



## Aged care

# NOT FOR PROFIT!

Anna Pha

**The aged care system is in crisis. Successive governments have seen old people as a “problem” that costs ever-increasing amounts of money. Once someone is past their working life, they are seen as surplus to the requirements of the profit-driven capitalist system and as a burden by governments bent on privatisation and profits-first.**

Profits can be made out of aged care services. Big business is rapidly expanding in the area, taking advantage of vulnerable Australians and government subsidies to syphon off millions of dollars of profits. All at the expense of quality care.

So it is that the Albanese Labor government has launched a taskforce to advise it on funding arrangements for aged care. Its aims are clear: to cut costs and make users of the system pay more.

Government reviews and inquiries are notoriously designed to come up with the recommendations that government itself wants. The aim of *this* review is to justify the cost-cutting and profit raising.

Its terms of reference are couched in the language of the sales pitch:

“The Government has committed to delivering aged care reform that restores dignity to aged care and ensures that older Australians are treated with the respect that they deserve. This includes reforming the in-home aged care system so that it better responds to the changing needs of older people and is simpler to understand and navigate.”

“The Taskforce provides an opportunity for *targeted* and thorough consideration of system funding arrangements to ensure that they are equitable, embed innovation, and include a future focus that adjusts to the changing pattern of demographics, needs and circumstances of older Australians ...”

[our italics]

“Targeted” suggests a tightening of means testing and the possibility of assets testing, including the family home, resulting in higher costs for the aged.

There is also a reference to “a robust safety net that properly recognises financial capacity at different levels of income and/or life circumstances” – spin for the introduction of tighter means and possibly asset testing.

### AFFORDABILITY

The report says care must be “affordable ... with arrangements that balance equity and fairness between older and working-aged Australians.”

In other words, recipients of aged care should pay more for care. It pits one group of Australians against another based on age and work status, a favourite neoliberal strategy.

The May federal budget allocated \$36 billion for 2023-24 for aged care with an estimate of just over \$40 billion in 2026-27. This includes \$11.3 billion over the next four years to cover an interim 15 per cent wage rise for aged care workers. With baby boomers soon to hit their late 70s the Treasurer is setting out to cut future spending on aged care.

This is the same government that finds it affordable to spend \$368 billion plus on nuclear submarines, more than a quarter of a trillion dollars on tax cuts for the rich and to hand out billions of dollars in fossil fuel subsidies.

### LEVY

The taskforce is also asked to consider the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. “The Royal Commission made a number of recommendations on funding and contribution approaches for aged care, including means testing and the possibility of a levy, the Commissioners had differing views.”

The possibility of a levy such as the Medicare levy paid on personal (not corporate) taxable incomes appears to be high on the agenda.

Transparency and accountability are not on the agenda. There is no suggestion that the taskforce look into how care providers spend their subsidies and user contributions. Yet there are numerous examples of private providers, including church and non-profits, syphoning off millions at the expense of care quality. (See *Guardian*, #2021, 29-08-2022, “Profiteering & neglect: the aged care crisis.”)

The taskforce is directed to reach a unanimous position but to offer options for consideration by government.

It is chaired by Aged Care Minister Anika Wells. The deputy chair, Nigel Ray, has served as an executive director of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as well as having had a career at Treasury. Another member of the Taskforce is Rosemary Huxtable, a former Secretary of the Department of Finance under the Coalition.

Other members come from more diverse backgrounds including Indigenous, seniors, ethnic and academic, as well as a trade union representative and former Liberal NSW state Premier Michael Baird.



The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) held a rally in 2018 to demand making nursing ratios law. Photo: Matt Hrkac / matthrkac.com.au – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0).

The Royal Commission estimated that one in three residents in aged care facilities have experienced substandard care. It revealed a litany of issues including the failure to meet personal and clinical care requirements, staffing shortages, undervaluing of staff, casualised and low-waged workforce, substandard food, preventable deaths and injuries, drugging of residents, abuse of residents, lack of accountability and transparency, and poor management.

These critical issues will **not** be addressed by making users pay more or by a levy. The present system of private providers, outsourcing and complex company structures will continue to result in lack of transparency and accountability as to how funding is spent.

The 15 per cent rise in the award wage for aged care workers is a step in the right direction but will not solve the staffing shortage.

The private sector is incapable of delivering aged care that treats people with dignity and ensures that older Australians are treated with the respect that they deserve or the care that they need.

### NATIONALISATION

To achieve these basic human rights, we need, at a minimum:

- Equal pay for work of equal value for staff
- Permanent work become the standard
- Staff-to-resident ratios to reduce workloads and enable quality care

- Funding of registered nurses on every shift
- Improved working conditions negotiated through union industry bargaining
- Appropriate training of all staff.
- Abolition of university and TAFE fees, and adequate income support while training
- Staff, residents and their families to have greater involvement and say in the running of centres
- Regulation for higher standards, including measures to inspect and enforce them
- Full accountability and transparency
- More home care packages
- Construction by governments of more residential aged care centres
- Centralised funding through a progressive tax system.

These necessary and urgent reforms can only be achieved by a nationalised system with universal access, the abolition of deposits and hefty daily or weekly payments, in a system based on care, not a “care economy” for big business.

There is **NOT** a shortage of money to fund these reforms. It is a question of political will and priorities.

The taskforce is to report by December 2023 with an interim report in October. 🇺🇦

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MUA launches Voice to Parliament film

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“Politically saturated injustice”

The Guardian now has a podcast

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# Guardian

Issue 2057

19th June, 2023

## Interest rate burden on workers

The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) is navigating a “narrow path” which Government Philip Lowe says is “likely to be a bumpy one.” Bumpy it will certainly be for many Australian workers, small businesses and farmers with loans or paying rent. Twelve rate rises in 13 months have seen interest rates rise from 0.1 per cent in May 2022 to 4.1 per cent in June 2023. In all interest rates have risen by a factor of 41 in a relatively short space of time! Monthly repayments on an average mortgage of \$500,000-\$600,000 over 25 years have risen by around \$1,200 bringing total repayments to \$4000 or more depending on the location.

There is a very real cost of living crisis as households face rising prices – rent, food, power bills, health, as well as mortgage repayments. All of this while real wages have fallen and continue to fall.

Lowe admits that “real incomes have declined” and that “mortgage payments as a share of household disposable income will reach a record high later this year.” He also acknowledges that “Rents are also increasing quickly, putting pressure on some households’ finances.”

In addition, he notes, data from banks suggest that spending is most subdued among households with a mortgage, especially those that borrowed large amounts relative to their incomes over recent years, and households that rent. The retail sector is already feeling the impact with demand for non-essentials falling. If this trend continues, which is the RBA’s intention, then small businesses in particular will go to the wall and jobs will be lost.

The labour market, Lowe says, has been very tight, unemployment at its lowest level in nearly 50 years. “It is clear that total demand in the economy has been pushing up against supply, and that, recently, this has been contributing to the upward pressure on prices.” Where demand outdoes supply, companies increase prices for goods and services well beyond any price rises they face.

“The return of inflation to target requires a more sustainable balance between aggregate demand and supply. The tool that the RBA has to achieve this balance is interest rates.” Translating that into plain English, the RBA is increasing interest rates so that households have less income to spend on goods and services. That in turn will reduce demand. It is doing so during a cost-of-living crisis. When demand is reduced, then unemployment rises.

“The path back to 2-3 per cent inflation is likely to involve a couple of years of relatively slow growth in the economy. Even so, as the Board navigates that path it is seeking to preserve as many of the gains in the labour market as is possible.” (Emphasis added) “I want to make it clear, though, that the desire to preserve the gains in the labour market does not mean that the Board will tolerate higher inflation persisting.” In other words, the RBA’s interest rate hikes will increase unemployment and that will continue until the CPI is within the RBA’s arbitrary target of 2-3 per cent, regardless of the impact on unemployment or the economy. This is capitalism’s solution to inflation. Make workers and households carry the burden of reducing interest rates and risk recession to achieve its goals. Never mind the impact on workers and households.

Lowe also trots out the capitalist myth about wage rises causing inflation. Again, no mention of profit-gouging by the large corporations or banks not passing on full interest rate rises to depositors while hiking their rates on loans.

A much simpler method and less painful for the working class and the economy would be for the government to step in with price controls, nationalise electricity and increase public housing supply. The establishment of a national, democratically controlled public bank with a strong social charter would force private banks to compete.

Lowe and his corporate board members must go.

## Unions for YES workshops coming soon

**The Communist Party of Australia supports and is campaigning for a YES vote in the coming referendum on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament. As the Party statement of 29 January this year said:**

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

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

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

If YOU are wanting to campaign, one thing you can do is attend one of the free workshops being held by Unions for Yes.

This free workshop is open to all unionists and community members who want to be part of the Unions for YES campaign!

This workshop will focus on the key campaign

messages and how you can have the most effective conversations to persuade your workmates, friends, neighbours, and fellow community members to vote YES!

It will cover common objections and prepare you with all the responses to them that we know work best.

The workshop will also give you an overview of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and why the Voice is so important as a first step towards Voice, Treaty, and Truth.

If you are a unionist or community member who wants to sign up to one of our free online courses you can do so here:

- 11th July 2023 1pm to 4pm (AEST)
- 18th July 2023 9am to 12pm (AEST)
- 2nd August 2023 1pm to 4pm (AEST)

Please note that there is a capacity of 25 participants for each session, so register early to make sure you don’t miss out.

Head to [atui.org.au/campaign-conversations-for-yes/](https://atui.org.au/campaign-conversations-for-yes/) to book a place in one of the workshops, and for workshops for members and/or staff at your workplace. The full CPA statement on the Voice to Parliament can be found at [cpa.org.au/statement/2023-2](https://cpa.org.au/statement/2023-2) 🌐

## Julian Assange “close to extradition”

**Julian Assange has lost his latest legal appeal against being extradited from the UK to the US. This means that there is now only one final appeal to a panel of two judges between Assange and extradition to the United States where he could well be sentenced to a combined 175 years in prison. The Communist Party of Australia has consistently held that “this is a political case which has**

**nothing to do with justice,” and has called on all Party members and supporters to write to PM Anthony Albanese to ask him to bring Assange home.**

The Assange campaign is also urging supporters to write to Caroline Kennedy, the US Ambassador to Australia, and to call their local MPs to let them know that journalism should not be treated as a crime.

There will be a celebration for

Julian Assange’s birthday on 1st July at Bar Oussou in Melbourne for an event of music, solidarity, and activism in support of Assange’s freedom and the pursuit of truth.

Sounds of Freedom: Bar Oussou, 653 Sydney Rd, Brunswick, Victoria, 2pm onwards. For more on the Assange campaign, go to [assangecampaign.org.au](https://assangecampaign.org.au) 🌐

## WA: Hopes for change on youth justice

**WA’s Inspector of Custodial Services Eamon Ryan has released a damning report on conditions inside Banksia Hill Youth Detention Centre.**

Ryan prepared the report after he and his team spent 10 days inside WA’s two dedicated youth detention facilities, Banksia Hill and Unit 18 housed within Casuarina adult prison.

