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Unite to save the planet

Anna Pha

"If nothing changes, we are heading towards a 2.8 degree temperature rise – towards a dangerous and unstable world," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned in his opening speech to the Climate Ambition Summit in New York on 20th September.

"Our focus here is on climate solutions – and our task is urgent. Humanity has opened the gates of hell. Horrendous heat is having horrendous effects. Distraught farmers watching crops carried away by floods, sweltering temperatures spawning disease, and thousands fleeing in fear as historic fires rage. Climate action is dwarfed by the scale of the challenge," Guterres said.

"We must make up time lost to foot-dragging, arm-twisting and the naked greed of entrenched interests raking in billions from fossil fuels."

The Summit, called by the Secretary-General, was held against the backdrop of the worsening climate crisis with the aim of showcasing 'first mover and doer' leaders from government, industry and other organisations. Invitations to speak at the opening session were restricted to those who came with **credible actions, policies and plans – and not just pledges** – to accelerate the decarbonisation of the global economy and deliver climate justice.

Tellingly, Australia was not invited to speak at the first session!

It was an opportunity for governments to show the progress made and announce new commitments on climate action. While a number of countries did bring forward their commitments to reduce emissions, the outcome still fell far short of what is required to meet the 1.5°C limit.

The summit was preceded by a huge march in the streets of New York, where thousands gathered calling for an end to fossil fuels.

OBLIGATIONS NOT MET

Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa, Prime Minister of Samoa and chair of the Alliance of Small Island States, noted that inhabitants of Pacific Island nations like Tuvalu and Kiribati are already being forced to relocate due to rising sea levels.

"I stand here to ensure that all people of small island developing states know that their voices are being heard on the world stage," she said. "And we will not stop fighting for their right to remain on the lands in which the legacies of their ancestors are rooted. The lands we have every obligation to protect."

Kausea Natano, Prime Minister of Tuvalu, a Pacific island nation at acute risk from sea level rise, called for a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty. "The longer we remain addicted to fossil fuels, the longer we commit ourselves to mutual decline," he said.

Lidy Nacpil, coordinator of the Asian Peoples' Movement on Debt and Development, said wealthy governments are nowhere near close to doing enough for the developing world. "We, the people of the Global South, are not asking for assistance," she told the Summit. "Climate finance is an obligation and part of reparations for historical and continuing harms and injustices."

In 2009, developed countries pledged to contribute US$100 billion in annual climate financing for vulnerable nations starting from 2020. They have not met this commitment.

Marina Silva, Brazil's environment minister pledged to get more aggressive on the country's emissions targets and reaffirmed plans to halt deforestation in the Amazon by 2030.

"No country should have to pick between fighting global warming or fighting poverty or hunger," she said. "This is a false dilemma."

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

AUSTRALIA

Climate Analytics Director Bill Hare, who attended the summit, said, "Australia has told a good story about its policies, but they don't stack up, emissions are increasing. And it's promoting new coal and gas developments, and so on.

"That's a common storyline that I can see between the countries that spoke at the Secretary-General's climate ambition summit and those that wanted to but were not invited."

"In a way, the Australian climate policy system is more based around announcements than real, regulatory action, driving things forward," he said.

Australia is the largest emitter per capita in the Asia-Pacific region.

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"The Australian climate policy system is more based around announcements than real action."

Guardian

Issue 2072 2nd October 2023

What's housing for?

The Victorian Labor government has announced a big housing plan. Around ten thousand people will be moved from their homes – with no consultation, and very little notice, so that public housing can be demolished and a mix of 'social and affordable' housing can be built under 'public private partnerships.' If all goes as planned, the new buildings will house many more people than the towers do now, but only ten per cent of the new build would be 'social.' It's a good time to ask the question. What's housing for?

This might sound like a silly question. Housing is for people to live in. Everyone needs some kind of housing. It's essential. It's a human right.

