pilbara Pluto facility last week.

"In the past week, Woodside has had to shut down its Pluto LNG plant as well as its Perth headquarters and evacuate workers due to the potential threat of gas," she said.

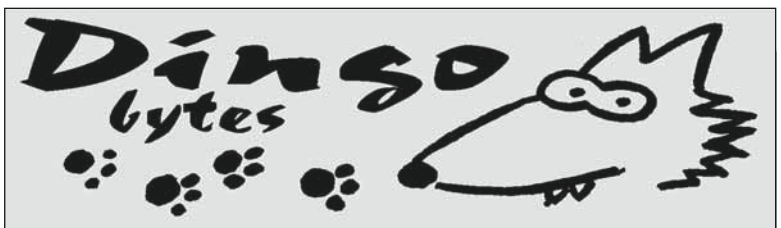
"This is actually a really sensible response to that danger and the risk of gas, and Disrupt Burrup Hub thinks Woodside should adopt that response in a much broader sense and just stop producing it all together."

Around 2000 Woodside employees were able to exit the building safely.

A Woodside spokesperson said the company respected people's right to protest legally but that it was unacceptable for protest action to put people's safety at risk.

Woodside also confirmed yesterday that one subcontractor employee has sought ongoing medical attention for noise exposure following the incident at the Pluto facility last week.

Ngaarda Media ✪



British PM Rishi Sunak has announced that two further barges will house around 1000 asylum-seekers off Britain's coast. In a speech in Dover, Kent, Sunak defended measures to house asylum-seekers on barges – with the first one set to be moored in Portland, Dorset, this month, and the announcement of two more to house another 1000 people. He declined to say where the two new barges would be moored. Amnesty International UK chief executive Sacha Deshmukh called for the plan to use accommodation barges to be scrapped. "Like the use of former military barracks and reported plans to use decommissioned cruise ships, corralling large numbers of people onto giant barges is a terrible idea and should be abandoned. Confining people who've escaped terror, torture, and other cruelty in locations which will inevitably lead to their social isolation is immoral and potentially unlawful." British Red Cross executive director Christina Marriott said, "People fleeing war and persecution should be able to access the system whenever they need it, regardless of how they arrived in the UK."

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: Action group Lock the Gate Alliance in NSW has condemned mining giant Whitehaven's plan to expand its Maules Creek coal mine, saying it highlights the company's total disregard for the damage coal is inflicting on local communities and the climate. Whitehaven began contacting locals late last week and quietly uploaded expansion plans on its website. Based on Whitehaven's map – which does not include an exact size – the expansion would bring the mine closer to Maules Creek village, including a local school, and would carve out more of Leard State Forest. Leard Forest was the site of mass community protests. The expansion would mean Maules Creek coal mine would operate until 2043 – nine years more than the existing operation. Whitehaven would mine 126 million tonnes of coal in total if the expansion goes ahead. The application comes as Whitehaven faces fresh scrutiny over emissions produced at its Narrabri mine, with reports it is polluting three times more than originally expected. Boggabri farmer Sally Hunter said, "Whitehaven knows increasingly ambitious greenhouse gas reduction targets both domestically and in customer countries mean the end is nigh for coal. Rather than sensibly introducing a diversification plan to support local workers, the company is going hell for leather to rip what it can out of the ground before the market finally crashes, leaving everyone high and dry. Failing to prepare for the inevitable risks leaving economies in places like Boggabri and Narrabri destitute when the crash comes. It's time for government intervention to prevent vampires like Whitehaven from sucking our region dry." Maules Creek resident Ros Druce said, "Whitehaven has proved over the years it has callous disregard for the local community and has racked up a list of fines and criminal offences. So far, no penalty has been significant enough to make this repeat offender change its ways. The Minns government must take action against Whitehaven where the Perrottet government failed. At the very least, Whitehaven must not be rewarded with permission to build any new coal projects or expansions."

Radical Radiothon

3CR, Melbourne's Community Radio station, has been broadcasting alternative views and Australian music since 1975, and is still going strong. 3CR's annual Radiothon runs throughout June – their theme this year is "Stay Tuned, Stay Radical." The station needs your help to "Stay Radical" and provide a vital platform for the issues that get left behind, and the voices that get silenced. 3CR needs the community to "Stay Tuned" to diverse voices and alternative perspectives in order to create meaningful social change. Please help the station to build and expand this critical media outlet, and encourage others to "Stay Tuned, Stay Radical." Make a donation to 3CR's 2023 Radiothon today. Any amount makes a big difference, and all donations over $2 are tax deductible. To donate go to 3cr.org.au/donate or call 03 9419 8377. If you donate, please mention the *Guardian – The Workers Weekly.* 3CR podcasts can be heard online and for free at 3cr.org.au.

The US drive to war with China and the battle of ideas

Photo: Nelson Runkle – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0).

William Briggs

Somewhere, somehow, China became the number one enemy of the world, or at least to the world that is run by the USA. For many the "reason" has been the challenge that China poses to US economic hegemony, but might not the US' fear of China be based on ideological causes; a battle of ideas?

Why does a country that has never been incursionary suddenly become a threat? Why is a country that seeks to develop an economy that actually benefits its people considered a danger to the world? What is China doing that is wrong, or to invert the question, what is China doing that is right that has made it the enemy of the USA and its dwindling band of allies?

Governments and their propaganda machines do not encourage us to ask questions, but surely the big question is; why?

The world teeters on the edge of an appalling abyss. We face climate catastrophe, economic crisis, war and increasingly the threat of an unimaginable war. Such a war would threaten the survival of the species and yet the drive to war goes on. The demonisation of China just gets worse. The propaganda machine makes sure that people do not question that China is the enemy. Why?

Some "experts" like Samuel Huntington wrote of a "clash of civilisations." Such a view sees a rising China as a threat that must be countered. It allows for the propagandist line that China is becoming too "'assertive" or that it is somehow intent on controlling the region and the world.

This view is a disturbing one and particularly so when there is no actual evidence to suggest that China is acting in a negative way. It is not militarily expansionist, does not have hundreds of military bases around the world, like the USA. It does not topple regimes or invade smaller states. The anti-China hysteria cannot be justified.

One view is that China threatens US economic hegemony and must not be permitted to assume global economic primacy. This position sees China as a rising capitalist nation. The USA is therefore threatened and is reacting accordingly. It is an argument that sees the USA and its growing belligerence in a purely economic light. It is an undoubted fact that the USA is in a state of economic decline and will ensure, if at all possible and for as long as possible, that it remains top dog, regardless of the cost.

The USA has a long and bloody history of subjugating other states. Sometimes this is done with the carrot and sometimes with the stick. Certainly, it is seeking to subjugate China, but is it simply because China is proving to be a rival capitalist nation? This view is superficially appealing, at least until the rest of the world is taken into consideration.

The world can be crudely broken into three major economic spheres of America, China, and the European Union (EU). The size of their economies is roughly equal. The US still leads the pack with a GDP of US$25 trillion. China follows with $18 trillion and the EU at close to $17 trillion. Twenty years ago, the biggest rival to the US for economic strength was the EU. The EU was not threatened by an aggressive US war machine. Economic rivalry existed but only a madman would have suggested that the USA and Europe might go to war to maintain economic power. Japan has maintained a prominent place among global capitalist economies but is not threatened by the USA.

The theory that the war drums are being beaten, simply on the grounds of relegation and diminution of American economic power in the face of a rising capitalist power, looks a little shaky.

There is a third theory that needs to be considered. That theory is that China, while not a socialist state, is intent upon establishing the economic basis from which to build a successful socialist state and economy. This is certainly what is being said in Beijing. Washington, it seems, might concur.

The USA as the epitome of capitalist ideology, both philosophical and economic, naturally finds the idea of socialism to be a threat. Socialism, for a capitalist state, is something of an existential threat. It hardly matters that Cuba remains a tiny, non-threatening country. It must be bullied and its economy squeezed by sanctions.

Venezuela has had over 900 sanctions imposed by the USA. The world might remember the fate of Grenada which could never have posed a problem for its massive near neighbour and yet its sovereignty was crushed by a US military invasion in 1983. These experiments with socialism, along with that of the USSR were all conducted from a very low economic base. If China is seeking to build a socialist economy, then it becomes particularly fearful for the USA because it would be built on a foundation of a strong economic base.