The report describes frequent lockdowns, self-harm incidents, staff shortages and damaged facilities. Ryan said he and his team “saw young people, staff and a physical environment in acute crisis.”

The report found the prison had struggled to recruit staff and the number of people quitting was unusually high.

“The help these young people need and the effective rehabilitation they require are exactly the types of interventions (education, programs, recreation, training, family reconnection, general health and mental health) that have been most heavily impacted by staffing shortages and increased lockdowns,” Ryan said.

The report made a series of recommendations, including that a second youth custodial facility be

built and constructed “that meets the complex needs of different cohorts of young people.”

Nyungar-Niyiyaparli-Yamatji advocate and Curtin University legal academic Emma Garlett agreed a second facility for youth on remand would help.

“Western Australia used to have a remand centre, but then they stopped that, and now we don’t,” she said.

“It’s important; it needs to happen. I think that’s a great recommendation.”

“There really needs to a therapeutic approach taken for young people,” she said.

“The last place they need to end up is in Banksia Hill. They need to stay with their families and they need to stay with communities, and there needs to be a lot of diversion programs happen as well.”

New WA Premier Roger Cook has appointed Paul Papalia as Corrective Services Minister, making him responsible for the crisis-plagued Banksia Hill Youth Detention Centre.

“This is a priority for me and I’ve made it clear to Minister Papalia that it’s a priority for him,” Premier Cook told *The West Australian*.

*Ngaarda Media* (edited for reasons of space) 🌐

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# Maritime Union of Australia launches Voice to Parliament film

The documentary film *COME WALK WITH US* premiered on 7th June, introduced by executive producer Thomas Mayo. Mayo is a former wharfie, an author, a signatory to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and a leading voice for the Yes campaign in the lead-up to the referendum later this year.

The star of the film, Vicki Morta, is Australia's first Indigenous woman bosun. Vicki works on a bauxite tanker off the coast of Far North Queensland. Since 2021, Vicki has been an advocate for the Voice to Parliament.

The film follows Vicki on her personal journey to her home in Far North Queensland to hearing stories about her peoples' history from her Elders, to the national stage where she has become a prominent champion for the "Yes" campaign.

The documentary showcases the Maritime Union of Australia's (MUA) long record of solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. From wharfie Fred Maynard who led the first all-Aboriginal political voice, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association back in the mid 1920s, to today supporting the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the referendum for its key proposal: a constitutionally enshrined First Nations Voice.

The film premiered to a captivated audience who'd travelled from Newcastle, Port Kembla, Wollongong, and across Sydney to Surry Hills for the screening. Afterwards, their spontaneous response was a video message of endorsement and gratitude to Vicki who is still at sea on a lengthy swing aboard her ship.

The film is available as an online documentary and discussion starter via the MUA's Youtube channel. It is expected to play a

crucial role in inspiring audiences with its depiction of the unique and deeply felt perspective of an Indigenous woman at the forefront of a tough industry in the lead-up to the referendum later this year.

Speakers at the launch included Bidjigal man and MUA Sydney Branch Indigenous Committee President, **Tony Cook**, Torres Strait Islander and adviser to the From the Heart campaign, **Kenny Bedford**, and MUA Sydney Branch Secretary **Paul Keating**. The event was Hosted by the Maritime Union of Australia – Sydney Branch, and MCed by the MUA National Women's Officer, **Michelle Myers**.

Quotes from the film:

Vicki Morta, Ngadjoni-Jii & South Sea Islander descendant: "We want to be heard. Because at the moment, they're the ones that are telling us what we want, what's best for us."

**Uncle Terry O'Shane**, KubirriWarra Clan of the Yalanji nation & ex-seafarer: "If we don't get a positive outcome in this referendum and I think we will, Australia will stay divided. It will not go away because justice has not been done. That's how important it is."

Professor **John Maynard**, Fred Maynard's grandson, Worimi and historian: "this ... is something that our people fought for for nearly 100 years, and it's long overdue."

**Pat Dodson**: "it'll be the voice where they can say, 'Hey, mate, you're doing the wrong thing. Pull up.' If they don't listen, then the public will know that the First Nations people have had a disagreement with the Parliament of the day on some law that they're trying to make that's going to affect their lives."

MUA (edited for reasons of space) ✪



## Existing on \$13 a day

Young renters on youth allowance sharing a typical two bedroom flat have only \$13 a day to cover food, transport, medicine, utilities, and other costs, according to an alarming new analysis by Homelessness Australia.

To coincide with Youth Homelessness Matters Day, the peak body conducted a two-year longitudinal analysis, cross-referencing the cost of 50 per cent rent of a two-bedroom apartment against the maximum income support payment available to a young person living away from home.

While overall income support payments increased 10 per cent in two years (due to CPI indexing), rents surged 24 per cent. A young person who paid 64 per cent of their income two years ago to share a two-bedroom unit will now have to pay 73 per cent of their income.

"After paying rent a young person on income support in Australia has only \$13 a day to cover food, transport, medicine, power, and other costs. Unless there's some magic pudding we're not aware of, this is a ridiculous expectation," said Kate Colvin, CEO of Homelessness Australia.

"The reality is landlords will not rent to a young person whose budget is stretched this thinly, making it almost impossible for young people who can't live safely at home to find somewhere to live.

"We urgently need to lift Youth Allowance and Commonwealth Rent Assistance so young people have the income they need to avoid homelessness. By failing to act, we are condemning growing numbers of young people to homelessness and poverty. It's impossible to develop skills and experience or attain an education when you're hungry or unsure of where you will sleep."

The latest figures from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show that each year 39,300 children and young people aged 15-24 come to homelessness services alone. Many cannot be safely reunited with family and need long-term housing and support.

"It is harder and harder for homelessness services to find young people a rental home and when they do, the rent is eye-wateringly expensive," said Colvin. "If we want to give the next generation a genuine shot in life, the least we can do is give them the income they need to survive." ✪

## A win for workers and union advocacy

The Australian Workers' Union (AWU) has welcomed a suite of major changes to the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme which should provide much-needed protections and support for PALM workers.

Key improvements include a minimum of 30 hours of work per week and a minimum weekly take-home pay of \$200 after deductions – meaning that no worker will have less than \$200 in hand after deductions to pay off airfares, accommodation and expenses. Additionally, the revisions promise pay parity with domestic workers and make inductions mandatory for all workers.

"The AWU has been campaigning long and hard for improvements to the PALM visa scheme and I am very pleased to see the changes announced today," said AWU National Secretary Daniel Walton.

"These are not minor adjustments but significant wins for both the AWU and the workers we represent. They provide much-needed safeguards, regular income, and will help ensure the dignified treatment of farm workers.

"For many years now we have battled the business lobby and the National Party who have tried to sweep the mistreatment of

PALM workers under the rug. I am very pleased we now have an Agriculture Minister who is more interested in cleaning up than covering up. Australia does not need to mistreat our guests from the Pacific in order to have thriving and profitable agriculture and horticulture sectors.

"Our international reputation has been tarnished for too long. We should never lose sight of the fact that the PALM scheme is not just about filling labour shortage gaps, but also about strengthening ties with our neighbours. That can only happen if the people who come here to work are treated respectfully and fairly."

However, Walton cautioned that while the new rules are welcome, their impact will depend on robust enforcement.

"These rules will only be as effective as their enforcement. It is our collective responsibility to ensure these changes are more than words on paper. They must bring about a real difference in the everyday lives of the people we represent," Walton said.

The scheme will now include an accommodation and transport safety net for workers offered less than 20 hours of work per week.

Australian Workers' Union (edited for reasons of space) ✪

## Union action reveals \$2.6 million in underpayments

"Trade unions are ... critical for workers under capitalism"

(CPA Political Resolution, 2022)

**Industrial action by Australian Workers' Union (AWU) members at Taronga Western Plains Zoo has led to the discovery of \$2.6 million in underpayments to casual workers at the iconic tourist destination. Taronga Western Plains Zoo agreed to an audit of their payroll systems by KPMG (a global network of professional firms providing audit, tax and advisory services) after AWU workers downed tools late last year over ongoing pay problems.**

For 18 months maintenance workers at the tourist attraction endured underpayments, late payments and consistent problems with their leave entitlements and allowances.

Tony Callinan, AWU NSW State Secretary, said members on site were right to stand up to the Zoo's management.

"It's a bit rich for Taronga to come out today and claim to be self-reporting an underpayment when the payroll audit would have never happened if not for AWU members' taking action in November 2022," says Callinan.

"Taronga Western Plains refused for months to accept there was a problem with their payroll system and it was only after

AWU members held a stop work meeting at Dubbo that they agreed to meet with us.

"On the 5th December 2022 in a meeting with an AWU Organiser and Delegates in Dubbo Taronga reluctantly agreed to engage an external auditor which has identified \$2.6 million of underpayments to casual workers.

"The AWU members at Taronga Western Plains should be immensely proud, they stuck together and took action, they fixed their own issues and six months later have put \$2.6 million in the pockets of their casual colleagues," says Callinan.

AWU ✪

# Folbigg case highlights need for case review commission

**Australia needs an independent body with powers to investigate claims of wrongful conviction, says the Australian Lawyers Alliance (ALA).**

"An independent dedicated body, like those that exist in New Zealand and the UK, to investigate criminal cases where people maintain they have been wrongfully convicted would provide a valuable safeguard against terrible miscarriages of justice, and could help prevent another case like Kathleen Folbigg," said Greg Barns SC, criminal justice spokesperson for the Australian Lawyers Alliance.

"Once someone is convicted, our current system of criminal appeals makes it very difficult for a person to challenge their conviction, even when new evidence comes to light.

"An independent body that

has the freedom and the power to thoroughly investigate would take the responsibility for appeals away from the convicted person and their friends and family, and provide an important protection against wrongful convictions."

In New Zealand the Criminal Cases Review Commission assesses applications and will undertake a full investigation if it thinks there are doubts about the conviction. The case is then referred back to an appeal court. In the UK, the Criminal Cases Appeal Commission comprises twelve independent experts who review disputed criminal cases and send them back to the appeals court if there is reason to do so.

"The Commission works in their own timeframe rather than at the pace of the courtroom and has access to a range of specialists and

scientists who can be drawn on to examine evidence," said Barns SC. "If introduced in Australia a body like this could report back to the court and a judge would determine whether to set aside a conviction.

"We understand that the NSW Attorney General Michael Daley has said that he is open to considering legal changes that are required to avoid a situation like Kathleen Folbigg's in the future. An independent criminal case review body would be an effective way to help prevent this terrible situation occurring again."

6th June 2023.