Not so fast. In Australia, under capitalism, housing is for making money. Housing is for storing capital, and – thanks to a variety of governments – for avoiding taxes. This has gone so far that using property as a way of dodging tax has come to be seen as though *that* were a human right. Labor backed off from its timid proposals to curb lurks like negative gearing.

There are contradictions hiding in plain sight when Australians talk about housing. One is that governments feel they have to simultaneously keep house prices high, and keep houses affordable for first home buyers. This has been about as successful as driving with one foot on the accelerator and one on the brake.

In assessing the Victorian Government's housing plan, some commentators just go along with the logic of ex-Premier Daniel Andrews' introduction: 'build more homes, and they'll be more affordable.' This is deceptively simple. If making more homes available were all it took, the government would be doing something about 'land-banking,' whereby developers lock up land for years until they think they can extract maximum profit from it. They'd be requisitioning unoccupied homes. Doing those things would mean tackling capital, which always comes ahead of the needs of the working class in this country.

Making more homes can only ever be part of the solution. What this country needs is more public housing. Not 'social,' not 'affordable,' but public.

If you're reading this and wondering what's wrong with nice words like 'social' and 'affordable,' here it is in a nutshell. Public housing is run by the government for the purpose of providing homes for people. Rents are planned according to income levels so that nobody is in housing stress (defined as paying 30 per cent or more of one's income towards rent or mortgage). 'Social' and 'affordable' housing bows to the neoliberal idea that governments must not run things. Some 'affordable' housing sets rent at just under housing stress levels, effectively keeping poor people poor.

Public housing as it is run at the moment, is a way of parking disadvantage. It's significant that our Prime Minister likes to talk about how he grew up in public housing as a way of showing that he knows what it's like to be poor. If we ran public housing the way it should be run – for the people – "he grew up in public housing" would be as remarkable as "he grew up in a house."

Public housing as it is run now reinforces class and racial division. During the Covid Pandemic lockdown, the supposedly enlightened Victorian government arbitrarily locked up public tenants in their towers in a way it would never ever treat middle class Victorians. Mixed housing that replaced public housing has led to public tenants separated from private amenities in the same building by a 1.8 metre fence, really putting the disadvantage in their faces.

The Communist Party of Australia works for real public housing, planned with people's needs in mind, run for people, not to make developers richer, and not to keep working people in their place. Public housing for the people!

74th anniversary of the People's Republic of China

To the People of China
and its leadership the Communist Party of China

The Communist Party of Australia sends warm greetings to the people of China and its leadership the Communist Party of China on the 74th anniversary of the foundation of People's Republic of China.

The PRC and its people celebrate the tremendous achievements of the last 74 years and honour all those who contributed to the milestone.

It is a fact that under the leadership of the Communist Party of China the building of a socialist society has enriched the lives of millions of Chinese people.

The People's Republic of China has also become a beacon of hope and progress for the rest of the world as capitalism and imperialism have wrought misery and destruction upon the world's population.

It is only by the efforts of building socialism that we can achieve an end to poverty, hunger, exploitation, war, and environmental destruction. The PRC's proposals and initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative offer much in the way of human and shared development in times of a decaying unipolar world.

The CPA continues to campaign against AUKUS and the prospects of war in our region. Our Party welcomes the efforts to renew the friendly and mutual beneficial relations between the governments of Australia and China.

We wish the People's Republic of China every success in achieving its goals set out under the leadership of president Xi Jinping. Towards prosperity and peace!

Long live the 74th anniversary of the People's Republic of China!

In friendship and solidarity,

Vinnie Molina – President
Communist Party of Australia
1st October 2023

Unite to save the planet

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Guterres called on developed countries to reach net zero as close as possible to 2040, and emerging economies as close as possible to 2050 in line with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities under the Acceleration Agenda. The Acceleration Agenda brings forward deadlines for achieving just transition goals.

They also include:

- Credible plans to exit coal by 2030 for OECD countries and 2040 for the rest of the world;
- Ending fossil fuel subsidies – which the IMF estimates reached an incredible US$7 trillion in 2022;
- Setting ambitious renewable energy goals in line with the 1.5 degree limit.