This fear seems to be at the centre of America's war drive. If socialism is to work then it must be quantifiably an advance on capitalism. It is at the core of Marx's theory.

Capitalism provided a better future than feudalism and so, if socialism is to follow capitalism, then it has to offer something that is not simply more attractive but essentially superior.

The Chinese have been pushing to develop their productive forces to match and potentially outstrip those of their capitalist rival. All evidence seems to point to this becoming a reality in the not-too-distant future. This is of grave concern to Washington. The last few years have seen the private sector in China begin to shrink, while the state-sector has grown. Life for the people is improving. Real wages are growing, inflation is low and the social wage remains relatively high.

For the USA, as the bastion of neoliberal capitalist philosophy, all of this is anathema.

The US' allies, who share this economic and philosophical world view are equally uneasy. The result, in real time, is a mounting demonisation of China and a dangerous rise in tension and the militarisation of the region.

For the people of the region and the world, it means insecurity. The propagandists do their work. China is the accepted enemy. Nobody tells us why. All possible theories, from a clash of civilisations, to an imagined incursionary and expansionist China, to an economic threat, to a refusal to abide by the "rules-based order," up to and including a clash of ideology between capitalism and socialism are thrown into the mix.

The net result is that we live in a period of danger and to separate fact from fiction becomes all the more difficult.

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GREEN NOTES

Greenwashing Overload

Anna Pha

"Our climate change commitment provides the framework for our strategy and our commitment to enable the transition by aligning our lending portfolio with net zero emissions by **2050**," claims ANZ in its 2022 annual report. This, it says, includes sustainable resource extraction in areas such as iron ore, lithium, nickel, cobalt, rare earths, copper and bauxite, and support for basic materials production including green steel and low-carbon aluminium production. Really? ANZ has been the biggest backer of the fossil fuel industry, lending it **$18.6 billion** since 2016, the year of the signing of the Paris agreement, and **$4.6 billion** between 2021 and 2022. The loans were for new projects and expansion of existing ones.

The NAB in its 2022 annual report notes that "Climate change is a significant risk to the planet and a major challenge for society to address. At the same time, considerable opportunities are emerging as the low carbon transition occurs. NAB is supporting customers as they decarbonise, build their climate resilience and help achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement." Sounds great? But of the Big Four Banks, NAB is second only to the ANZ in its greenwashing, lending **$9.5 billion** between 2016 and 2020 to fossil fuel companies.

A similar sorry tale of greenwashing can be told about the other two major banks. In the last two years alone, the Big Four have lent the fossil fuel industry **$13.1 billion**. These loans are set to see an additional **2.4 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions** – over 5 times Australia's emissions in 2021. These loans are to some of the most climate destructive corporations in Australia including Woodside, Santos, Glencore, Whitehaven Coal, and the dirty Pluto 2 LNG project.

In June 2022, Tiwi Islands Senior Lawman Dennis Tipakalippa successfully launched a Federal Court lawsuit against Santos for failing to adequately consult with Traditional Owners prior to beginning development of the destructive Barossa gas field. Tipakalippa won his case and in December Santos also lost a subsequent appeal.

Traditional Owners said that the project risks disruption to songlines, sacred sites, and cultural practices, as well as spills and pipeline ruptures in the local marine and surrounding environments. The impacts of the Barossa gas field and associated Darwin LNG expansion project on the local environment and cultural heritage of the Tiwi Islands, Larrakia Country and surrounding sea country would be far-reaching and disastrous.

Tiwi Islands and Larrakia traditional owners lodged formal complaints against ANZ, Commonwealth Bank, NAB, and Westpac in April 2023 alleging that the banks breached their human rights commitments. These grievances are the first filed by traditional owners in Australia against financial institutions. They are demanding that the banks pull out of the existing loans to Santos and commit to not funding the proposed expansion of the Darwin LNG project, which would be used to process and export gas from Barossa.

If you bank with one of the four Big Banks, take action! Write to your bank demanding that they cease lending to the fossil fuel sector, or you will cease banking with them.

If new gas and coal projects continue to be approved and bankrolled as if there is no tomorrow, there will literally be no tomorrow.

Sources: Environmental Defenders Office and marketforces.org.au.

Fight Climate Change Not War speak out and march Fremantle

Richard Titelius

On Saturday 27th May, several anti-war, anti-nuclear and climate activist groups held a speak-out on the AUKUS Agreement signed in September 2021 between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, the proposed acquisition of up to eight nuclear powered submarines, and climate change. The event was organised by Stop AUKUS WA. On the 14th March 2023, the leaders of the three nations signed a Joint Statement on how the acquisition of the submarines will proceed and the training of Australian Defence Force personnel to operate the proposed submarines.

The MC for the event was Sam Wainwright of Stop AUKUS WA and also a former Fremantle City Councillor. Sam said that the funding allocations of the Federal government showed where its priorities lie. In the 2023 budget, the government has allocated $4 billion towards renewable energy, $10 billion on fossil fuel subsidies, $48 billion on defence, and $368 billion towards 6-8 nuclear powered submarines over 30 years. By the time the submarines are delivered, that last figure will be around fifty per cent bigger. Those are the government's priorities unless unless we the people do something to change the ALP's mind about the concept of defence and security. Sam said it will take a prolonged campaign like we have never seen before.

The first speaker was Mia Pepper of Nuclear Free WA who said that the eight nuclear powered submarines proposed under the AUKUS Agreement are a big erosion of Australia's anti-nuclear stance. The likes of Queensland Nationals Senator, Matt Canavan are seeking to lift the ban on nuclear energy by saying that it makes no sense to ban nuclear energy when we will have a fleet of nuclear submarines.

Mia Pepper, explained that Australia is still dealing with the legacy of uranium mines such as the one at Jabiluka in the Kakadu National Park where problems with leaking mine tailings continue to dog clean-up efforts. One estimate is that it will cost $2.2 billion to rehabilitate the Jabiluka site. Additional mines will only increase the difficulty of rehabilitating the mine sites long after the mining companies have extracted the ore. A nuclear power industry would only compound the health and financial risks to Australia's people.

Dr Chris Johansen from Nuclear Free Cockburn Sound said that the proposal to spend $368 billion on up to eight nuclear-powered submarines represented a reluctance to spend on social programs, social housing and renewable energy which would help promote human thriving. The nuclear subs from the AUKUS deal would be stationed at the Stirling Naval Base in Cockburn Sound, creating dangers for local communities from Rockingham to Fremantle. Supporters of the subs deal argue that there is only a million to one chance anything calamitous will happen – but even that chance is too much of a risk.

Dr Johansen also argued that if we leave the accountability for nuclear submarines to government and the military we may never know what happens in regards to an accident until it is too late for local communities to respond effectively. Johansen was against the government promoting a war with China for the purpose of purchasing nuclear submarines for our defence – which he doubted would only have conventional weapons on board as promised. The purchase of nuclear submarines was also being used to normalise nuclear power. Johansen concluded by saying it was okay to be a NIMBY in this case, but that nuclear-powered subs should not be in *anyone's* backyard.

Elizabeth Hulm of Stop AUKUS WA began by saying that we reject the myth that in order have peace you have to prepare for war. We need to reject the operation of the military industrial complex which is what our government will support if we go further with the purchase of these subs. This amounts to a theft from the public purse, and avoids scrutiny of what happens to our money. We need to re-imagine the discourse of security, as what really makes us insecure are food insecurity and climate change. These matters pose existential threats to mankind's survival. Hulm added that the working people of Australia will not feel compelled to fight in wars of US imperialism. We should make the pursuit of peace everyone's business, especially workers.

Rob Delves of Extinction Rebellion said it was important to link the fight to stop climate change with the fight to stop AUKUS. While Prime Minister Albanese would have the Australian people think that AUKUS and the nuclear submarines would increase our sense of security, Delves said that the deal to acquire the subs has had the opposite effect on our supposed enemy China where it has created a sense of distrust. The word "security," Delves added, comes from the Latin word *secures* and means living without worry or anxiety. What many people in Australia and the world are rightly insecure about is access to food, water, and housing, as well as about climate change.

AUKUS has been captured by the people who profit from war while all the talk about a military strategy to protect us from war also distracts us from the existential threat facing us. Australians need to mobilise to stop catastrophic climate change.