Kathleen Folbigg is an Australian woman convicted in 2003 for killing her four infant children. She was pardoned twenty years later due to serious doubts about her guilt. 🗳️

## Twisting the Middle Arm

**The Middle Arm gas hub in Darwin has been riddled in controversy from the beginning. From a murky \$1.5 billion dollar federal subsidy, to scathing Freedom of Information requests revealing the Albanese government knew Middle Arm was central to Beetaloo Basin fracking expansion – the Middle Arm gas hub is bad news.**

Larrakia Traditional Owners have spoken out about the threats the hub poses to sacred sites, warning of another Juukan Gorge.

What is Middle Arm? It's the name of an enormous petrochemical and gas export hub in the Northern Territory. The project is undergoing what Ketan Joshi has called "a massive greenwashing makeover which includes removing references to petrochemicals." Tamboran Resources, one of the fracking companies involved in Middle Arm has put out a proud press release about their part in the project, announcing that they will have the capacity for 6.6 million tonnes

of Liquefied Natural Gas per year "with the potential for expansion."

Middle Arm will receive \$1.9 billion in subsidies from the Albanese government. At a protest rally outside Tanya Plibersek's office, First Nations Justice campaigner and Garawa woman Nicole said:

"Larrakia Traditional Owners are warning me that sacred sites on their Country could be destroyed by Middle Arm – where Middle Arm is converting fracked gas into liquid gas for exportation and petrochemicals for plastic, paints and fertilisers. It would also threaten ancient Larrakia rock art and shell middens – Darwin's only known remaining Aboriginal rock art to have survived colonisation. That has flow on effects to stories, dreaming, and rituals, and must be stopped."

With thanks to GetUp and Ketan Joshi. 🗳️

## NSW Nurses and Midwives back the Voice

### NSWNMA statement

**As Australia is being asked to consider a Voice to Parliament for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the New South Wales Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) is formally supporting this important initiative.**

In 2018, the NSWNMA Committee of Delegates passed a resolution in support of the Uluru Statement from the Heart:

That this Committee of Delegates recognises that as a health union the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association has a special responsibility to support measures that contribute to improved health outcomes and progress

reconciliation with Australia's First Peoples. The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association reaffirms its commitment to closing the gap in health and life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians.

We recognise that this will require a multifaceted approach and that self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be fundamental. Therefore, this Committee of Delegates supports implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart as another step forward on the path to Reconciliation.

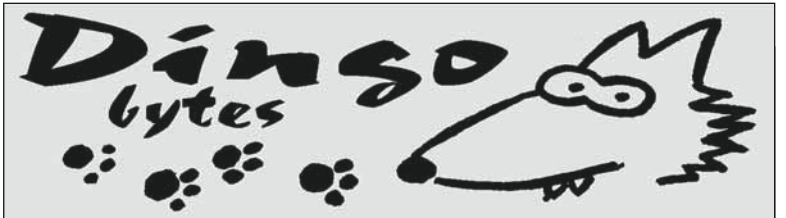
In acting on the democratic

decision of members, the NSWNMA is supporting the proposal to establish an Indigenous Voice that is enshrined in the Constitution.

As a trade union, we firmly support issues of social justice and take an active role in promoting and supporting positive outcomes for all communities.

We believe Australia's original custodians deserve greater representation at the highest level, particularly when it comes to the decision-making processes that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

nswnma.asn.au 🗳️



A major survey conducted by McKell, the Transport Workers Union and TEACHO sheds light on the harsh reality faced by food delivery, rideshare, and AmazonFlex drivers. The survey, which included over 1000 transport gig workers, reveals that the notion of "flexibility" is merely an illusion. The key findings of the survey show low pay, job insecurity, and the absence of fair, safe, and sustainable standards, highlighting the urgent need for transport reform. The survey uncovered a shocking truth: 81 per cent of respondents depend on gig work as their primary source of income, but are overwhelmingly struggling to make ends meet. Astonishingly, the more hours they work, the lower their hourly pay becomes. Approximately 66 per cent of full-time workers and at least 45 per cent of all workers earn less than the minimum wage, potentially affecting over 100,000 gig workers in Australia. This alarming trend amounts to the equivalent of ongoing wage theft, and undermines the livelihoods of hardworking individuals. Deadly pressure is affecting gig workers. More than half of the respondents experience work-related stress, anxiety, and mental health issues. 56 per cent of food delivery riders said they're pressured to rush and take risks on the road to earn enough money and avoid "deactivation" for being deemed too slow by the algorithm. While flexibility is often cited as a major benefit of gig work, the survey revealed a different reality. 54 per cent of respondents prioritise fair pay and safe working conditions over flexible hours. About 41 per cent of workers are forced to work over 40 hours a week, and 69 per cent feel compelled to work during peak hours to earn a sufficient income. Said one worker: "I work 7 days a week and often above 70-80 hours a week, and I barely make enough money to live."

**PARASITE OF THE WEEK:** Confirmation from mining company Tamboran that it has "secured" 170 hectares at the Middle Arm petrochemical precinct in Darwin Harbour proves beyond all doubt that the publicly-funded facility will exist to artificially prop up a Northern Territory fracking industry. Tamboran's ASX statement says the land "is expected to host a (fracked gas) development with an initial capacity of 6.6 million tonnes of LNG per annum, with the potential for expansion." Tamboran was fined \$6,500 in January this year for using more than 300,000 litres of drilling sump waste water for dust suppression. The Northern Territory's environmental regulator has also reportedly launched an investigation into allegations that heavy metal contaminants such as lead and barium have since been found in a nearby cattle breeding paddock. Frack Free NT spokesperson Phil Scott said, "This announcement confirms what groups like ours have been saying since day one – that the government-provided \$1.5 billion for the Middle Arm Precinct will be a taxpayer funded subsidy for fracking companies like Tamboran." This is the Albanese and Fyles Government working hand in fist to artificially create a market for fracked gas when otherwise, it's unlikely production scale fracking would be economically justifiable in the Territory. These governments have claimed that they won't support fracked gas projects if they don't stack up environmentally, socially, or economically, but here they are sinking scarce public funds into a risky, climate-wrecking project regardless.



### 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](https://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](https://3cr.org.au).

# RBA: technically insolvent, morally bankrupt

Graham Holton

According to its website, the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) determines the policy of the Central Bank and undertakes the actions necessary to ensure that monetary and banking policies are directed to “the greatest advantage of the people of Australia.” Its chief aims are: “the stability of the currency of Australia; the maintenance of full employment in Australia; and the economic prosperity and welfare of the people of Australia.”

There are nine members on the RBA Board. Its Chair, since 18th September 2016, is Dr Philip Lowe. The Deputy Chair is Michele Bullock, and the other members are Mark Barnaba, Ian Harper, Carolyn Hewson, Steven Kennedy, Iain Ross, Carol Schwartz and Alison Watkins. Eight of the nine Board members were appointed by the Coalition. The main restriction on being a board member is that board members can't work for, or run, other banks.

Philip Lowe has a house in Sydney's Randwick with no mortgage, a Commonwealth Bank credit card and three bank accounts.

In 1997 Lowe obtained a half-price home loan, subsidised by the Reserve Bank, to purchase his five-bedroom house. He took out two loans to purchase the \$1,075,000 property, a \$241,000 loan from the RBA and \$151,000 from the Commonwealth Bank. The subsidised mortgage loan is not listed as a gift.

During the last financial year Dr Lowe's total pay package was \$1,037,709 making him one of the country's highest paid public servants.

This raises the question, are Australian tax dollars being well spent on the RBA Board? By comparison, Lowe's peers in the UK and the US do similar jobs for far less reward. In 2019, the annual salary for the US Federal Reserve Chair, Jerome Powell, was \$301,931 in Australian dollars. The other “Fed” governors only get \$272,000. In the UK, the Governor of the Bank of England, Andrew Bailey, takes home £500,000 (A\$933,000) a year, comparable but still less than in Australia.

Another factor that might make us ask if we're getting value for money from our Reserve Bank Board is its own financial performance. The independent review, *Reserve Bank of Australia Annual Report* (27th October 2022), shows Philip Lowe responsible for trading losses of up to AU\$58 billion, as a result of the RBA's bond purchase program and term funding facility.



Philip Lowe. Photo: Crawford Forum – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

These losses have left the Reserve Bank technically insolvent. The Federal Treasurer halted all dividends to Australian tax payers until the Reserve Bank returned to positive equity, estimated to be in 2032.

In the foreword to the review, Dr Lowe writes: “The rise in bond yields that has accompanied the stronger economy and higher inflation has resulted in significant valuation losses on the Bank's holdings of government bonds. As a result, the Bank has recorded an accounting loss of \$36.7 billion this year, which has reduced its equity to negative \$12.4 billion.”

On 6th June, the RBA announced its 12th consecutive interest rate rise, to 4.1 per cent. Dr Lowe was slammed for suggesting that Australians should cut back on spending to cope with rising interest rates. He is unaffected by mortgage rate increases.

He was criticised in April for not speaking at the National Press Club, following a meeting of the RBA board. Instead, he attended a private lunch hosted by investment bank Barrenjoey. Dr Lowe's loyalty is clearly to the banking class, not Australia's working families.

As families across Australia lose

their houses, due to skyrocketing mortgages, and first home buyers increasingly fail to get into the housing market, it is legitimate to ask how this is to “the greatest advantage of the people of Australia?” The Board of the RBA has dismally failed to achieve its two basic aims: “the maintenance of full employment in Australia; and the economic prosperity and welfare of the people of Australia.” Interest rate hikes do not improve the interests and welfare of most Australians.

How can the RBA board get it so terribly wrong? One factor might be that the RBA Board's salaries, like those of our MPs, are unaffected by the state of the Australian economy. Even if Australia is forced into a recession, they will not lose their salaries and generous perks. The RBA continually fails to meet its basic policy aim to protect the “welfare of the people of Australia.” The RBA Board has shown no empathy for the Australian people. Our reserve bank is not only technically insolvent, but morally bankrupt. It has declared a class war against the working class, with the landlord and banking classes being the clear victors. ☹️

## PEACE NOTES

Hannah Middleton

Russia and Belarus have signed a deal to deploy Russian tactical nuclear missiles in Belarus.

“In the context of an extremely sharp escalation of threats on the western borders of Russia and Belarus, a decision was made to take countermeasures in the military-nuclear sphere,” Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said.

Moscow will retain control over the weapons and any decisions on their use, Shoigu said.

Russian President Putin said that by stationing tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus, Russia will be doing what the United States has done for decades by putting its nuclear weapons in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey.

“Over the last two and a half years, the Republic of Belarus has been subjected to unprecedented political, economic, and information pressure from the United States, the United Kingdom, and its NATO allies, as well as the member states of the European Union,” the Belarusian foreign minister said in a statement.

“In view of these circumstances, and the legitimate concerns and risks in the sphere of national security arising from them, Belarus is forced to respond by strengthening its own security and defence capabilities.”