The Acceleration Agenda also calls for climate justice. "Many of the poorest nations have every right to be angry," Guterres said. "Angry that they are suffering most from a climate crisis they did nothing to create."

"Angry that promised finance has not materialised."

"And angry that their borrowing costs are sky-high."

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, globally three billion people are already highly vulnerable to climate change.

"The small steps countries offered are welcome, but they're like trying to put out an inferno with a leaking hose. There is simply a huge mismatch between the depth of actions governments and businesses are taking and the transformative shifts that are needed to address the climate crisis," David Waskow, Director, International Climate Initiative, World Resources Institute said.

CLASS STRUGGLE

The struggle for a just transition to renewables is a class struggle. At the heart of the climate crisis is more than 100 years of capitalist expansion based on the maximisation of profits through the exploitation of labour and extraction of natural resources regardless of the impact on humanity and the environment. The military industrial complex, an integral part of the capitalist system, is the single largest creator of greenhouse gases.

Capitalism caused the crisis facing humanity and the planet. Capitalism is incapable of solving the crisis and time is fast running out.

Australia must put energy resources into public ownership and management with a nationwide plan for future development.

The government must halt and reverse the expansion of fossil fuel production and development of a weapons industry. It is no justification to say projects must be approved because of the law as Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek says. Change the law!

Australia's economy requires a rapid restructuring to end its heavy reliance on the export of fossil fuels. Instead, switch to the development of a manufacturing sector in such areas as the expansion of renewables, manufacture of pharmaceuticals, development of innovative products based on recycling of waste, vehicle production, and advanced technologies.

The government must legislate strict limits for pollution and impose hard emissions caps to reduce them to zero by 2040, along with heavy penalties for corporations that break the law, including jail time for executives.

The AUKUS agreement and nuclear submarines must be cancelled, and in their place a merchant fleet built in Australia strengthening Australia's self-reliance and independence.

Public transport should be free and expanded to serve outlying suburbs and rural and regional areas.

State and federal governments could build one million units of publicly controlled and environmentally sustainable housing, and upgrade existing public housing to become environmentally sound.

Saving the environment and preventing war are interconnected. They are part of the same class struggle which can only be won by united, militant action on the ground. Trade unions, environmentalists, peace activists, Indigenous Australians, and other progressives united *can* save humanity and the planet.

The Summit is an important lead-up to COP28 in Dubai later this year where countries will determine how further to keep the 1.5°C goal alive and address climate impacts. Australia still has time to show leadership with concrete actions. ✪

On 14th October vote YES!

Vinnie Molina

On 14th October the Australian electorate will decide whether to amend the Constitution for recognition of Indigenous Australians and a Voice to Parliament for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Postal ballots are now open, and voting is compulsory. Many young people have registered to vote for the first time. That gives me hope that the vote of young people in this historical event could carry the day for the YES vote and Indigenous Australians.

It has been sad to see in the last few weeks the lies, misinformation, disinformation, and propagation of fear by some in the No campaign in order to gain support for their backward position in the upcoming referendum.

Many of the comments and actions show the type of society we live in. Some of those comments are full of hate, racism, and ignorance. In particular, attacks on social media have shown strong anti-communist feelings being used as propaganda to divide and attack the YES campaign.

How will history judge us? Those voting No in the referendum will be voting for the status quo. The day after the referendum, if the Voice is defeated, Indigenous people will remain in the current situation of dispossession, substandard and overcrowded housing, and lack of basic services that other Australians enjoy. It will be a setback in the long struggle for change, but that struggle will continue.

Those voting YES in the referendum will be voting for an opportunity to change the status quo, and on the day after the referendum, if successful, indigenous people will continue the struggle for a voice that will develop into a vehicle to improve their current situation.

The CPA made a historical decision to support and campaign for a YES vote back in January 2023. We knew the campaign would be hard and difficult. It was not helped by the announcement of the referendum coming before Invasion Day – a day of pain for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Many people, ourselves included, felt the pain of the failed past and the lack of trust that a voice might deliver. Analysing the situation, we looked at the day after a possible NO victory and decided the status quo was a no go that could not be allowed to continue. We know the voice will not deliver all the change needed but we see it as a space opening with potential for change in the future.