The last speaker was Greens Upper House member for Fremantle, Brad Pettitt who said that in the fight against the impacts of climate change, we have science on our side – it is not war we need to fight but climate change. The impacts of climate change are already being felt, forcing people to flee some parts of the world. On current projections, we are on track to see 1.2 billion people displaced by climate change. The $368 billion earmarked for nuclear subs under AUKUS would be better spent on tackling climate change. As an example, Pettitt suggested that it would take only $2 billion to put renewable energy and insulation on 35,000 social and community houses in WA. In this country we also have a biodiversity crisis of which climate change is a principal cause.

Over 150 people then marched with a giant inflatable whale at the front and a number of colourful banners with the marchers singing and chanting against the war and for a more peaceful future. The march fittingly ended at Bathers Beach, as oceans should be for marine life and not nuclear submarines with their deadly cargo of warheads and radioactive fuel. The message of the rally and march also reached a wider audience that evening as a report appeared on the Channel 10 news.

The Communist Party of Australia joins all these social and political groups in opposing the AUKUS Agreement and the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines which will create insecurity. The real existential threat of our times, climate change, remains unaddressed by our government and its effects are felt by all life on earth.

Fight climate change, not war! ✪

OP-ED: War Crimes: It's not over

By now, everybody will have heard about the Ben Roberts-Smith verdict. Australia's most decorated living soldier has had a spectacular fall from grace at his own hands. Roberts-Smith, backed by one of Australia's richest men, Seven proprietor Kerry Stokes, brought a defamation case against the Nine newspapers, and lost. "Lost" doesn't really do it justice – Roberts-Smith has been publicly named a murderer, a bully, and a liar by the judge who brought in the final verdict. The original report hadn't named Ben Roberts-Smith. The term "bully" here doesn't really do justice to Roberts-Smith's attempts to intimidate other members of the SAS.

Naturally the Nine papers are exultant at the win and the vindication of the investigative journalists who did the original report. The Seven website is being as muted as possible about the verdict, while the Murdoch websites are despicably describing the verdict as "going woke," as though murdering civilians and then being found out is the same as being obliged to have a rainbow morning tea when you'd rather not.

Still, it's a triumph for justice, isn't it? A war criminal has been exposed, and journalists have triumphed, speaking truth to power.

Speaking of war crimes, there's one Australian journalist still awaiting vindication, who has suffered for exposing war crimes. His name is Julian Assange, and he has been in prison in the UK for four years, pending extradition to the United States. He released evidence of US helicopter crews shooting civilian journalists, and committing a variety of other crimes in Iraq.

In one of the greatest examples of spin seen in modern times, the Assange case has somehow come to be about Assange himself, rather than about the crimes he revealed. Countless hours have gone into describing his personal habits and character as though whether or not Julian Assange offers to help with the dishes after a meal is more important than US troops murdering civilians and torturing prisoners in a country they invaded on a false pretext. Assange should be released and brought home to Australia right now. ✪

Wage theft rewarded

Union members at Melbourne's Monash University are dismayed at the recent appointment of Margaret Gardiner as Victorian Governor. Prominent NTEU member Ben Eltham tweeted "we note that Professor Gardiner presided over more than $8.6 million in wage theft while Vice-Chancellor of the University". Gardiner's partner is Glyn Davis, former Vice-Chancellor of Melbourne University where wage theft was practiced on systematic basis. Gardiner is now Governor of a state where wage theft is illegal. ✪

Multipolarity and US hegemony

Graham Harrington

Photo: Mark Hodson www.101holidays.co.uk – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0).

With the defeat of socialism in Eastern Europe, the United States enjoyed a unilateral ability to shape the world in its own image. Countries which had struggled for national liberation in Africa, South America, and Asia were forced to submit to the institutions of imperialism which had been created after the Second World War – the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation. States in Eastern Europe joined NATO and the remaining socialist states were forced into either a state of siege or reluctant engagement with imperialism.

This one-way trend has come to an end. It is clear that US hegemony is declining. Brazilian President Lula da Silva recently said as he visited China, "Why should every country have to be tied to the dollar for trade? ... Why can't a bank like the BRICS Bank have a currency to finance trade between Brazil and China, between Brazil and other countries? ... Today countries have to chase after dollars to export, when they could be exporting in their own currencies."

Where previously the US dollar was used as the intermediary in international trade, the Chinese Yuan is increasingly used, as are other currencies. So, the world's largest economy in purchasing power parity (China), the world's largest energy exporter (Russia), and one of the largest economies (Brazil), have signed on to move away from the dollar.

A recent US$10 billion deal between China's state-owned Chinese National Offshore Oil Company and France's TotalEnergies is to be done through the Chinese Yuan. The Saudis have expressed their intention to join BRICS, and even India – which has tense relations with China – has indicated its intention of using non-dollar currencies in trade with Russia.

US senator Marco Rubio has expressed his horror at this changing state of affairs, saying in an interview that "there'll be so many countries transacting in currencies other than the dollar that we won't have the ability to sanction them." (He believes this to be a bad thing!).

Additionally, CNN broadcaster Fareed Zakaria had a recent article in the *Washington Post* with the headline "The dollar is our superpower and Russia and China are threatening it."

To be clear, US power may be exposed, but it is not weak. US imperialism still has over 850 military bases, and the West is still the dominant political, cultural, and economic power in the world today. The CIA is still able to interfere in almost any country in the world. Additionally, imperialism cannot be reduced to just US military power. For example, in several African countries, France remains militarily and economically involved; in Asia, Japan and South Korea are acting as US proxies against China; and in the Middle East, Israel is still the US's main ally in the region.

The positive effect of multipolarity is that it allows independent countries to adopt their own development models, outside of the Bretton Woods system. The threat of de-dollarisation was a major factor in the invasion of Iraq and the NATO overthrow of Gaddafi in Libya. However, the changing global order has meant that in the past year, popular mobilisation forced French troops out of Mali, Burkina Faso, and the Central African Republic, as African states turn towards China and Russia rather than the West.

In Latin America, Nicaragua, Venezuela (despite its problems), and Cuba have emerged as the vanguard of the move against US imperialism. Brazil and Argentina have talked about developing their own currency, the Sur. China has brought peace between Iran and Saudia Arabia, which will hopefully end the horrific war in Yemen. In Asia, China has built a modern railway system in socialist Laos – still destroyed by American bombs – and US hopes to win over Vietnam seemed to have failed as that country moves towards closer co-operation with Beijing.

However, we must also remember that multipolarity is not the end in and of itself. The fact that a country has been given the ability to develop outside the US-controlled order, does not mean that it will use that ability to build socialism. Far from it, in some cases. Our struggle is not just against the United States, but against capitalism. But neither does this mean adopting a liberal purism, common among Western leftists, that every country must adopt our definition of socialism or else they are the enemy.

The cracks within imperialism are growing, and it is a fact that socialism cannot be built in a world controlled and dominated by the United States or its proxies. James Connolly famously declared "Neither King Nor Kaiser," but in practice, the 1916 Rising could not have happened without German weapons. This didn't make the Kaiser progressive, of course, but it did show Connolly understood the need to remain principled against imperialism as well as the need to have tactical sense to exploit the contradictions within it.

Socialist Voice

Evictions fuel homelessness

BRITAIN: Campaigners fear "no-fault" evictions could continue to rise, fuelling homelessness even as the government prepares to ban the practice amid spiralling rents and interest rates.

In the first three months of this year, 6820 landlords started eviction proceedings under section 21 – known as "no-fault" evictions as the landlord does not need to provide a reason to evict the tenant.

Figures from the Ministry of Justice show that no-fault eviction claims rose by 15.8 per cent compared to the first three months of 2022 and were well above pre-pandemic levels, returning to their highest point since 2017.

Meanwhile, rents continue to rise and competition for rental properties remains fierce. Much of the increase appears to be driven by landlords looking either to sell their property or re-let it to a new tenant at a higher rent price.

Government figures published in May show that 34,300 households were threatened with homelessness in 2022 for this reason.

Not only was that more than half the total number of private tenants threatened with homelessness that year, it was also a 50 per cent increase on the figure for 2019.

Rising interest rates are at least partly to blame for this increase.

After a long period of record-low interest rates, the Bank of England began to raise rates at the end of 2021 to tackle the emerging inflation problem.