Russia's Foreign Ministry responded to Western criticism by pointing out that Washington and its allies had ignored repeated Russian calls for the withdrawal of US nuclear weapons from Europe. The ministry reaffirmed Moscow's right to take “the necessary additional steps to ensure security of Russia and its allies.”

This worrying development takes place in the context of the war in Ukraine, caused by US and NATO plans to use Ukraine as a foil to generate conflict intended to bring down Putin's government and destroy Russian power.

In 2008 former US Ambassador to Russia (and current Director of the CIA) William Burns warned that NATO efforts to bring Ukraine into its ranks would precipitate Russian military intervention. NATO invited Ukraine to join in November 2008.

The US, EU, and NATO instigated a coup in Ukraine in February 2014 which removed the elected president, Victor Yanukovich, and replaced him with an ultra-nationalist government.

In April the new government declared war on the ethnic Russian population of the Donbas. This triggered the Russian annexation of Crimea and the provision of military support by Russia to the Donbas.

Ukraine and its NATO allies then sued for peace, initiating negotiations that led to the adoption of the Minsk Agreement, which put in place a ceasefire in exchange for guarantees regarding Ukrainian sovereignty over the Donbas as well as relative autonomy for the ethnic Russians of the Donbas, protecting their language, religion, culture, and traditions.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, former German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and former French President Francois Hollande have admitted that the Minsk Accords were a sham intended to buy time to build up the Ukrainian military.

Russia's decision to invade Ukraine on 24th February 2022 was not an unprovoked act of aggression, but an act of self defence.

Nuclear weapons pose unacceptable humanitarian consequences and the transfer of Russian tactical nuclear weapons into Belarus is a worrying development.

However, we should remember:

- The US, not Russia, withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile and Intermediate Nuclear Forces treaties.
- The US, not Russia, has frozen talks on the extension of the New Strategic Arms Treaty.
- The US, not Russia, recently publicised a nuclear policy allowing for the pre-emptive use of nuclear weapons in a non-nuclear situation.
- The US, not Russia, has deployed a low-yield nuclear warhead (the W-76-2) on Trident submarine launched ballistic missiles, and conducted war games practicing launching this weapon where Russia was the named target.

We must call for all US nuclear weapons to be removed from NATO countries, Italy, Turkey, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium and for the new missile bases in Romania and Poland to be closed, in return for Putin not putting nuclear weapons in Belarus.

The United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons is the only international treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons use and threat of use. It makes nuclear weapons illegal. PM Albanese should sign this treaty immediately.



*Something to say?*  
**Write to the Editor!**

[editor@cpa.org.au](mailto:editor@cpa.org.au)

# “Politically saturated injustice”

**Campaigners blasted a High Court decision to reject Julian Assange’s appeal against US extradition last week as a “blatant politically saturated injustice.”**

The Wikileaks founder’s legal team is to mount a final attempt in British courts to stop the 51-year-old Australian facing a “political prosecution” and up to 175 years in jail.

His wife Stella confirmed that Justice Swift had rejected all eight grounds of his appeal against extradition, which was ordered by Priti Patel as home secretary last year.

She said he will make a renewed application for appeal at the High Court, which will proceed to a public hearing before two new High Court judges.

“We remain optimistic that we will prevail and that Julian will not be extradited to the United States, where he faces charges that could result in him spending the rest of his life in a maximum security prison for publishing true information that revealed war crimes committed by the US government,” she said.

His father John Shipton added, “The grounds for a hearing are clear, firm, and just. Julian’s family watch on horrified, and all fair-minded people the world over watch with profound disquiet and alarm.”

Veteran journalist and campaigner John Pilger said, “I have never known such a blatant politically saturated injustice.”

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said, it was “deeply concerned by the UK High Court’s decision” which has brought Mr Assange “dangerously close” to being extradited.

RSF director of campaigns Rebecca Vincent said, “It is absurd that a single judge can issue a three-page decision that could land Julian Assange in prison for the rest of his life, and permanently impact the climate for journalism around the world.”

She said RSF is now preparing to mount a judicial review against Belmarsh prison after she and the organisation’s secretary-general were barred from visiting him in April.

“We are willing to escalate this as is needed, especially as the possibility of his extradition is coming closer. If he is extradited it would be highly difficult if not impossible for people to see him.”

Assange has suffered from deteriorating physical and mental health while being held in the maximum security prison in east London following his removal from the Ecuadorian embassy, where he had stayed for seven years, in 2019.

He faces 18 US charges over WikiLeaks’ publication of hundreds of thousands of classified documents leaked by former US Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning.

Amnesty International legal adviser Simon Crowther told the *Morning Star*, “The reality of the case is that Julian Assange is being prosecuted for doing something that journalists do all the time.”

He said the latest High Court decision “makes us really concerned because the legal avenues are getting smaller and smaller as time goes by.”

On High Court judges who are due to decide on whether to allow Mr Assange a final appeal, he added, “We very much hope that



John Shipton (right), father of Julian Assange, and Richard Titelius following a Free Julian Assange rally, November 2022, in Perth. Photo: CPA.

they will hear that appeal because that’s the appeal on the really crucial issue of freedom of expression.

“The next week is a really important moment to this case. If Julian Assange loses those arguments we hope of course still to bring the case to the European Court of Human Rights.

“It’s disappointing that the UK government is continuing to pursue this case on behalf of the US.”

*Morning Star* ✪

Australian readers should be contacting their MPs and Senators to support the Bring Julian Assange Home Parliamentary Group. See [assangecampaign.org.au](http://assangecampaign.org.au) for details.

## Review

# The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the technology of occupation around the world

**This book is a useful read for anyone who thinks, as a lot of Australians do, that what happens to Palestinians under Israeli occupation is sad, but it’s over there and not here.**

If that’s how you see it, Antony Loewenstein has got news for you. As the subtitle of *The Palestine Laboratory* hints, and as the book explains, Israel’s occupation goes around the world in more ways than one.

Since 1947, the date of the first “Nakba” or “catastrophe” as the Palestinians call it, Israel has been in control of a large number of dispossessed Palestinian people. Since 1967, it has controlled a lot more. As Nathan Thrall wrote, “South Africa’s apartheid lasted 46 years. Israel’s is at 72 and counting.”

Israel’s occupation has to involve the rest of the world because without external support the occupation wouldn’t last. As detailed in

John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt’s *The Israel Lobby*, the United States gives Israel more direct and military assistance than it does to any other country. Mearsheimer and Walt asked what the US gets in return. In *The Palestine Laboratory* Loewenstein answers that question. It’s not good news.

Israel exports weapons and surveillance systems around the world. It sells riot gear tested while putting down Palestinian demonstrations, as well as drones, face-recognition systems, and other forms of surveillance forces. As Loewenstein documents, Israel is not fussy about who it deals with (in this respect, the apartheid state has a lot of company), selling arms to apartheid South Africa in defiance of a United Nations boycott. Current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has very close relations with India’s pogrom-encouraging PM Modi. In

all this, Palestine has functioned as what Loewenstein calls “an invaluable testing-ground on behalf of a global military hegemon serving other militaries.”

One way in which the occupation of Palestine has gone to the world is through telephones. No need to check the references to see if your phone is in there, the Pegasus spyware developed in Israel by the NSO group can apparently snoop on any brand. NSO is described as “the world’s most successful cyber-surveillance company.” NSO’s connection to the occupation is partly in helping get diplomatic cover for the occupation of Palestine, selling cyber-surveillance tools to some African countries in return for votes at the United Nations.

Loewenstein also details the activities of the company Black Cube, started by a former head of Mossad and a group of former Israeli intelligence officials. The

company has become “a mainstay on the global market for private and corporate intelligence,” and has a record of spying on human rights activists and critics of dictatorial governments. They also spied allegedly, on Obama administration officials who supported the sanctions-lifting deal with Iran, and on Romania’s top corruption prosecutor, as well as working for Harvey Weinstein when he was trying to stop stories about his sexual assaults getting out.

Possibly a more dangerous export is ideological. Loewenstein spells out the ways Israeli ideologues involved in the occupation promote ethnonationalism and a fascist vision of the dictatorship of an ethnic/religious majority. A chilling Netanyahu quote opens the concluding chapter: “They [the world] will become more like us than we will become like them.”

Ukraine gets a mention too,

with President Zelensky describing Israel as “the victim” of resistance to its’ occupation, and that his country should be modelled on Israel. This does not bode well for ethnic Russian Ukrainians.

The conclusion the reader draws from *The Palestine Laboratory* is that the occupation will not stay inside the borders of Palestine, and it should be fought internationally for pragmatic as well as altruistic reasons.

Along with this moving story is the story of Loewenstein himself, and of the integrity and independence of mind he has shown, coming from a background in which it would be easy to go through life believing in “the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state.” He says “the daily grind of occupation ... made me ashamed of what was being done in my name as a Jew.”

FJK ✪

## Ban on Nazi symbols raises deeper concerns

**Professor David Slucki of the Australian centre for Jewish Civilisation, Monash University, has welcomed the coming ban on Nazi symbols and trade in Nazi memorabilia, but has described the ban as a “limited” intervention.**

“The bigger concern,” he said, “is the persistence of Nazism in our society, which is not the result of the display of Nazi symbols in public. There is excellent work being done by researchers and activists to identify the causes of this, and the methods through which the far right recruits disaffected members of our society, particularly young men.”

Professor Slucki added that, “Much more work needs to be done in this area. Bans are

not a silver bullet and do not address the root causes. Ultimately, those groups will find new symbols and new ways to circumvent these bans and taboos, as they have done in other countries where Nazi symbols and Holocaust denial are banned.”

One root cause Professor Slucki could have mentioned is the encouragement of neo-Nazism by members of Australia’s bourgeois parliaments. Liberal Party and National Party members have been known to flirt with fascism; think of George Christensen (former National Party MP) speaking at neo-Nazi rallies. We don’t have to go back far in the past to find a government Senator berating ASIO for including the term “right-wing”

when describing extremists who are, quite openly and proudly, right-wing. Pauline Hanson, whose sole political raison d’être is racism, sits in the senate, along with her party’s other senator Malcolm Roberts who, while claiming to not be anti-semitic has cited prominent anti-Semite and Holocaust denier Eustace Mullins.

Professor Slucki might also remember the Australian Prime Minister whose response to racist violence perpetrated by people wearing the Australian flag as a cape was that he would never condemn anyone for wearing the Australian flag.

Slucki goes on to say that, “We must continue to work towards understanding

the root causes of such hatred and violence, rather than focus on band-aid solutions.”