With this as our focus, we took up the task of convincing our ranks of the just decision made by the Central Committee. We believe that to a great extent Party members fully endorsed and actively campaigned for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's Voice to Parliament.

The Party prepared a number of materials that included thousands of leaflets, banners and badges in support of the YES campaign. Comrades across the country made a visible contribution for the YES vote.

It is not a surprise that leaders of the No campaign used the Communist Party of Australia on social media and their news channels to attack and try to divide the YES campaign.

The reality is that communists are people who live and share the same difficulties as other working-class people who stand in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Communists work, study, and live on stolen lands and therefore campaign for that recognition and want to see justice for Indigenous people and the closing of the gap.

This is a good opportunity to remind readers that there are only two camps or choices on 14th October: YES or NO. An informal vote is a vote for the status quo. Vote YES for a potentially better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. If you are still in the camp of those who don't know, to get informed visit: **cpa.org.au/yes-to-the-voice-to-parliament** or visit the YES Campaign website at **www.yes23.com.au**

In conclusion I would like to ask readers to consider that injustice is felt and as Che Guevara once said "if you tremble with indignation at every injustice then, you are comrade of mine." ✪

The question

"A Proposed Law: to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. Do you approve this proposed alteration?"

Closing Loopholes Bill

A missed opportunity

Anna Pha

Although this bill sets out to close some loopholes in existing legislation, it is a missed opportunity for more extensive reforms that would give trade unions greater powers to protect the interests of workers and for workers to have guaranteed rights.

The bill offers the possibility for gig workers with low bargaining power or their union to apply to the Fair Work Commission (FWC) for minimum standards. How many gig workers will be in a position to do that? It fails to set minimum standards for gig workers. It fails to tackle gig work as a business model, instead setting it in concrete.

The transition from casual to permanent provisions apply to work of an ongoing nature which enables a worker after six months (in a small business 12 months) to apply for part-time or full-time work. The bill does not prevent an employer ending a worker's employment within the six-month period and rehiring another worker. It could even result in "casuals" having less regular work to get around the bill's provisions.

Many of the other provisions require employees or unions making an application to the FWC. They are not automatic and often in cases where workers have the least bargaining power.

The labour hire provisions do not apply when workers supplied by a labour hire company are "self-employed" with an Australian Business Number. Yet these are some of the most highly exploited workers. The bill does not permit unions negotiating an agreement with a host employer to cover all workers on a site doing the same job. This is a big issue on construction sites and in other industries.

Between its election in 2013 and its defeat in 2022, 26 of the Coalition's 27 appointments to the FWC were from an employer background, breaking a long-held convention of equal appointments from trade union and employer backgrounds.

At present the right to take or threaten any form of industrial action is restricted to negotiations around a new enterprise agreement, and it involves a protracted process of ballots and giving the employer advance notice. This has kneecapped unions and workers fearful of facing hefty fines. When unions do take industrial action, employers have the power to lock them out. This right does not exist in most other industrialised nations.

The Communist Party of Australia calls for the repeal of the Fair Work Act and in its place a new Act which puts the interests of workers first with strong guarantees of workers' and trade union rights with hefty penalties for employers who breach these. These rights include:

- Unfettered right to strike
- Unfettered right of entry to workplaces for trade union officials to represent workers, to organise the workforce, and recruit new members
- Right of trade union officials to inspect employment records
- Paid time for trade union meetings
- Abolition of lockouts by employers
- Repeal of secondary boycott provisions
- Industry-wide bargaining and agreements
- Casual employment should not be a business model
- Labour hire restricted to top-up needs, not a business model
- Union agreements across a workplace covering all workers, regardless of form of employment
- Labour shortages to be overcome by skills training of Australian workers as the priority
- Guest workers to be guaranteed established Australian rates of pay and conditions
- The reference of a dispute to the Commission to be a last resort
- The FWC to have powers of conciliation but not arbitration except by agreement
- Appointments to FWC comprising an equal number of trade union and employer representatives.