Interest rates are now 18 times higher than they were at the end of 2021, meaning some landlords struggling to cover their buy-to-let mortgages have decided to sell up or find new tenants willing to pay higher rents.

Nathan Emerson, chief executive of property agent body Propertymark, said his members are "absolutely" seeing landlords selling up due to rising interest rates.

Emer Sheehy, a policy manager at Citizens Advice, said that evicting tenants is also a way to cash in on rising rents, especially as pressure on household budgets has made existing tenants more willing to "push back" on rent increases that they would be unable to absorb.

Charities are also concerned about an increase in homelessness as evictions rise, putting huge strain on local authorities whose homelessness services are already stretched.

The number of people living in temporary accommodation has already reached its highest point since 2005, passing 100,000 in December 2022, with the chief executive of homelessness charity Crisis, Matt Downie, describing the system as "on its knees."

Morning Star

West London. Photo: Kathleen Tyler Conklin – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

Right to strike struck down

Mark Gruenberg and John Wojcik

WASHINGTON: By an 8 to 1 vote, the right-wing-dominated US Supreme Court has curbed the right of the nation's workers to strike by allowing companies to sue unions in state courts whenever they wish for alleged "damage" strikers cause, overruling the National Labour Relations Board even if it is already investigating and handling the dispute.

It is no surprise to the labour movement and its allies that a Court which, for the first time in history, took away a constitutional right by killing Roe v Wade, would continue its right-wing crusade by chipping away at the sacred right of all Americans to withhold their labour to make gains or to protect themselves on the job.

The only dissenting justice, Ketanji Brown Jackson, warned that the ruling moved in the direction of ushering in indentured servitude across the nation. She declared that her colleagues misread the primacy of US labour law and that the ruling indeed would allow turning workers into indentured servants.

Somehow, lawmakers and judges act as if labour law is not "real" law, allowing themselves to deny, for example, that the encouragement of collective bargaining is the legal, lawful policy of the United States government under the terms of the National Labour Relations Act. Justice Jackson is apparently the only judge on the Supreme Court who recognises that adhering to US labour law is as much a requirement as adhering to any other law.

Justice Jackson made her opposition to the ruling known in blunt remarks after the Court released its decision: "The ruling places a significant burden on the employees' exercise of their statutory right to strike, unjustifiably undermining Congress's intent. Workers are not indentured servants, bound to continue labouring until any planned work stoppage would be as painless as possible for their master."

The decision in *Glacier Northwest v. Teamsters Local 174* outraged Teamsters President Sean O'Brien and Association of Flight Attendants-CWA President Sarah Nelson. AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler predicted that when the case will be tried over again in Washington state, the union will win.

Under current law, strikes are legal under the National Labor Relations Act unless there is deliberate property damage, violence, or both. In plain English, the justices in the majority took away the word "deliberate," letting bosses sue unions for any alleged damage strikes cause. It would open the door to company agents themselves causing damage and then blaming it on workers or their unions.

"It's like putting a tax on the right to strike," Harvard labour law professor Sharon Block, a former NLRB member, told CBS's business channel.

In the six-year-old case, Glacier, a cement company, sued Local 174 for striking and letting cement in trucks dry in Glacier's yard, costing it $100,000 in damage to the trucks, plus lost business. Local 174 denied the charges, saying the workers ensured the cement truck drums were still spinning, keeping cement wet, when they left. It called Glacier's suit retaliatory labour law-breaking.

The NLRB General Counsel agreed and took over the case, but Glacier went to Washington State Supreme Court to argue it could sue the local for damages. That court threw that case out, saying federal law pre-empted Glacier's damages try. The US Supreme Court majority didn't.

"By reporting for duty and pretending as if they would deliver the concrete, the drivers prompted the creation of the perishable product," the cement, Trump-backed Justice Amy Coney Barrett wrote, swallowing the company's line. "Then, they waited to walk off the job until the concrete was mixed and poured in the trucks. In so doing, they not only destroyed the concrete but also put Glacier's trucks in harm's way."

Because they did so, in her lengthy retelling of the dispute, Glacier could sue the local for damages. The ruling reverses precedents and opens the floodgates to similar expensive lawsuits by firms against striking unions. AFA-CWA's Nelson said the decision could lead to more militancy.

"If the Supreme Court interferes with the already limited right to strike, it's going to create even more instability in the workplace," Nelson predicted at the end of a zoom press conference on another strike issue. "They have to respect this human right or workers will take it into their own hands.

"There will simply be a breakdown in the law. We will see a lot more strikes."

O'Brien said the ruling showed the court's tilt towards the corporate class and the "billionaires ... they socialise with at cocktail parties and who they owe their jobs to in the first place." The justices "are not upholding the law," he added.

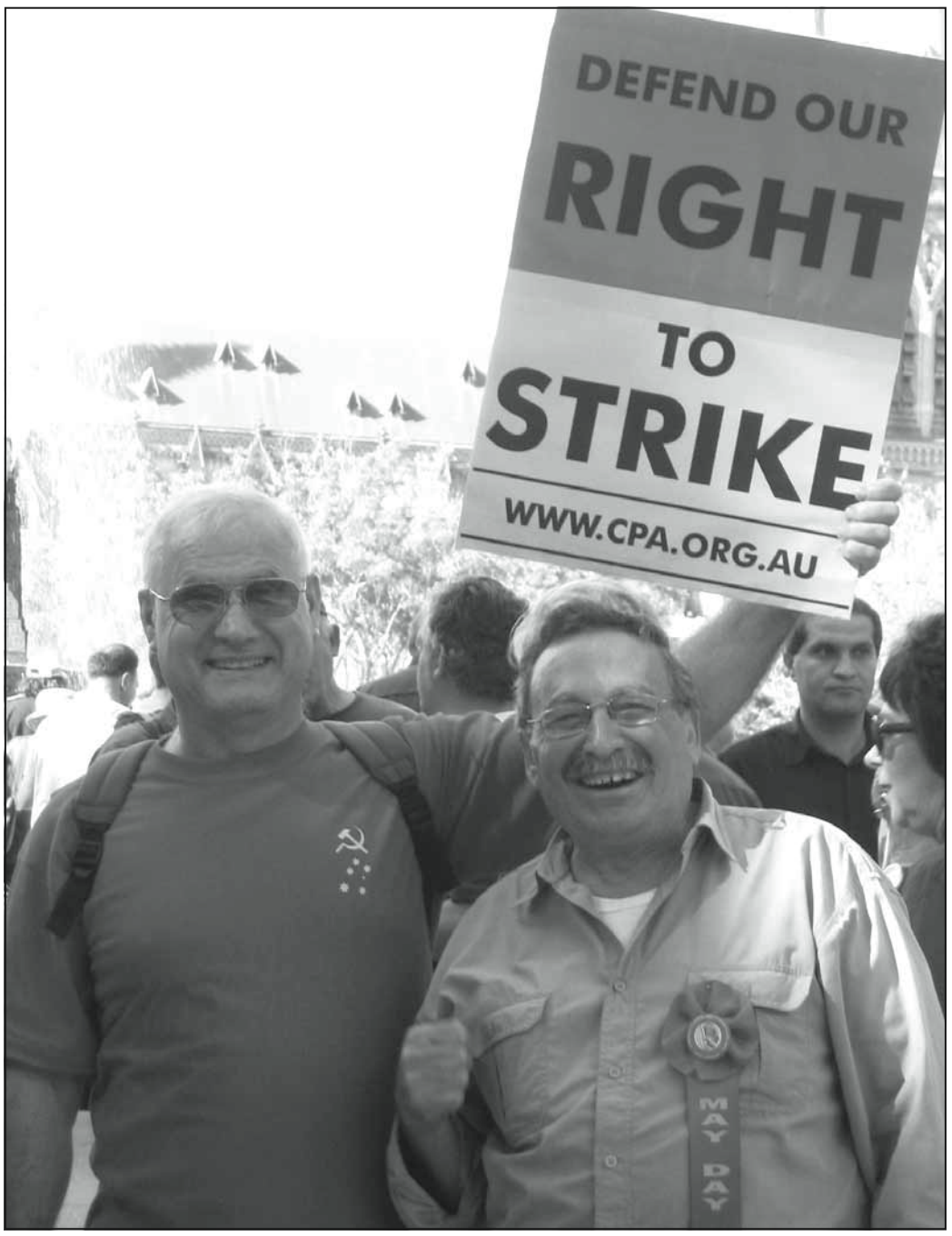
"American workers must remember their right to strike has not been taken away. All workers, union and non-union alike, will forever have the right to withhold their labour. The Teamsters will strike any employer, when necessary, no matter their size or the depth of their pockets," he promised.