The Communist Party of Australia strongly supports effective anti-racist movements. Racism is often used by capitalists as a dangerous distraction from the problems caused by capitalism. As the CPA program says:

“Our goal is the creation of a society that will resolve the problems inherent in capitalism – war, exploitation, environmental destruction, oppression, poverty, unemployment, ignorance, bigotry, racism and discrimination.” ✪

# Banks behind nature destruction

Nat Pelle

**Australia's big backyard is incredible – home to some of the most diverse plants and animals in the world. But we are destroying it at an incredible rate. In Queensland alone, between 2018-2020, over one million hectares of forest and woodland was bulldozed, mainly for beef production. Behind the deforestation are some of our biggest banks – NAB, Rabobank and CommBank.**

## QUEENSLAND'S DEFORESTATION FRONT

Queensland is the only deforestation front in a developed country anywhere in the world. As home to iconic and endangered species like the koala and the greater glider, the consequences of the destruction are immense. Every hectare destroyed was precious habitat for any number of animals – and it's pushing many of them to the brink of extinction.

The *Banking on Nature Destruction* report reveals that of the million hectares of nature that was destroyed over two years, more than a third of the destroyed area met the strictest international definition of deforestation and also likely had a significant impact on a protected species or ecosystem without an approval, and so was potentially illegal.

Almost 200,000 hectares of the deforestation was habitat for the endangered koala; the species most impacted by this destruction. Greater gliders, northern quolls, ornamental snakes, and Australian painted snipes also saw tens of thousands of hectares of their forest habitat destroyed. Overall, 227 threatened species and ecological communities saw some of their forest habitat destroyed.

## THE ROLE OF BANKS

This deforestation, that contributes to the decline of the population of some of our most-loved species, changes ecosystems, causes erosion, and drives climate change doesn't happen by itself. Behind Queensland's nature destruction are Australia's biggest banks.

As lenders that finance activities across the entire economy – whether it's building houses, mines, wind farms, or cattle farms – banks have a responsibility to ensure their lending is helping to halt and reverse nature destruction in line with global nature goals.

Every dollar traded in the economy relies on nature being in good health. Half of Australia's GDP has a moderate to very high direct dependence on benefits provided by nature, so ending deforestation is not only good for nature, it makes financial sense to do so.

From the investigation, NAB came out as the bank with the most exposure to high-risk deforestation through its loans. Rabobank was the next most exposed, followed by Commonwealth Bank, ANZ, and Suncorp.

## WHAT SHOULD BANKS DO?

By financing businesses involved in deforestation, banks not only fuel the extinction crisis but also expose themselves to substantial risks. But there are plenty of things that can change.

Banks that are truly committed to the global goals for nature need to stop financing deforestation. They need to assess their exposure to nature-related risks, take stock of their nature-related impacts and dependencies, commit to align their lending to global nature goals using science-based targets, including "no deforestation" targets, and implement policies such as conditional lending in order to deliver them.

Despite their pivotal role in financing agriculture and other industries that impact on nature, no Australian bank has committed to stop financing deforestation. Without such a commitment, they cannot claim to have credible net zero policies. Their lack of oversight is driving the extinction crisis and the under-reporting of financed greenhouse gas emissions.

Banks can play a pivotal role in protecting nature, combating climate change, and ending the extinction crisis. The first step is owning up to their role in nature destruction.

Australian Conservation Foundation 



Photo: Quartl – Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0).

## Bedtime story

# Once there was a Chinese spy base ...

Manolo De Los Santos and  
Kate Gonzales

**On 8th June, the US media added to its long storybook of tales to scare people away from normal relations with Cuba. The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) published an article claiming that China has plans to set up a "spy base" in Cuba, to "eavesdrop" on the United States and "identify potential strike targets." WSJ has already published two more pieces since rapidly ramping up its narrative against the Cuban state and fermenting more paranoia as the news spreads across mainstream news outlets in the United States.**

Meanwhile, Cuban officials held a press conference on 8th June to completely deny the allegations. Cuba's Vice Foreign Minister

Carlos de Cossío stated that, "All these are fallacies promoted with the deceitful intention of justifying the unprecedented tightening of the blockade, destabilisation, and aggression against Cuba and of deceiving public opinion in the United States and the world." Even John Kirby, National Security Council spokesman who was the former press secretary for the Pentagon, has denied the WSJ report, calling it "inaccurate."

This is just one new addition to the long legacy of lies that the United States has been spinning in an attempt to further alienate the Cuban people. One just has to remember the "Havana syndrome" that mysteriously affected diplomats in Cuba; it was first blamed on foreign powers as an attack but was later revealed to have no basis. Or maybe the claims about 20,000 Cuban soldiers supposedly based

in Venezuela to maintain the government there, when in reality, the vast majority of Cubans present in Venezuela were medical workers. Or perhaps the idea that Cuban doctors sent across the world are enslaved, when it is simply their understanding that their duty to humanity is to provide health care to those who need it. All of these lies have been told just in the past few years alone.

These falsified stories all swirl into fomenting the atmosphere of paranoia and suspicion that prevents normal US-Cuba relations. In the wake of the Havana syndrome myth, Trump was able to interrupt the path Obama set toward normalisation, setting 243 additional and comprehensive sanctions, and further preventing the island from meeting its basic needs. The United States continues to live out its Cold War fantasies through these lies, at

the cost of the Cuban people's lives and well-being.

Cossío was careful to point out that Cuba would never allow a foreign military base on their island, as it is a signatory of the Declaration of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace. Cuba is also currently sponsoring and hosting peace talks between Colombia and the National Liberation Army (ELN). As of 8th June they have agreed to a cease-fire, ending decades of violence in the country. Cuba already suffers from the illegal US occupation of Guantanamo, to further rub salt in the wound. The United States has its infamous military base there, which is known for the inhumane treatment and torture it deals out to its prisoners. While it accuses China of military expansion, the United States has hundreds of military bases all over the globe.

Cuba has demonstrated that it desires nothing but peace in the region, and normal relations with its neighbour, the United States. But the United States refuses to accept this proposal. Instead, it maintains the most comprehensive sanctions in history against the small island. Instead, it falsely places Cuba on the state sponsors of terrorism list, even though it is in fact a sponsor of peace. Instead, the US government and its media apparatuses choose to fabricate myths and legends, painting Cuba as the evil monster under the bed. It chooses to scare the US people away from the possibility that normal relations and ending the blockade against Cuba could be good for people from both countries.

Globetrotter 

## Sudanese army and Rapid Support Forces extend fragile ceasefire by five days

**The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) agreed to extend a fragile truce by five days on 29th May. The truce, which came into effect on 22nd May, was marked by violations although the intensity of fighting decreased. Over 850 civilians have died and over 3600 have been injured**

**since fighting broke out on 15th April. Nearly 1.4 million have been displaced.**


On 28th May, the US and Saudi Arabia, which had jointly mediated the ceasefire, released a statement highlighting violations by both parties. The statement said that while the SAF violated the prohibition against aerial attacks, the RSF had "continued encroachment in

civilian areas." Among the buildings occupied by the RSF was the office of the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP).

SCP spokesperson Fathi Elfadl told *Peoples Dispatch* that no humanitarian corridor had been set up and areas worst affected by the fighting had not received aid. In fact, the US-Saudi statement said that both SAF and RSF

forces had stolen consignments of humanitarian aid.

Civilians have borne the brunt of the conflict. Prices of bottled water, food, and fuel have gone up between 40 and 60 per cent in conflict-affected areas. The World Food Program (WFP) projects that 18 million people will be left unable to afford basic food by as early as August if the fighting continues.

The fighting in Sudan was the culmination of months of tension between top generals who had staged a coup in October 2021, and severely repressed civilian protesters who were demanding democracy. 

# Can the US and China have “mutual respect”?

Vijay Prashad

On 3rd June 2023, naval vessels from the United States and Canada conducted a joint military exercise in the South China Sea. A Chinese warship overtook a US guided-missile destroyer and sped across its path. The US Indo-Pacific Command released a statement saying that the Chinese ship “executed maneuvers in an unsafe manner.”

A spokesperson from China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Wang Wenbin, responded that the United States “made provocations first and China responded,” and that the “actions taken by the Chinese military are completely justified, lawful, safe, and professional.”

This incident is one of many in these waters, where the United States conducts what it calls Freedom of Navigation (FON) exercises. These FON actions are given legitimacy by Article 87(1)(a) of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea. China is a signatory to the Convention, but the United States has refused to ratify it. US warships use the FON argument without legal rights or any United Nations Security Council authorisation. The US Freedom of Navigation Program was set up in 1979, before the Convention and is separate from it.

Hours after this encounter in the South China Sea, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin spoke at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. The Shangri-La Dialogue, which has taken place annually at the Shangri-La Hotel since 2002, brings together military chiefs from around Asia with guests from countries such as the United States. At a press conference, Austin was asked about the recent incident. He called upon the Chinese government “to reign in that kind of conduct because I think accidents can happen that could cause things to spiral out of control.”

That the incident took place because a US and Canadian military exercise took place adjacent to Chinese territorial waters did not evoke any comment from Austin. He emphasised the role of the United States to ensure that any country can “sail the seas and fly the skies in international space.”

Austin’s pretence of innocence was challenged by his Chinese counterpart, Defense



Image: Territory of American Canada – Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0).

Minister Li Shangfu. “Why did all these incidents happen in areas near China,” Li asked, “not in areas near other countries?” “The best way to prevent this from happening is that military vessels and aircraft not come close to our waters and airspace ... Watch out for your own territorial waters and airspace, then there will not be any problems.” Li contested the idea that the US navy and air force are merely conducting FON exercises. “They are not here for innocent passage,” he said. “They are here for provocation.”

## TIGHTEN THE NET

When Austin was not talking to the press, he was busy in Singapore strengthening US military alliances whose purpose is to tighten the net around China. He held two important meetings, the first a US-Japan-Australia trilateral meeting, and the second a meeting that included their counterpart from the Philippines. After the trilateral meeting, the ministers released a sharp statement that used words (“destabilising” and “coercive”) that raised the temperature against China.

Bringing in the Philippines to this dialogue, the US egged on new military cooperation among Canberra, Manila, and Tokyo. This builds on the Japan-Philippines military agreement signed in Tokyo in February 2023, which has Japan pledging funds

to the Philippines, and the latter allowing the Japanese military to conduct drills in its islands and waters. It also draws on the Australia-Japan military alliance signed in October 2022, which – while it does not mention China – is focused on the “free and open Indo-Pacific,” a US military phrase that is often used in the context of the FON exercises in and near Chinese waters.

Over the course of the past two decades, the United States has built a series of military alliances against China. The earliest of these alliances is the Quad, set up in 2008 and then revived after a renewed interest from India, in November 2017. The four powers in the Quad are Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. In 2018, the United States military renamed its Pacific Command (set up in 1947) Indo-Pacific Command and developed an Indo-Pacific Strategy, whose main focus was on China. One of the reasons to rename the process was to draw India into the structure being built by the United States, emphasising the India-China tensions around the Line of Actual Control.