Many of these reforms, in the years prior to neoliberalism, were a reality. It's time to make them a reality again.

For more on the Closing Loopholes Bill, see *Guardian* #2070. ✪

OP-Ed: Daniel Andrews

FK

On 26th September Daniel Andrews resigned as Premier of Victoria and from the Victorian Parliament. He has been Premier for nine years.

On the credit side, Andrews has consistently shown the Murdoch press to be a paper tiger, ignoring numerous, often racist, scare campaigns, and winning huge majorities in the face of unrelenting demonisation from News Corp. He has proved that getting public works done, and progressive measures for renters, workers, and minorities are no obstacle to staying in office. He criminalised wage theft, and introduced industrial manslaughter laws. Starting a Treaty process was a good move.

On the debit side, his government showed indifference to Indigenous people, by bulldozing the Djab Wurrung birthing trees, and quickly changing bail laws in reaction to news items. The arbitrary incarceration of public tenants in housing blocks during Covid is a black mark on his record, for which he never apologised.

Many obituaries will be written for his political career, including, perhaps, in this paper. For now, let's note that Daniel Andrews' premiership shows that it's possible to ignore NewsCorp and get concrete and positive things done. ✪

Sydney Vigil

STOP USA BLOCKADE ON CUBA

Join us in Sydney to demand that the USA stops the blockade on Cuba with the right to self determination. Also stop Venezuela & Gaza blockades.

4:15 pm Tuesday 17th October – 50 Miller Street North Sydney

Shame, Inghams, shame!
Workers fight back

Photo: Supplied by the United Workers Union

Vinnie Molina

Around 1000 workers at Inghams chickens have been on strike, demanding better wages and conditions. Their demand for a 6 per cent pay increase was met with resistance by the employer who offered a 3.5 per cent rise, which is less than the cost of living. Instead in a show of arrogance Inghams' CEO Andrew Reeves gave himself a 9 per cent increase on top of his $1.1 million annual salary. This was a slap in the face of the workforce; mainly low paid female migrant workers who earn about $25 per hour. Their demand amounts to $1.50 per hour. Shame Inghams Shame!

The big lesson in this dispute is that workers are prepared to fight back. Members of both unions, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) and the United Workers Union (UWU) have built their unions in their workplace; they joined in solidarity at the picket line after voting to take protected industrial action.

The feeling at the picket line which started at midnight on Thursday night, 21st September was of militancy. The Filipino, East Timorese, Burmese, African and Afghani striking workers danced reggaeton and chanted outside their workplace in Perth, WA.

Workers are confident that their will to stay out until their demands are met will deliver a victory. On Monday 25th September, an in-principle agreement was reached in South Australia which was welcomed by striking workers in WA.

The pressure is on. The thousands of chickens that get slaughtered every week (up to 200 thousand in WA alone, and double that amount in SA) are supplied to places like KFC. The AFL Grand Final is fast approaching this weekend and the demand for several thousand buckets of KFC for the event means workers must be back at work.

Despite a police presence at the picket line the striking workers were able to speak to their coworkers who presented for work, urging them to join the picket line. Many of them joined the picketers at the 4 am early shift. The unions involved have done a fantastic job by organising a good delegate structure and building solidarity on and off the job.

At the time of writing this report, the workers and their unions have forced Inghams back to the bargaining table where a proposal that meets the workers' demands was put to the workers to consider. They have won the dispute, bravo!

Workers who stick together, win together. Congratulations!

Cruise control

Workers employed by North Queensland maritime transport company Cruise Whitsundays, a subsidiary of multinational cruising company Hornblower, have been on strike since 20th September, after being offered a pocket change pay rise by their multinational employers. Workers will also refuse to charge passengers for alcohol or clean the vessels.

The Maritime Union of Australia is suggesting anyone with Cruise Whitsunday bookings check the company's cancellation policy if their plans will be affected by the stoppages, which have been caused by management's reckless refusal to offer a reasonable deal to their workforce.