"Unions will never be broken by this court or any other. Today's shameful ruling is simply one more reminder the people cannot rely on their government or their courts to protect them. They cannot rely on their employers. We must rely on each other."

Shuler predicted that in a rerun of the company's case in Washington state courts, the union would win. Her statement did not touch the wider issues Block, Nelson, and Justice Jackson raised.

"The Supreme Court unnecessarily gave the employer another bite at the apple" by relying on "unfounded allegations in the employer's complaint that the union intended to damage the cement trucks when it called the strike," Shuler said.

People's World



Sydney, Australia, May Day 2007 – "Defend our right to strike." Photo: CPA.

"Unions will never be broken by this court or any other. Today's shameful ruling is simply one more reminder the people cannot rely on their government or their courts to protect them. They cannot rely on their employers. We must rely on each other."

Vicious attack on Indigenous rights

Opposition politicians in Brazil have launched "the most serious and vicious attack on Indigenous rights in decades," campaigners have warned.

The Chamber of Deputies, Brazil's lower house, voted through a Bill that seeks to stripp powers away from the country's Ministry of Indigenous Peoples and the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change.

Both ministries, led by prominent environmentalist women, were created by President Luiz Inacio "Lula" da Silva when he retook office in January.

The move to hinder Lula's environmental policies was led by Brazil's so-called "beef caucus," which represents the interests of large-scale agriculture and cattle industries.

If passed by the upper house, the law could allow any Indigenous territory in the country to be scrapped, or slashed in size, and replaced by mines, oil wells, or other industrial projects, campaigners from Indigenous rights organisation Survival International warned.

Loggers, ranchers and others who have illegally invaded Indigenous territories will be allowed to remain there, destroying the forest, until the lands are fully demarcated – a process that usually takes decades.

Government teams will be allowed to make forced contact with uncontacted tribes. Such contacts, the organisation says, are almost always deadly.

"Many Indigenous peoples will never be able to recover their land as the Bill also boosts the Time Limit Trick, a pro-business ruse which states that Indigenous peoples who can't prove they were on their land when the constitution was enacted in October 1988 will never have their rights recognised," Survival said.

Hundreds of Indigenous territories, home to over a million people, could now be at risk.

"For anyone who thought that [former far-right president Jair] Bolsonaro's defeat meant his agribusiness allies were defeated also, this has been a very nasty wake-up call," said Sarah Shenker, head of Survival Brasil.

"It rips up the legal protections on Indigenous land, giving the big businesses and criminal gangs behind the logging and mining even more freedom to invade Indigenous territories and do what they like there.

"If this passes into law, it'll be the kiss of death for the first peoples of Brazil and the highly biodiverse territories they protect in the Amazon and beyond."

Morning Star

Book-banning in Arkansas

Photo: pxfuel.com (Free for commercial use).

CJ Atkins

Librarians in Arkansas could be headed to prison if they set up displays showcasing books on LGBTQ topics or the history of racism. According to the Republican-controlled legislature and local conservatives, such themes are "obscene" and not "age appropriate" for children or teenagers.

But community libraries and booksellers are fighting back against Act 372, a new censorship law passed by Republicans. A coalition of at least 17 plaintiffs – including the Central Arkansas Library System, the Arkansas Library Association, the American Booksellers Association, two independent bookstores, and 17-year-old library patron Hayden Kirby and her mother – have filed a federal lawsuit to stop implementation of the measure.

The so-called "obscenity bill," which has been marketed by Republicans as an effort to protect children from materials deemed "harmful to minors," is being denounced as an unconstitutional violation of the First Amendment by lawyers representing the plaintiffs.

Part of the Republican Party's "anti-woke" homophobic, transphobic, and racist culture wars, the Arkansas law is aimed at whipping up hatred and paints a political target on the LGBTQ community, people of colour, and the US Constitution.

Backers of the law say no one under 18 should be able to access books or other materials pertaining to LGBTQ topics, racism, or sexuality. Exposing young people to the existence of such things, they say, is "indoctrination."

Under the provisions of Act 372, "knowingly" distributing such books or informing people of how to obtain them is a Class A misdemeanour, punishable by up to a year behind bars and a $2,500 fine. "Possession, sale, or distribution" of material deemed "obscene" is marked a Class D felony and carries an even stiffer penalty – up to six years in prison and $10,000 in fines.

As for who makes the decision as to what counts as obscene, the law leaves it up to local school boards, city councils, and county quorum courts.

"Seeing books and librarians as a threat to our kids is hard to square with the reality of what goes on in our libraries," Central Arkansas Library System (CALS) Executive Director Nate Coulter said in a statement. "The plain effect of this law ... will be to frighten librarians and deter libraries from offering books for the entire community of readers."

The original bill that became Act 372 was proposed by Republican State Senator Dan Sullivan. An LGBTQ Pride month display in the children's section of his town's local library in June 2021 ignited his crusade. Local fundamentalist Evangelical leaders erupted in protest over the display, leading to the library's director and assistant director both losing their jobs. In November last year, voters then decided to cut the library's funding in a referendum.

Writing in the state's largest circulation newspaper, the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, Sullivan said that before his bill, "teachers and librarians, who are the closest to our children, were 100 per cent legally free to provide children obscene material."

He said obscenity laws should provide no exceptions for educators or library professionals to make choices about book availability or appropriateness. Following his logic, displaying books on LGBTQ topics in a library is on par with selling illegal drugs, torturing animals, and sexual violence.

"After all," Sullivan wrote, "we don't exempt pharmacists from drug-dealing laws, slaughter houses from animal cruelty laws, and doctors from sexual assault laws."

Act 372 is "virtually identical" to a 2003 state law that also sought to ban reading material conservatives decided was "harmful to minors," according to CALS attorney John Adams. That bill was signed by then-Governor Mike Huckabee; his daughter, current Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders, signed the latest version.

The original 2003 bill was struck down by the Arkansas Supreme Court in 2004.

Like the faulty 2003 law, Act 372 doesn't differentiate what is "harmful" according to age. "If some given book was inappropriate for a 7-year-old, it might be illegal for a bookseller or librarian to display it or give it to a 17-year-old," Adams said.

Another major problem with Act 372 – one common to most reactionary censorship attempts – is that it sets the vague notion of "community standards" as the guideline for determining the appropriateness of reading materials.

Under existing Arkansas law, material is deemed obscene if, "to the average person, applying contemporary community standards, the dominant theme of the material taken as a whole appeals to prurient interest."

Depending on the politics of the local community, this often amounts to homophobic, transphobic, and racist viewpoints deciding the standard – which appears to be the case in Arkansas.

Allison Hill, the CEO of the American Booksellers Association (ABA), said the law "denies residents of Arkansas their constitutional right to decide for themselves and their children what they read." She declared Act 372 an effort to criminalise librarians and booksellers.

The ABA pointed to the fact that Act 372 also opens up the potential for citizen censorship vigilantes entering bookstores for the "express purpose of finding a book that they believe is offensive," in order to prompt a prosecution.

"It is impossible for a bookseller to know the contents of every book in their store and impossible to define 'harmful' for everyone," Hill said.

The fight against Act 372 will now move to the federal courts, where past rulings against censorship bills provide some hope for optimism. A decision is not expected quickly enough to prevent the law from going into effect, however, which is set to happen on 1st August.

Speaking of the legal fight, CALS director Nate Coulter said, "We are doing this for our patrons and our staff, and to honour our longstanding opposition to censorship and commitment to free speech and the freedom to read."

People's World

Global Briefs

PAKISTAN: Militants attacked a Pakistani security post near the country's border with Iran last week, triggering a shoot-out that killed two soldiers, the military said. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack in the area of Singwan in restive south-western Baluchistan province. The military said the two slain troops "embraced martyrdom while fighting bravely against the terrorists."