The document shows how the US has attempted to inflame all conflicts in the region – some small, others large – and put itself forward as the defender of all Asian powers against the “bullying of neighbours.”

Finding solutions to these disagreements is not on the agenda. The emphasis of the Indo-Pacific Strategy is for the US to force China to subordinate itself to a new global alliance against it.

## MUTUAL RESPECT

During the press conference in Singapore, Austin suggested that the Chinese government “should be interested in freedom of navigation as well because without that, I mean, it would affect them.” China is a major commercial power, he said, and “if there are no laws, if there are no rules, things will break down for them very quickly as well.”

China’s Defense Minister Li was very clear that his government was open to a dialogue with the United States, and he worried as well about the “breakdown” of communications between the major powers. However, Li put forward an important precondition for the dialogue. “Mutual respect,” he said, “should be the foundation of our communications.” Up to now, there is little evidence – even less in Singapore despite Austin’s jovial attitude – of respect from the United States for the sovereignty of China. The language from Washington gets more and more acrid, even when it pretends to be sweet.

Globetrotter ✪

## People’s Health Tribunal finds Shell and Total Energy guilty of harming African communities

A panel of environmental and human rights activists acted as judges in a People’s Health Tribunal organized by communities impacted by the operations of extractive corporations Shell and TotalEnergies. Supported by organisations like Medact, We the People, the People’s Health Movement, and #Stop

EACOP, on 20th May, the Tribunal found the corporations guilty of harming the health of people across Africa.

Nnimmo Bassey, Jacqueline Patterson, Kanahus Manuel, and Dimah Mahmoud condemned Shell and Total’s activities, stating that they were “extremely harmful to the livelihoods, health, right to shelter, quality of life, right to live

in dignity, quality of environment, right to live free of discrimination and oppression, right to clean water, and right to self-determination.” This edition of the People’s Health Tribunal was built as activists witnessed extensive greenwashing by the oil and gas industry at COP27 in Egypt last year.

Decades of exploitation of African land have resulted in

devastating consequences, including air pollution, water contamination, deforestation, violence, land grabbing, and forced migration. Omar Elmawi, who provided an overview of TotalEnergies’s impact on Mozambican communities, emphasised that in the current situation, “everyone loses, except Total.” Elmawi said he believed that African countries must take

control of their own resources and development to make sure that justice is restored.

Governments in the Global North, where most extractive corporations have their headquarters, still choose to ignore the destruction caused by these industries. In 2022, Shell made a profit of \$40 billion, while TotalEnergies ended the year with \$36 billion in profits. ✪

## Nicolás Maduro makes historic trip to Brazil for South American Presidents’ Summit

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro participated in a joint press conference on 29th May from the Planalto Palace in Brasília, highlighting the importance of resuming ties. The press conference was held following a bilateral meeting between the heads of state ahead of the South American Presidents’ Summit.

As Lula told media, “This is a historic

moment. After eight years, President Nicolás Maduro is back to visiting Brazil and we have recovered our right to have a foreign policy with the seriousness we have always had, especially with the countries that border Brazil.”

Their meeting took place days after Lula and Maduro appointed ambassadors to each other’s countries on 24th May, and formalised the reestablishment of relations.

According to statements from their

governments, the meeting focused on reactivating trade between the two countries, cooperation on issues regarding the Amazon, advancing regional integration, and issues related to their 2198 km border. At the press conference, Lula highlighted that at its height, the flow of trade between the two nations had reached \$6 billion and it had now dropped to \$2 billion, which he argued “is bad for Venezuela and Brazil.” Lula also said that he is in favour of Venezuela joining BRICS.

Maduro commented on the challenges the country underwent when “Brazil closed all of the doors and windows, despite being neighbouring countries, countries that love each other as people.” He recalled an attempt to invade the Venezuelan embassy in Brasília, which was defended by Brazilian social movements and solidarity groups. “Today, a new chapter of relations between our countries begins,” he said. ✪



Film review by Maria Duarte

# My Imaginary Country

**Acclaimed documentary film-maker Patricio Guzman returns again to his native Chile to explore the driving force of women in the recent Chilean revolution in his new thought-provoking film, *My Imaginary Country*.**

It examines how in October 2019 a 30-peso rise in train fare prices was the catalyst to social protests erupting in the country following years of corruption, inequality and the government's inability to dismantle Pinochet's economic structures and those of his dictatorship.

The film features footage of students jumping ticket barriers en masse, chanting "fare dodging is another way of fighting." When the violence extended to local banks and stores, involving looting and over one and a half million people demonstrating in the streets of Santiago for more democracy, a more dignified life, better education, a better health system, and a new constitution. President Sebastian Pinera declared a state of emergency announcing "we are at war."

Guzman reflects on how the government's use of the military to solve a social conflict was reminiscent of the Pinochet regime.

There are powerful black and white images as well as film footage of protesters being blasted with water cannon and attacked by soldiers and police.

Through on the ground footage, reportage and interviews with a whole host of women from different spheres ranging from medics, journalists, political scientists, to activist leaders, and ordinary mothers and protesters, Guzman shows the crucial role women have played in the democratic movement to demand equality and justice, to rewrite the constitution and implement reforms.

The most empowering sight in the film is that of hundreds of female demonstrators, young and old, all blindfolded, and all singing the protest song "The Rapist is You" written by the Tesis Collective (who are also interviewed in the documentary) which turned into a feminist anthem denouncing patriarchy and violence and abuse against women.



This is a very highly charged and emotional documentary which provides a snapshot of people power and what it can achieve, and it documents the social revolution that Guzman had been waiting to witness since his student days in 1973.

*Morning Star*

*My Imaginary Country* will be premiering at the Melbourne International Film Festival in August this year. 🌟

## WFP expected to cut food aid to Palestine due to lack of funding

**Almost 200,000 Palestinians could be without critical humanitarian food aid starting next month, according to the United Nations World Food Program (WFP). The agency had said earlier this month that almost 60 per cent of Palestinians it was providing food vouchers for will stop receiving them by June, due to an acute funding deficit.**

Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza are suffering from decades of economic decline due to the constraints, barriers, and restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation as well as frequent Israeli raids and attacks. According to the latest WFP statistics, 1.84 million Palestinians, or roughly about 35 per cent of the total population, are currently suffering from food insecurity at various levels.

According to reports, the WFP will be forced to close down its operations in the West Bank and Gaza by August if there is no new funding by then.

The WFP estimates that \$51 million is required to continue its operations in Palestine until the end of this year. It has called for regular, stable funding to continue providing vital food aid to Palestinians in the coming years. The food aid program for Palestine has reportedly already been reduced by 20 per cent for May 2023.

"Desperate times call for desperate measures," said Samer Abdeljaber, WFP representative and country director in Palestine. "We have no option but to stretch the limited resources we have to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable families are met. They will go hungry without food assistance." 🌟

## Child labour common in the US as Washington fails to take action

**Children are our future, and they need to be taken good care of in any society. However, in the United States, child labour is common as the country fails to take real actions to protect its young.**

As World Day Against Child Labour falls on 12th June the United States, the only country in the world that has not ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, should seriously examine its problem of rampant child labour and take action to protect the children.

The United States has seen a 69 per cent increase in children employed in violation of child labour laws since 2018, according to the US Department of Labor. Farming is a sector where child labour runs rampant.

Estimates by the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs

suggested that there are approximately 500,000 child farm workers in the United States. Many of them start working as young as age 8, and 72-hour work weeks – more than 10 hours per day – are not uncommon.

Furthermore, a report by the US Government Accountability Office suggested that 100,000 child farm workers are injured on the job every year and that children account for 20 per cent of farming fatalities.

Child labour is also not uncommon in other industries. For example, a recent federal investigation into Guatemalan children working in the United States in violation of child labour laws has expanded to include meat-packing and produce companies that have allegedly hired underage migrants in at least 11 US states.

As the problem of child labour plagues the country, some

lawmakers are seeking to loosen child labour laws instead of taking much-needed actions to enhance protection of the children.

Lawmakers in several US states are embracing legislation to let children work in more hazardous occupations, for more hours on school nights and in expanded roles, including serving alcohol in bars and restaurants as young as 14, said a report by The Associated Press.

"The consequences are potentially disastrous," Reid Maki, director of the Child Labor Coalition, which advocates against exploitative labour policies, was quoted as saying. "You can't balance a perceived labour shortage on the backs of teen workers."

A total of 10 US states have considered bills to loosen child labour restrictions in the last two years.

*Telesur*

(edited for reasons of space) 🌟



## Global Briefs

**NORWAY:** A new report commissioned by the Norwegian police into a deadly shooting during Oslo's annual LGBT Pride festival last year blasted Norway's domestic security agency, saying it had intelligence an attack was imminent and could have prevented the bloodshed. The report focused on how the police and the Norwegian Police Security Service handled the 25th June 2022 attack in which two people were killed and 20 wounded.

**SENEGAL:** President Macky Sall has ordered an investigation to determine who was responsible for protests by supporters of a political opponent that turned deadly last week but said he was open to consulting with the parties involved. President Sall was making his first remarks about the unrest while speaking at a council of ministers meeting. The opposition says at least 19 were killed.

**ROMANIA:** Thousands of healthcare workers protested in Romania's capital Bucharest to demand higher wages, more staff and improved working conditions. The Health Solidarity Federation, which organised the protest, said it was concerned that a "decline in real wages driven by inflation" would lead to a "decrease in the quality of healthcare" in Romania.

**SOUTH SUDAN:** A local representative says at least 13 people are dead and 21 have been wounded in clashes at a United Nations site in South Sudan for the protection of displaced civilians. The fighting erupted in the Malakal site between members of the Shilluk and Nuer ethnic groups.

**ISRAEL:** Israeli soldiers fired tear gas at scores of protesters who pelted the troops with stones along the border with Lebanon. Protesters tried to break through a fence in the rugged area overlooked by an Israeli military post.

**SENEGAL:** Authorities in the Senegalese capital Dakar have banned protests by supporters of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko. On 1st June Sonko was sentenced to two years in prison for "corrupting" a young woman in 2022. The move sparked violence which has so far claimed the lives of at least 16 people and injured hundreds. The protests were also plans by President Macky Sall to run for an unconstitutional third term in office. The opposition has vowed to hold the banned demonstrations.

**UNITED STATES:** Former president Donald Trump has been indicted on seven charges of mishandling classified documents at his Florida estate. The development makes Trump the first former president in US history to face criminal charges by the federal government that he once oversaw.

**BRITAIN:** Rail union members have accepted a new pay deal at ScotRail. Members of the country's largest rail union will receive a 5 per cent uplift in their basic salary, with the lowest paid receiving up to 8 per cent, alongside other benefits the union argues "added value to the overall pay package." RMT union general secretary Mick Lynch said, "We have managed to negotiate this deal like many others on the railways including in Wales, the English regions and now Scotland."