The company's HR representatives met with MUA officials and delegates, but workers left the meeting in bewilderment at a pay offer from the company that amounted to between $1 and $1.50 per hour for a small percentage of staff.

"The company's offer is a completely unacceptable, unfair and indefensible position, so we have no choice but to take further industrial action," said the MUA Queensland Branch Secretary, Jason Miners.

"Cruise Whitsunday don't have a business without their workforce. These hard working, loyal employees took a pay freeze during COVID, but with summer coming early and the post-COVID tourism boom, now it's the workers' turn to receive some recognition and respect for the contribution they've all made for many years to this profitable company," Miners added.

At the commencement of negotiations, the union and its members sought pay parity with other operators doing the same or similar runs and charters, but Cruise Whitsundays have refused to match the pay on offer from other companies.

"If you take the management position at face value, this company is so poorly run and the upper management so overpaid that if the frontline workers got a decent wage outcome the business would go under," said Miners.

"This is a profitable company being fattened up for market by a global shipping outfit that doesn't want to give its Australian workforce a fair-go."

Miners said that while the company's reputation was built on the hard work of a workforce that delivers a once-in-a-lifetime experience in the most beautiful part of the world, the crews are being paid barely more than the legal minimum wages while the company generates exorbitant profits greater than any of their five other businesses combined.

At the commencement of negotiations, Cruise Whitsundays put forward a draft agreement that included a 3 per cent wage increase for 2023, below inflation, and a 0 per cent wage increase for 2024. This offensive and ridiculous offer was rejected by 87.4 per cent of Cruise Whitsunday employees at a recent ballot.

The work stoppages are complemented by staff wearing campaign t-shirts aboard the vessels as well as work bans on charging passengers for alcohol or cleaning company vessels.

In addition to the wage dispute brought on by Cruise Whitsunday's refusal to offer a decent pay rise, the MUA is also in the process of lodging proceedings for breaches of the current employment agreement and crew underpayments that amount to multiple hundreds of thousands of dollars.

MUA

Dingo bytes

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) says it is deeply concerned by reports regarding the conduct of the Secretary of the Home Affairs Department, Mike Pezzullo, labelling his position as untenable. Australian Public Service (APS) employees, including in Home Affairs, face potential disciplinary action for sharing political content on social media, yet one of the most senior public servants in the country has been apparently sharing his political wish list and hit list with a well-known political operative.

The union says the reports also raise questions regarding the former Coalition government's failed attempt to privatise Australia's visa system. The CPSU fought against the Morrison government's attempt to sell off the system when it was first proposed in the 2016-2017 Budget, until it was dropped in 2020.

Liberal Party heavy Scott Briggs led the bid, and was part of the consortium who were the front runners vying for the highly lucrative contract – Australian Visa Processing Pty Ltd. Had the privatisation been successful, it would have handed our visa system over to private, for-profit businesses, and put over 2000 Home Affairs jobs on the chopping block. Melissa Donnelly, CPSU National Secretary, pointed out that APS values require all APS employees to be impartial and apolitical. After the revelations about the Secretary of Home Affairs, Mike Pezzullo, it is hard to see how those values have been upheld. "APS employees can face disciplinary action for sharing political content on social media, so it is astounding to learn that one of our country's most senior public servants has been sharing a political hit-list with a known Liberal Party operative. Mike Pezzullo's position as Secretary of the Department of Home Affairs is clearly untenable. These revelations also raise questions regarding the former Coalition Government's failed attempt to privatise Australia's visa system. Scott Briggs was heavily involved, leading the bid for the $1 billion visa processing tender." Donnelly said.