EUROPEAN UNION: The EU's border and coastguard agency is collecting information from migrants that could end up identifying vulnerable people seeking sanctuary from persecution in their homelands, according to a report by the EU's data protection watchdog. The European Data Protection Supervisor also announced that it is launching an investigation into whether Frontex gathered information that it is not entitled to collect and illegally provided those details about migrants to the EU's police agency Europol

SENEGAL: The opposition leader in Senegal, Ousmane Sonko, has been sentenced by a court to two years in prison for "corrupting the youth" but was cleared of allegations of rape. Critics of the government say the aim of the trial was to prevent Mr Sonko from standing in next year's presidential elections.

Honduras: Honduran President Xiomara Castro said that she will make her first official visit to China. The president made the announcement on her official Twitter account after the inauguration of the Chinese Embassy in Tegucigalpa, which she did not attend. "At the invitation of President Xi Jinping I will visit with special mission the People's Republic of China from 9th to 14th June," Castro said and added that "the refoundation of Honduras demands new political, scientific, technical, commercial, and cultural horizons." For his part, Honduran Foreign Minister Eduardo Enrique Reina, who will accompany the President, said that during the official visit to China "there will be very good news ... a series of memorandums, documents, and framework agreements will be signed." The opening of diplomatic relations between Honduras and China was announced last March, after breaking with Taiwan and recognising the "one China" policy. According to the Honduran foreign minister, since then there has been progress, as China has approved the entry of strategic products from Honduras, and has also accepted, at the highest level, more than 30 Honduran university students studying in Taiwan, Reina said. Honduras' decision of recognising the Chinese government as the only legitimate government representing all of China led to the closure of the Taiwanese embassy in Tegucigalpa.

Japan: The Sendai District Court dismissed a lawsuit demanding an injunction against the restart of the No.2 unit at the Onagawa nuclear power plant (Onagawa Town and Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Pref). The lawsuit was filed by residents living near the Onagawa NPP against the plant operator, Tohoku Electric Power Company. The plaintiffs argued that the city government's evacuation plan for nuclear emergencies was ineffective in protecting residents from the risk of radiation exposure. The court ruling made no judgement on the company's evacuation plan, but stated that the plaintiffs failed to prove the danger of an accident.

Find out more about the

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Juukun Gorge Revisited

Burrup desecration

Ron Hall

Could the destruction of priceless 40,000-year-old art work in the great land of Australia ever happen today? The deliberately planned Juukun cave explosion of 2020 proved it could.

In 2023, the presumptuous removal of rock art sites at Murujuga, on the Burrup Peninsula proved that such cultural vandalism could easily happen once again.

Just as alarming, journalists who try to document such acts of desecration face harassment by police for simply carrying out their professional duty to inform the public.

While taking photographs on public land, lead journalist with Ngaarda Media, Eliza Kloser, first was stopped and questioned by police, only later to have her car searched by a second group of police. Later the same day her accommodation in Karratha was also searched, and an SD card removed from her camera.

Photographs that Ms Kloser had taken of the desecration of sacred sites that was undertaken to construct a controversial $6 billion fertiliser plant and to supply it with gas, fortunately have seen the light of day. Telling evidence!

"I just thought it was ridiculous, it just shocked me a bit how policed it was, the area, and I was stopped so much for just taking photos," Ms Kloser told *The Guardian Australia*.

But other journalists recently have been subjected to similar treatment. Jesse Noakes, a Western Australian journalist and anti-Woodside activist was surprised to be served documents by a State Security detective and "politely" told it was a crime not to comply! Mr Noakes had just reported on the case involving environmental activist, Joana Partyka, who was similarly issued with documents in her "secure apartment complex." Again, the Burrup Peninsula appeared to be a focus of attention.

Given the draconian approach being pursued in Western Australia and now being taken further in South Australia, despite a strong community protest, a police state now looms large.

Where are the ethics in all of this? If the company behaviour involved was truly ethical and above board, why would a crane, for example, need to be brought on site apparently "under the cover of darkness" to carry out its destructive role?

In fact, companies may even be emboldened by relatively minimal penalties and virtual government complicity. Added to this, the criminalisation of protest attempts send a dampening message of deterrence, with journalists and protesters facing harassment, and possible outcomes involving crippling legal expenses, heavy fines or even lengthy jail terms.

No worthwhile community debate has yet been undertaken to allow a wide scale evaluation of capitalistic exploitation over and above the maintenance of ancient heritage sites, invaluable to all Australians, and the rest of humanity.

It all seems to mean that more than ever before a strong and clear formalised First Nations voice is needed to be heard for us to have any hope of protecting heritage sites which may contain some of the oldest and most extensive rock art anywhere in the world. ✪

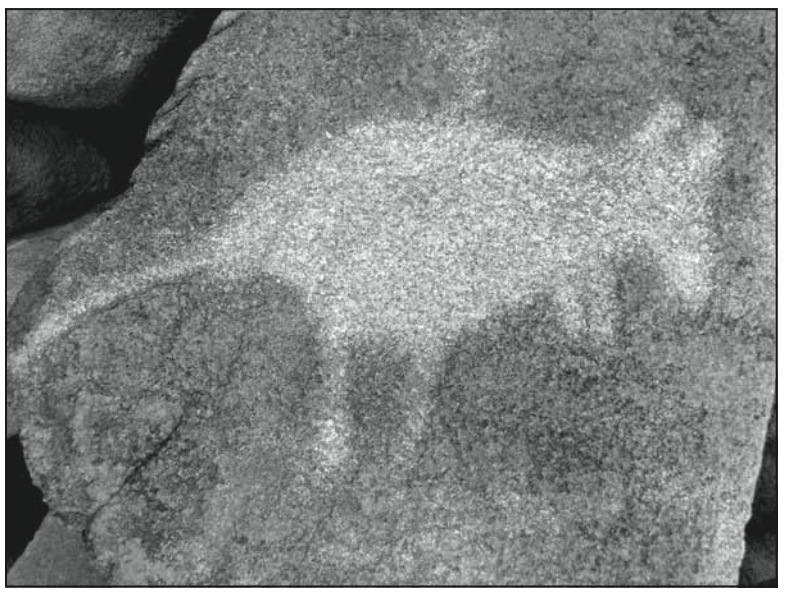

Photo: Jussarian – flickr.com (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Despite a strong community protest, a police state now looms large.

Taking fossil fuels out of sport

The Climate Council has launched a new voluntary code for sports clubs and arts institutions to remove fossil fuel sponsorship from their uniforms, stadiums, and events.

A number of spokespeople including athletes, academics and artists expressed their support.

Amy Steel, former Australian Diamonds netballer and climate change advocate said, "Sport plays a huge role in creating cultural change. Sport sponsorship is known as a way for companies to buy their social licence, by using the high cultural value of the sports clubs we know and love.

"So whilst sport doesn't itself contribute to a vast amount of emissions compared to other industries, by allowing fossil fuel companies to gain an endorsement, we stall the change that needs to happen.

"This change is needed urgently and we count on sport to play its role in getting us back on track for a safe and habitable climate future. Sport as we know it literally relies on climate action. There will be no safe climate to play backyard cricket, country footy and netball if we fail to act any longer. There is no time to waste, we need to take action, and this new voluntary code helps us to go about it."

Aimee Smith, award winning choreographer and dance artist and Edith Cowan University climate change PhD candidate said, "Saying no to the presence and sponsorship of fossil fuel companies in our theatres, music festivals and sports arenas is one of the most powerful ways we can send a clear message that we demand a liveable, beautiful and just future for us all.

"It can be really challenging for individual artists to speak out about the issue of fossil fuel sponsorship, especially in my home state of WA where these large corporations have such presence and power, and where turning down a good financial or potentially career-making opportunity can feel like taking a huge individual risk for an artist. But what artists do have, and certainly underestimate, is our collective power, our cultural influence and our immense social reach. If we all come together under a united voice calling for change we could, indeed, have the power to change the world."

Tully White, Australian women's longboarding champion who competes on the world tour and Surfers for Climate member said, "Rejecting fossil fuel sponsorship in surfing is crucial as we face the alarming realities of rising sea levels, coastal erosion, and intensified extreme weather events. Lets put a stop to fossil fuel giants greenwashing and move towards a sustainable future, safeguarding our natural spaces for generations to come."