Find out more about the

# Communist Party of Australia

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email [cpa@cpa.org.au](mailto:cpa@cpa.org.au)

# Half million march against Poland's far-right PiS

Graham Holton

**On 5th June half a million people waving Polish and European Union flags marched through central Warsaw. It was the largest political rally in Poland since the end of the communist period in 1989. The march was a protest against Poland's right-wing populist government, the Law and Justice Party (PiS), and to mark the 34th anniversary of the Solidarity trade union movement, under Lech Wałęsa, which ended communist rule. Wałęsa, a staunch critic of PiS, was at the rally. The protest march was supported by the Civic Platform Party, its leader Donald Tusk, who was prime minister of Poland from 2007 to 2014. Tusk said, "the whole world sees how strong we are and how we are ready to fight for democracy and freedom again, like we did 30, 40 years ago."**

The Civic Platform is head of the Civic Coalition, which was founded in 2018. It holds 106 seats in the Sejm and 37 seats in the Senate. Of Civic Platform supporters, 35 per cent identify with the centre, 28 per cent the left-wing, and 24 per cent are right-wing. It is the second largest party in Poland.

PiS has been in power since 2015. In that time it has eroded Polish democracy, attacked the system of independent judiciary, the LGBTQ+ community, same-sex marriage, and women's reproductive rights. While President Andrzej Duda did sign, on 23rd March 2023, an amendment to the Labour Code to implement EU directives on working conditions, to improve the work-life balance of parents and caregivers, PiS gives little support to European integration and opposes the use of the Euro.

The Law and Justice Party is also staunchly anti-communist. In 2020 Poland's Prosecutor General,

Zbigniew Ziobro, sought to ban the Communist Party of Poland (KPP), which must follow communist ideology and not "totalitarian" rule. The Communist Party of Sweden (SKP) condemned the anti-communist legislative changes, expressing solidarity with the KPP.

PiS claims that the obligations placed on Poland, as an EU member state, undermines its sovereignty, because EU law is the top law. In May the European Union's highest court found that Poland's Justice Reforms of 2019, violate EU law. The Polish Supreme Court lacks independence and impartiality, with the government reviewing judges' decisions and threatening them with fines and suspension. This is against EU law. For such breaches Poland has been fined nearly 1 billion Euros. On 6th June the Polish government rejected the EU's ruling. Ziobro called the EU Court of Justice "corrupt," vowing not to comply.

The opposition against PiS was galvanised by a controversial commission set up to investigate "Russian influence" inside the country, banning from public office anyone who was seen as agents of Russian influence. President Duda said, "transparency in explaining important public and political issues" was of the "utmost importance." The commission is nicknamed "Lex Tusk," as it is widely seen as targeting the opposition leader. The human rights activist, Sylwia Gregorczyk-Abram, said that Poland is "at a crossroads between being an authoritarian and a democratic country."

Brussels and Washington have expressed serious concerns about the PiS Commission. On 29th May, Matthew Miller, the US State Department spokesperson, said the US is concerned that the law could interfere with "free and fair elections," blocking the candidacy of opposition politicians without due process. "We call on the government of Poland to ensure this law does



Lech Wałęsa, June 2014. Photo: Radek Bet – flickr.com (CC BY-NC 2.0).

not preempt voters' ability to vote for candidates of their choice and that it not be invoked or abused in ways that could affect the perceived legitimacy of elections." On 2nd June Duda amended the law, following the criticism.

President Duda praised Ukraine for saving Europe from "the deluge of Russian imperialism." In April 2023, President Zelenskyy met Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, saying Poland will be a key partner in developing future Ukrainian infrastructure. Zelenskyy said that his government would "extend a hearty welcome" to Polish businesses seeking to help Ukraine's post-war rebuilding, which the World Bank has estimated would cost US\$41 billion. President Duda awarded President Zelenskyy the Order of the White Eagle, Poland's highest honour.

Poland has already given much needed assistance to Ukraine,

allowing 1.5 million Ukrainians to live, study and work in the country. According to the Polish Economic Institute, Polish citizens provided US\$1 billion in cash and goods to help Ukrainians in 2022. The country also has sent US\$2.5 billion in arms and equipment, including 300 tanks and four Soviet-era MiG-29 jets, to Ukraine.

The US ambassador, Mark Brzezinski, said at the inauguration of the first permanent US army base in Poland. "It signals to the world that the United States is committed to Poland, and to the NATO alliance. That we are united in the face of Russian aggression." More than 10,000 US soldiers are now stationed in Poland. According to *Deutsche Welle News* the small town of Rzeszow has had up to ten jumbo jets arrive every day in May, to supply armaments to nearby Ukraine. The airport is protected by US anti-aircraft missiles.

Poland faces an election in October 2023, the results of which are complicated by the US government needing Poland as a conduit to supply armaments to Ukraine. The US is also Poland's the second most important source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). In 2022 the American Chamber of Commerce in Warsaw estimated US investments at US\$25 billion.

The *New York Times* says opinion polls, done before the march, indicated that PiS would win the election by a narrow victory, because of its outspoken defence of "traditional" Christian values, increasing welfare payments to needy families, attacking "LGBT ideology," and declaring the EU a threat to Polish sovereignty. The following months will see how popular feelings are changed in Poland, under increasing US political influence. ✪

## Colombia and ELN Guerrillas sign historic ceasefire agreement in Havana

Alejandra Garcia and Bill Hackwell

**9th June 2023 will be remembered as a historic day for Colombia, Cuba, and all of Latin America. After decades of continuous violence and internal conflict, the government of President Gustavo Petro and the National Liberation Army (ELN) agreed to a ceasefire during the closing of the third cycle of peace talks that had been taking place in Havana, Cuba, since early May.**

Colombia is closer to achieving peace than it was at any time during the previous right-wing administration of Ivan Duque. All of Latin America has closely followed this development with high hopes for this third round of talks, which concluded in Havana with the presence of the Colombian leader, Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel, and Commander Antonio García, the ELN's top leader.

Petro arrived in the Cuban capital to accompany the formal closing of the third round of dialogue, which encouraged expectations about the new agreements. The

previous rounds of negotiations took place in Venezuela and Mexico.

"I am going to sign a paper that can mean the non-reversible beginning of an era of peace for this country," Petro said in Bogota in front of a massive rally of supporters, shortly after announcing his trip to Havana.

Why is it a historic day? The government and ELN guerrillas agreed for the first time in the country's history to a bilateral ceasefire for the next six months ahead.

"There will be a national ceasefire with the ELN, and simultaneously we will have scenarios of territorial incidences. This will have a very positive impact on the territories. There will be a pedagogical process and guarantees to reduce the anguish of the Colombian people," the Peace Commissioner, Danilo Rueda, told the local Colombian press.

"Thanks to the meticulous work of the peace delegation, an atmosphere of absolute confidence and security is being generated to face the setbacks," he added.

The Cuban Foreign Ministry published on its Twitter account that the government and guerrilla authorities agreed on a ceasefire, the

participation of society in the peace-building process, and new humanitarian actions.

The fourth cycle of talks will be held in Venezuela, from 14th August to 4th September. On that occasion, the parties will take stock of the fulfillment of what they have agreed. Once again, the eyes of Latin America will be upon these dialogues, as the road to definitive peace began on 9th June.

During the closing of the recent negotiating session, President Petro took the opportunity to show his support to Cuba amid the US government's opportunistic hostilities towards the island just two days ago. The closure of this round of negotiations occurred amid a wave of falsehoods from the United States and transnational corporations around the world, which insisted that Cuba was set to host an alleged Chinese spy base that would target the southern coast of the northern country.

Although the White House and the Pentagon denied the accusations, the media continues to echo this big lie, initially published by the *Wall Street Journal*. The timing fits the US playbook of spreading lies about

countries who don't line up with them at strategic moments.

It should be remembered that earlier negotiations reached a similar conclusion in 2016 in Cuba between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian government. In both cases Cuba played the role of neutral host and guarantor of the talks, but in 2018 Trump used that as the main reason for hypocritically putting Cuba on their list of State Sponsors of Terrorism, which the Biden Administration, with no shame, allows to continue. Think about it. How is it that a country that provides a safe space for peace negotiations be then rewarded by being labelled as a country that sponsors terrorism?

"I told President Biden that putting Cuba on the State Sponsor of Terrorism list was a profound injustice that must be rectified," President Petro said and emphasised his gratitude to Cuba for having historically supported Colombia in its efforts to seek peace. *Resumen Latinoamericano* ✪

# Books: Who profits in a crisis? *The Cost of Living Crisis* (and how to get out of it)

by Costas Lapavitsas, James Meadway & Doug Nicholls

Will Podmore

**In this excellent little book two economists and a recent General Secretary of the UK General Federation of Trade Unions explain very clearly and simply that Britain's current "cost-of-living" crisis is caused by the permanent austerity – poverty – policy of successive governments. It is Thatcherism: all power to private capital.**

MPs and commentators harp on about an imaginary inflationary "wage-price spiral," but since 2010, we have suffered wage stagnation, a "lost decade" almost unprecedented in our history. Inflation was on the rise before anybody went on strike to defend their living standards.

The public supports the current strike actions, knowing full well that the strikers are acting in the public interest. We have seen again and again that cutting back in a recession makes it worse.

In 2022, prices were up by 9.6 per cent, the highest rate of inflation for 40 years. Wages and salaries rose by just 4.3 per cent, which is to say that their real value fell by 5.3 per cent. So, organised workers are, quite rightly, taking strike action to defend their living standards.

Falling real wages mean record profits. The lower our wages, the higher their profits, in the same way that higher energy bills mean their bigger dividends. The problem is the profit system, built on exploitation.

The authors explain: the profits of the 350 biggest companies listed on the London Stock Exchange are 73 per cent higher than they were in 2019. There is a relentless rise in profits when companies take advantage of rising prices in order to boost their profits.

Companies claim profits out of their sales revenue. These profit "mark-ups" have been rising for decades. The biggest and most profitable companies lifted their "mark-ups" from 58 per cent in 2002 to 82 per cent in 2020.

The Bank of England noted last May that "companies reported

passing on the higher costs to consumer prices to a greater extent than normal."

Big business profits from high inflation. This is what keeps prices high. There is no "wage-price spiral." There is a "profits-price spiral."

The market has failed – it is not providing affordable food, energy, homes, transport, or utilities. It is not providing the investment that we need to rebuild our industries.

As the authors observe, from 1997 to 2007, the UK had a worse investment record than Italy, Germany, the US, France, Japan, or South Korea. Britain managed 16 per cent of GDP; their average was 22 per cent.

Privatisation too has pumped public wealth not into building productive capacity but into company directors' bulging wallets.

Weak investment leads to weak productivity growth: these failings started long before Brexit. This supply-side weakness is a key driver of rising inflation.

As the authors note: "The present Tory government as well as the entire political machinery of Westminster have no cure for the country's structural weaknesses."