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: Price gougers. Australian households are experiencing a significant decline in living standards as prices rise. Recent surveys have demonstrated that large numbers of people are going without basic necessities due to cost pressures. At the same time, corporate profits and executive bonuses are skyrocketing. Recent OECD research has demonstrated that in Australia, and comparable economies, corporate profits have been a major driver of inflation. The prices of goods and services are being raised not to match increased costs of production, but to inflate profit rates. To assess the causes, scale, and full effects of this price gouging and the adverse effects it is having on working people, the Australian Council of Trade Unions has commissioned renowned expert Professor Allan Fels AO to convene and chair an Inquiry into Price Gouging and Unfair Pricing Practices to examine the cause and effects of price gouging on the Australian people. The Inquiry will hold hearings across Australia. Everyone affected by price gouging is asked to make a submission about their story and what they see happening. Submissions will be also invited from academics, not-for-profit organisations, and think-tanks. The Inquiry's report will be received by the ACTU and made available to policy makers, support providers, and the Australian public.

Non-mainstream news on Sunday mornings at 9:15.

Available via podcast. **3CR.org.au**.

CPA members rally against transphobia in Brisbane

Che Janz

Several members of the Sunshine Coast Branch travelled to Brisbane on 14th September, to meet with a few non-member friends of the party at this rally. It was a protest against *7 News* falling into the same conservative pandering mediascape as the worst of the Murdoch Media. *7 News* has parroted the same sadly effective scare campaigns accusing the Trans community of grooming children and claiming that HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy) is irreversible and lethal. The event was arranged by Meanjin People's Pride (MPP) a self-described "grassroots queer protest group" who have been following *7 News* since it aired its disreputable story. MPP created an infographic refuting and debunking all of the *7 News* lies.

The crowd started small but increased rapidly. I noticed the colourful outfits around me, including one of the organisers wearing a dress decorated with hammer and sickles symbols with the Trans flag inside them. I complimented the dress and they reciprocated by admiring my iconic patch jacket. Ideologically the protest was a mix of Marxist-Leninists (including CPA members/fellow travellers), Ultra Leftists, Anarchists, and Social Democrats. All attendees united as a collective who agreed with the principle of queer and trans-liberation as a strong common goal.

Speakers ranged across age groups and professions, from those who began their transition a few weeks earlier to people who have been on the journey for years. I noticed a surprising number of educators. One of the speakers commented on how they are happy to be in the safe space for trans and queer students, as growing up they never had one.

One organiser said, "The old white man patriarchy controlling media knows it is dying, and is just attacking us [the trans community] as a last cling to relevancy for a few more years". Our own national embarrassment Rupert Murdoch is the prime example, but the grip on power by these wealthy WASP media oligarchs is loosening. Transgender existence is a convenient moral topic, and they will undoubtedly concentrate on a new target once the attention dies down.

After the protest was wrapped up the organisers urged people to make formal complaints to *7 News* and take further actions in solidarity.

One rally member said, Caleb, "I really appreciated speakers highlighting and analysing the intersection between both the autistic community and queer Community."

Sienna, a non-party member but very close friend, said, "Initially I was kind of worried it'd be a poor rally, however as the event snowballed it became two hours of trans people speaking on their experiences, and outright proving that falsity of the *7 news* 'spotlight.' It really was awe inspiring to see so many trans people get up and confidently tell their story, and it felt good to finally say that discovering my 'transness' was the first time I'd ever been certain about anything."

On the ride back to the Sunshine Coast I pondered the wider implications of the day, how as a self-described LGBTQ+ ally I was so happy and proud to see the Trans community gather united and without fear for the upward fight for their right to existence, with groups like Meanjin People's Pride to represent them. I was also slightly melancholy that the Trans community in the Sunshine Coast seemingly do not have the same resources or groups to represent them and demand their human rights. I am still determined and hopeful that in some way the CPA can support the community and Transgender Liberation, not only here but, across Australia. ✪

So much for the 'Canberra Voice'!

AJ Carruthers

The NSW vote is shaping up to be crucial for the Voice referendum, so members of the Canberra Branch decided to tour peripheral towns near Canberra, leafletting in Queanbeyan, Murrumbateman, Yass, and even as far as Brogo and Narooma.

The feeling in a lot of towns is positive, but for those who do feel friendly towards Yes, an old problem is coming back to bite: lack of local or alternative media in the regions.