Kelli McCluskey, chief executive artist, pvi collective (pvicollective.com) said, "As an arts sector, we know that our audiences, the people and communities we serve, do not want the arts associated with fossil fuels. We need to confront those concerns head on and do what we do best, imagine better alternatives.

"As artists, we know our values and our ethics drive our artmaking. When those are compromised or traded away through artwashing, we lose our ability to hold those in power to account through the art that we make. We lose the years of trust built up with our audiences. We lose our freedom of expression and that is not worth the trade off."

Dr Carmen Lawrence, academic, politician, and former Premier of Western Australia said, "What's clear is that these corporations need the sponsorship deals more than the sporting or arts bodies do. The amount of money that's provided is not an irreplaceable amount – it's just fairy dust designed to make the corporations look good.

"Some artists and sports people are trying to distance themselves from fossil fuel funding, but it's challenging. They need backing from their boards and governments to replace this funding. This isn't an impossible task – there are others who could step in to replace these funders.

"To safeguard Western Australia's unique landscape and biodiversity, including treasures like the Ningaloo Reef, we must decisively end our reliance on fossil fuels."

Professor of Human Performance at Edith Cowan University, and code co-author, Sophia Nimphius said, "Climate change is already affecting our daily lives and threatening our enjoyment and participation in sports, arts, and events. Leaders and organisers can lead the way by removing fossil fuel company sponsorship and taking a stand to show how serious we are about the health and future of our communities.

"In collaboration with the Climate Council, we've produced actionable guidelines to empower organisations to seek new sponsors that align with their values and our shared vision for a sustainable future, effectively severing their ties with fossil fuel company sponsorships." ✪

Bianca Chatfield. Photo: NAPARAZZI – flickr.com (CC BY-SA 2.0).

A history of US debt

Photo: rawpixel.com (CC0).

Graham Holton

The US Congress has approved a bill to lift the country's US$31.4 trillion debt ceiling days before its default. The day after it passed the US House of Representatives, the Senate voted 63-36 for the bill, after some concessions, with the support of 44 Democrats, 17 Republicans and two independents. The left-wing Democrat senators Bernie Sanders, John Fetterman, and Elizabeth Warren voted against what they believed was a right-wing bill.

Republicans complained that the bill would under-fund the military. Senator Lindsey Graham, the South Carolina Republican, called undercutting the military spending "a win for China." To clear the objections, Senate leaders ensured the deal did not limit US "military capabilities." Graham said, "It does not fix this bill totally, but it is a march in the right direction."

The concessions increased Pentagon spending by 3 per cent, to US$886 billion per annum. This is equivalent to the combined military spending of the next ten biggest national defence budgets. Defence accounts for 12 per cent of the US federal budget and a third of the discretionary budget.

After the bill passed the House, Democratic Majority Leader, Chuck Schumer, told the Senate that now "America can breathe a sigh of relief." This was not the first time the US has narrowly avoided a debt default, which would have had a devastating impact on US citizens and countries around the world. The agreement suspends the spending limit set by Congress until 1st January 2025.

The last time the US came close to default was in 2011. Then the credit agency Standard & Poor downgraded the US's credit rating to AA+, which has not been reversed. The credit rating agency Fitch gives the USA a AAA rating. The S&P 500 index rose 1 per cent on the bill's passing.

In April 2023, White House press secretary, Karine Jean-Pierre, said, "In our history, we have never defaulted on our debt or failed to pay our bills." This is not correct. During the War of Independence, the French spent 1.3 billion livres (£100 million), a massive sum at the time, on supporting the American colonies. The French expected to obtain lucrative trade deals after the war from the new government as repayment. Instead, America made trade deals with Britain. The massive debt caused major economic and political problems that led to a Financial Crisis and the French Revolution in 1789.

Two years after the War of 1812 with Britain, the US Treasury was unable to service its war debts. Treasury Secretary, Alexander J Dallas, admitted that, "a large amount of treasury notes has already been dishonoured." Later the US refused to repay the debt obligations that Cuba owed Spain, when the US took over the colony as war reparations for the Spanish-American War in 1898.

To help cover the massive costs of World War I, Congress created the debt ceiling with the Second Liberty Bond Act of 1917. This allowed the Treasury to issue bonds and take on new debt without Congressional approval. In 1939 the debt ceiling was applied to federal debt, under the Public Debt Acts.

The Public Debt Act of 1941 raised the aggregate debt limit on all obligations to US$65 billion, consolidating federal borrowing under the US Treasury. The massive costs of World War II required the debt limit to be raised to $300 billion in 1945. In 1979, Dick Gephardt imposed the "Gephardt Rule," that deemed the debt ceiling be raised when a budget was passed. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, that year the Treasury missed payments on $122 million in Treasury bills.

Since 1985 the US has failed to pay its full debt obligations to the United Nations. The Senate refused to appropriate the full US contributions, because the UN members had voted contrary to US political and military interests. The US still owes the UN over $2 billion.

In 2008, the US debt was over $10 trillion. In 2011, Republicans in Congress used the debt ceiling as leverage for deficit reduction. This led to a credit downgrade and contributed to the Dow Jones Industrial Average falling 2000 points in August, amongst its worst days on record. The delay in raising the debt ceiling caused the rise in government borrowing costs by $1.3 billion. The *Bipartisan Policy Centre* calculated that the delay cost the government $18.9 billion over the next ten years.

Today the USA is the world's most indebted country. According to the US Department of the Treasury, the US owes $6.2 trillion to itself: Mutual funds $3.5 trillion; Commercial banks and credit unions $1.2 trillion; State and local governments $343 billion; Private pension funds $805 billion; Insurance companies $252 billion; State and local government pension funds $343 billion; and US savings bonds $141 billion.

The other $28 trillion in public debt is owed mainly to: Japan $1.2 trillion; China $1.1 trillion; United Kingdom $431.8 billion; Ireland $307 billion; Luxemburg $291 billion; Switzerland $261 billion; Brazil $255 billion; with hundreds of billions to numerous other countries. All has to be repaid. ✪

Half the Sky

Decades of struggles have seen women make some progress in closing the wage gap, but they still face considerable barriers to achieving wage equity and full workforce participation in Australia. The gender gap is often quoted as 13.3 per cent, but this is misleading. The comparison only applies to people working in full-time positions and does not include bonuses and overtime payments which men are more likely to receive. Women form 67 per cent of part time workers. When actual average wages are taken into consideration the gender gap is around 30 per cent or in dollar terms $474.40 a week or $24,668.80 per annum. (ABS February 2023) In addition 60.1 per cent of females are in paid employment compared with 68.3 per cent of men. None of these statistics consider the many hours of unpaid labour and family and domestic responsibilities that women carry out. Australia's highly gender-segregated workforce undervalues and underpays "women's work." In addition, men have higher average salaries than women in 95 per cent of all occupations including those where women dominate the workforce. On average women earn $1 million less than men over their lifetime.

These and many other factors not only affect women throughout their working life, but have an impact during retirement, as women on average retire with 24 per cent less in their superannuation balances than their male counterparts. Taking time out to have children or care for family members can result in years with no superannuation contributions. But that's not all. Women only receive one third of the total government tax concessions on super (men receive the other two-thirds). Yet Australian women live on average four years longer than men, and with their lower super balances, they run out of super much earlier.

The inequities compound to the point where more than a third of single women over 60 live in income poverty and according to the latest census data the number of women over 55 experiencing homelessness increased by 31 per cent over the five years prior.

It is time for the highly skilled and important work carried out by women in the care economy including aged care, early childhood education and care, disability support, and other social services be recognised and valued. This includes pay equity, job security, appropriate workloads, career progression, and work health and safety. Government-funded parental leave should be raised to 52 weeks by 2030, to be shared between parents as they choose. Early childhood education and care should be free and accessible to all with the funding of additional places in the public and community sectors.

The age pension should be universal and raised to the level of the minimum wage. Reforms to superannuation, should include an end to its use for tax rorting and the establishment of a national superannuation fund which workers could join. This would offer a defined benefits scheme with lifetime guaranteed and indexed payments during payment. This would be in contrast to all the risks involved in managing a lump sum.

How to win this? By industrial relations reform including the right to strike and united struggle. How to fund this? Dump AUKUS and the nuclear submarines. End the US alliance. Abolish fossil fuel subsidies.