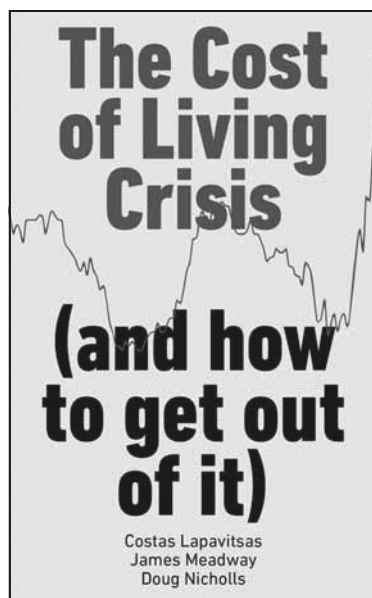
In fact, the state is making matters worse, attacking our trade unions and our right to strike, in order to keep profit levels high and rising.

The authors point out that the NATO sanctions imposed on Russia restricted its oil and gas exports, ratcheting up the prices of those key commodities.

These natural gas price rises have severely affected the peoples of Europe, where electricity supplies and, often, home heating and cooking, depend on natural gas.

Some tell us that we have Brexit to thank for inflation. Spain has a similar inflation rate. Has it too left the EU? Last year, EU member Latvia had 20.3 per cent inflation, and EU member Poland had 12 per cent.

Some say that the Bank of England is to blame for "printing too much money." But since quantitative easing (QE) started in April



2009, inflation has sometimes fallen to very low levels, and on occasion prices even fell.

But the Bank's QE has increased some, very specific, prices, by gifting new money to big financial institutions. This has pushed up the prices of financial and property assets. Rising share prices, and rising property prices and rents, increase the wealth of the already wealthy.

Finally, the authors put forward a three-part plan to tackle inflation. First, we need good union organisation to increase our wages, which means collective bargaining across the economy.

Second, we need to restrain big business profits by imposing effective price controls, in particular to squeeze the profits of major oil and gas suppliers like BP and Shell.

And third, and most radically, we need to rebalance the economy in favour of rebuilding industry, and away from financial services. This requires an industrial policy, including public investment to renew our infrastructure.

The authors insist that we cannot leave the essential elements of modern life – notably water, food, energy, and transport – to market forces. The working class has to take control, take charge.

*Morning Star* ★

**Big business profits from high inflation. This is what keeps prices high. There is no "wage-price spiral." There is a "profits-price spiral."**

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## WEASEL WORDS

### Certainty

Like many other weasel words, certainty is used to ask for things it would be impolite to ask for directly. The gas industry are just the latest to use this trick, after a busy year of price-gouging, lobbying for subsidies, and making the planet less habitable. If there's ever a Rent-Seeker's Guide to Etiquette, it will contain this entry:

Don't say "We want the government to shovel money into our failing and polluting industry."

Do say "Members of the gas industry plead for investment certainty."

### Clarity

Similar to certainty. "Clarity" is used weaselishly when you pretend not to understand something you understand all too well. A case in point is Peter Dutton and the Voice to Parliament. Dutton understands perfectly well what the referendum and the Voice itself will involve, but he's been pretending not to understand. Since saying "I don't understand" something anyone can understand would make Dutton look more than a little thick, he's been asking for clarity instead.

### Divisive

Divisive is one of those transitive adjectives. How you use it depends on whether or not you like the thing being described. Strictly speaking, any thing that people don't totally agree on could be described as "divisive." Some people like Vegemite, some people can't stand it. Vegemite has now divided people into two groups, so it's divisive. If you like someone, they're outspoken. If you think they're a pain in the neck, they're divisive. If you think it's fun to argue about a topic, it's controversial. If you'd rather everyone shut up about it, it's divisive.

### Inappropriate ("to comment")

"It's inappropriate to comment" can mean just that. It can also mean "I've found an excuse for not commenting." If there's a court case anywhere near the thing you don't want to comment on, "inappropriate to comment" gets you off the hook, like a magic spell. Exhibit A as lawyers say, Anthony Albanese, when asked about the high-profile case of Ben Roberts-Smith. Roberts-Smith was found to have murdered unarmed people, bullied other members of the SAS, and his girlfriend's family, and lied in court. You'd think taking a dim view of murder would be a pretty safe bet even for someone as risk-averse as Albanese, but Australian soldiers are treated like demi-gods by a lot of the media and Albo didn't want to take chances. So, asked about the Roberts-Smith case, our careful PM just said it would be "inappropriate to comment" because of possible future legal action, rather than risking the wrath of NewsCorp by disapproving of murder.

### Pre-empt

If there's no court case going on to get you off the hook, you can always say you don't want to pre-empt an inquiry. Just ignore all the people who have opinions on the issue anyway and pretend that your opinions on it would be special. Government ministers love this one, which may explain why they like inquiries into fairly obvious questions that could be answered by spending about ten minutes online.

### Let's wait to see

Sometimes you have to do this. Sometimes it just means you don't want to talk about it.

### Witch hunt

Originally this meant trying to find witches (these days that's not so hard; just type "witches in <your suburb>" and you're laughing. More commonly, it means an unfair trial, inquiry, or proceeding. Weaselishly, it means any inquiry you don't like. Former British PM Boris Johnson has been found to have lied to parliament over the parties he had after making parties illegal for anyone else in the UK. A parliamentary Privileges Committee, having worked out what everybody else in the country knew, has recommended that he resign for this. Consequences for Johnson's lies are always someone else's fault, so naturally, he's calling it a witch hunt.

# US-NATO air war provocation

John Wojcik

**Germany has invited the US and its other NATO allies to start the biggest war provocation in history in its airspace this week. The simulated air war will start there and, like nightmares of the past, spread over much of Europe. The unprecedented war games will involve 10,000 armed participants from 25 countries, with the United States alone sending 2000 Air National Guard members and more than 100 of the 250 jet fighters and bombers that will participate.**

The war makers of the Western world will also send ships to close in on European coastlines in their massive simulation of what they say NATO would have to do if it were necessary to defend against an attack from – or mount an attack on – Russia, China, or anyone else.

It almost defies belief that the US would be leading these unprecedented war games at a time when some world leaders are looking for a way to cool tensions due to the war in Ukraine which was, in major part, itself fuelled by NATO expansionism.

"This is an exercise that would be absolutely impressive to anybody who's watching, and we don't make anybody watch it," US Ambassador to Germany Amy Gutmann said.

She made no secret, however,

that the massive provocation is aimed at Russia. The irony seemed lost on her, however, that the massive show of force was occurring at precisely the time when the US also says it is committed to reducing the danger of nuclear war.

"We will show beyond a shadow of a doubt the ability and the swiftness of our allied force in NATO as a first responder," she told reporters in Berlin. "I would be pretty surprised if any world leader was not taking note of what this shows in terms of the spirit of this alliance, which means the strength of this alliance. And that includes Mr Putin," she said, referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The ambassador made no statement about how the planned war games would or could contribute to peace in Ukraine.

Minutes after the war provocation was announced, US Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth said on television that it's "clear to the world already that the US military is the fiercest and most powerful in the world with a capability of dealing lethal blows that is greater than anyone else's lethality."

She also did not bother to make any guesses about how all this military prowess might result in peace any time soon. Instead, she bragged openly about how it is US weaponry supplied to Ukraine that has allowed the war there to continue as long as it has. She expressed no

concern at all about the continuing death toll among either Ukrainians or Russians.

It is also apparently not enough that NATO, in violation of US assurances at the end of the Cold War, has expanded eastward right up to the borders of Russia and has swallowed up countries that were part of the Soviet Union itself.

Indicative of their intent now to back up US war provocations in Asia and the Pacific region, NATO has invited Japan to participate in the war games in Europe next week. The US sees Japan as important for confronting China in the Indo-Pacific region and views Germany, of course, as an instrument to contain Russia in Europe.

The US is urging both Japan and Germany to disavow their post-war pacifism and step up their military spending. It is not lost on the sensibilities of many that both countries – which were led by fascists during World War II and attacked the Soviet Union – will participate in war games aimed at Russia.

Not to be left out of the brag-gadocio regarding military prowess, the German military, too, has joined the chorus. "We are showing that NATO territory is our red line, that we are prepared to defend every centimetre of this territory," said Lieutenant General Ingo Gerhartz of the German air force.

One of the major concerns and most dangerous pieces in the war games and provocations scheduled for next week is that the warplanes could end up flying over part of Russia itself. The city of Kaliningrad is a small piece of Russian Federation territory wedged between Lithuania and Poland. Warplanes from both of those countries will fly between them, unavoidably coming close to if not actually into Russian airspace over Kaliningrad. The city is a Russian enclave located on the Baltic Sea and a strategically important piece of Russian territory that some observers say NATO would like to claim for itself.

To make matters worse, the US is not even pretending that the provocative war manoeuvres are simply about defence. Lieutenant General Michael A Loh, director of the US Air National Guard, said the exercise "goes beyond deterrence." He declared that the war simulation is "about the readiness of our force. It's about coordination, not



NATO's air policing mission over Poland, March 2023.  
Photo: NATO – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

just within NATO, but with our other allies and partners outside of NATO."

The unanswered question, of course, is what the General means by "readiness," which he says is more than just "deterrence." Then what is the "readiness" for?

Loh said the exercise would be "an opportunity for younger US airmen, many of whom have mainly gotten experience serving in the Middle East, to build relationships with allies in Europe and prepare for a different military scenario. So, this is about now establishing what it means to go against a great power, in a great power competition," he said.

So, US imperialist intervention in the Middle East, we are to presume, was just "small stuff" compared to the coming "great power competition" for which next week's war games will prepare. One would think the US is already waging war against a big power, at least a proxy war against the second-biggest nuclear power in the world.

Is Loh saying we have to get "ready" for waging a direct war that would involve our young servicemen who don't yet have the experience fighting a "great power?" Hearing top military brass talk in this way should ring alarm bells for everyone.

A million dead in the Middle East due to imperialist intervention, are we to presume, was just small stuff? We should shudder to think what Loh and his colleagues see as necessary in the "great power competition" for which next week's war games will allegedly prepare our young people. Many see the US role in Ukraine as the first step in the strategy Loh is talking about, preparing to fight a war with a major power or powers.

NATO, however, has assured the people of Europe that there is no reason to get too excited or worried about any of this. Hundreds of warplanes soaring overhead, crashing through the sound barriers and racing through the skies of their cities, are no cause for concern. If they live on the coast, they don't need to pay any attention to the warships firing in their direction. The only bother civilians should encounter, according to NATO, will be disruptions in civilian air flights.

None of us, apparently, have to even give thought to the possibility that our children may not have a planet on which to live. We have the assurances of the people who say they run the most lethal military in the world that everything will be just fine.

People's World ✪

## NO TO NUCLEAR SUBMARINES

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