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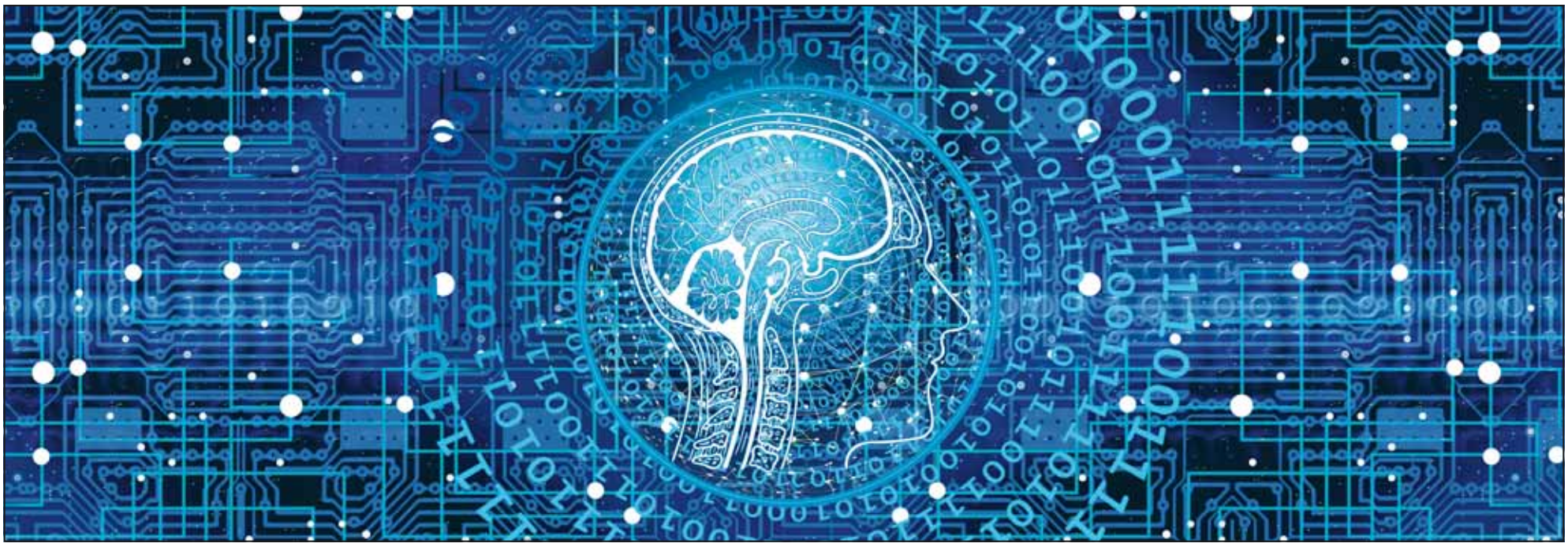
Technology is not neutral



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Artificial intelligence (AI) is big in the news. On the 30th May the Centre for AI Safety published a very short statement: "Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war."

Over 300 AI researchers, engineers, academics and technology professionals have signed the statement. They include Geoffrey Hinton, the "godfather of AI," who recently resigned from Google while warning of the dangers of the technology, and the CEOs of OpenAI (creator of ChatGPT), Google DeepMind, and Stability AI.

The Center for AI Safety website suggests a number of possible disaster scenarios: AI tools for drug discovery could be used to build chemical weapons; AI-generated misinformation could destabilise society, undermining collective decision-making; the power of AI could be concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, enabling "pervasive surveillance and oppressive censorship" – and human beings could become dependent on AI instead of thinking for themselves.

The signatories to the statement may not all have had the same targets in mind. Those fully committed to the Western capitalist economic model will likely not have been thinking about their own police and secret services, when referring to "surveillance" and "censorship" – although we know that police surveillance is being stepped up here and that there is already effective censorship when it comes to issues like the war in Ukraine.

The point about destabilising society also needs clarification. Does it, for example, extend to the mass unemployment that could be caused by the widespread introduction of AI?

Automation has already led to the loss of many skilled jobs. Some of these have been replaced by new jobs with new skills – but the development of AI may put even these at risk.

In a class-divided society such as ours, technology is not neutral, as Robert Poole explained in an article in this paper (*After ChatGPT: will machines make teachers obsolete*, Wednesday 31st May).

Workers would welcome labour-saving technology if it gave them more paid leisure time, but employers see it as a means of cutting costs and jobs.

The Center for AI Safety statement places the risk of extinction from AI on a par with those from pandemics and nuclear war. But when two high-risk issues coincide, the overall risk is multiplied. What, for example, would be the outcome if the decision to press the nuclear button is made by an algorithm?

That is no idle question. In an article published on Bloomberg the day after the statement, retired US Navy admiral James Stavridis says that "the Ukraine war may become a proving ground for AI" – for the US, that is.

Stavridis is a former supreme allied commander of NATO, and his view is that AI will "completely change warfare."

It will, first and foremost, "instantly provide highly detailed strategic targeting information, giving a decision maker a road map to use precision weapons at the most vulnerable points of an enemy's logistics chain."

It has "the ability to control massive swarms of drones in synchronised attack formations," which in Ukraine could allow the Kiev government "to deplete Russia's dwindling supply of armour, and also cause its forces to waste critical air-defence missiles."

AI "could also be a powerful tool in psychological and information warfare," by "creating deepfakes," its ability "to conduct cyberattacks may be its most dangerous attribute."

You can bet your bottom dollar that if Stavridis is thinking like this, then so also is the US military-industrial complex, and other states too.

Nearly 50 years ago, the Lucas Aerospace Shop Stewards Combine produced a detailed plan for conversion from military to useful production, while retaining jobs and skills; that model should be the way forward, and AI should be democratically regulated.

Morning Star ✪

Starbucks exposed as union-busting liar

Mark Gruenberg

Jaysin Saxton, the Starbucks worker who exposed for the US Senate and the world to see that company CEO Howard Schultz lied about not busting unions, will get his job back.

Saxton told the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) convention in New Orleans that the National Labour Relations Board ruled for him, deciding Starbucks illegally fired him from its Augusta, Georgia, store last year because of his union advocacy. He'll walk in the store door on 7th June to reclaim his post.

Once there, he declared during a series of panels on 25th May on organising, the atmosphere in the store will be totally different "and Starbucks isn't ready for it."

"I can't wait to get back."

Saxton played a key role in exposing Starbucks' abuses and exploitation of its workers nationally. With one other worker, Saxton followed Schultz to the witness chair earlier this year before the Senate health, education, labour, and pensions committee. There, he described in detail his mistreatment and ultimate firing from the Augusta store.

Schultz, the Starbucks founder who had just stepped down as its CEO – but who's still on the board and is the firm's biggest stockholder – denied then under oath that his firm ever illegally fired anyone for advocating unionising. Saxton point-by-point, then and at the CBTU, exposed that lie.

Starbucks is supposed to be tolerant and friendly to customers and workers, Saxton noted. "You can get fired on the spot for cursing," he commented. "But you can be racist or homophobic or commit sexual assault" on a worker and nothing will happen. "When partners complained, they got written warnings." "Partners" is Starbucks' nickname for its workers.

At Augusta, Starbucks "fired the store manager we all loved" and brought in another manager "who started firing all of us 'to make us work harder.'" The new manager also made working conditions difficult by constantly changing machines' positions within the store. The manager insisted workers have a "meaningful connection" with customers and in a maximum of 60 seconds allowed baristas to produce coffee and food. "I don't know anyone who could do that," Saxton said.

The workers responded to such conditions by first staging a two-day strike in honour of the fired manager, and then unionising, by a vote of 26 to 5, in April 2022, after Starbucks Workers United, a Service Employees sector, aided their grassroots organising drive.

Starbucks responded by firing Saxton and another organiser and forcing the workers to be "more efficient." Half of the 40 workers have left.

But with 20 workers now doing the work of 40, the store "is on assignment" and at risk of closing. Starbucks believes the remaining workers will be afraid of unionising, but the company will be wrong, Saxton predicted.

Bosses thought "they had fired enough of us to destroy morale." But now the workers will "have proof" Starbucks broke labour law when Saxton returns to his job under National Labour Relations Board orders. The remaining workers, he believes, will see that "Jason got fired, and now he'll get his job back ... We're going to build it (the store) back up and give it (unionisation) right back."

People's World ✪

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