Still, in Narooma for instance, streets are emblazoned with big support for Yes. Some pubs are going full on with the official Yes campaign. Given how badly the South Coast was treated by the Liberal government during the bushfires, progressivism is remarkably strong there. It's of course true that the key will be the working classes of the big cities, and so far the migrant vote is looking good.

One Branch member, doing phone banking, noted that migrants were overwhelmingly warming towards Yes, some drawing connections between migrant and Indigenous experience. This remains a fight on multiple fronts, in regions and the cities; the Communist Party support for the Voice is an important one, an historical one. We recall the great Faith Bandler, leader in the 1967 referendum, also a communist: for Bandler, unequal pay and land rights, human rights, and constitutional rights, were comparable issues. For now, Faith gives us hope. ✪

GREEN NOTES

Anna Pha

Coalition leader Peter Dutton is calling for small modular (nuclear) reactors (SMRs) to replace coal-fired power stations as they are closed. SMRs are a class of nuclear fission reactors which are smaller than standard ones, and transportable. This is yet another diversion from phasing out fossil fuels. First it was the "gas-led transition," now it is the nuclear-led transition. The former is hogwash, the latter is dangerous. The Coalition's agenda is driven by the Minerals Council of Australia (MCA) and the Australian Petroleum Production & Exploration Association – two powerful resources lobby groups.

Under the proposal, 71 SMRs would replace the output of coal-fired power stations. In pure economic terms the idea does not stand up. According to Peter Farley, a fellow of the Australian Institution of Engineers, renewable power plus backup power (e.g. pumped hydro or battery storage) is possible for one-third of the cost of nuclear power, in one-third of the time. The Department of Energy estimates SMRs that it would cost $387 billion – even more than the estimated $368 billion commitment for nuclear submarines – and with a similar delivery time in the 2040s or later. Yet the science, as reported by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) dictates that urgent action is required before the end of this decade.

SMRs are by no means a proven technology commercially, with only two in operation, a third one licenced to take off and around 80 on the drawing board. They present a range of dangers.

Neutron leakage rates are estimated to be higher for SMRs than for larger nuclear reactors. Some designs use water as a coolant, others use liquid metal coolants which also becomes radioactive. Another potential issue is that a lower fraction of the fuel is consumed, also increasing waste volumes.

The question of how and where to store nuclear waste long term has not been resolved. There are literally thousands of tons of solid fuel from nuclear power plants and millions of litres of radioactive waste from weapons production stored in temporary containers. Some have already begun leaking. It would be madness to expand the nuclear industry posing greater risks to health and the environment. The Fukushima power plant and release of radioactive water into the ocean should be warning to all. So far in Australia a *terra nullius* approach has been taken when governments discuss possible sites for disposal of nuclear waste.

SMRs pose particular security risks. Being much smaller and in far larger numbers they are likely to be spread more widely and be more difficult to protect from terrorist attacks or sabotage.

Nuclear power was banned by legislation in Australia in 1998. Queensland LNP Senator Matt Canavan has a private member's bill to scrap that ban which was referred to a Senate committee. The committee rejected lifting the ban, pointing out that there was not enough time to develop nuclear power in Australia to reach the national target by 2030. It said it would take 10-15 years to have an operational plant in Australia.

Labor has opposed the idea saying it would be too costly. There is little public support for nuclear power plants of any type. Labor in opposing the idea on the grounds of cost, is avoiding the question of nuclear itself – after all it has signed up for nuclear submarines. Labor continues to ignore warnings from the IPCC, the International Energy Agency, and scientists not to open new coal or gas projects or expand existing ones. The Coalition would use nuclear to delay transitioning from fossil fuels.

West Australia: Public Sector wages update

Richard Titelius
Delegate CPSU/CSA

In the build-up to the Western Australian government releasing its next wages policy before the end of the year, the State Treasury offered a briefing to all public sector unions.

Public sector unions each brought their officials and selected delegates. The principal unions were also given the opportunity to ask ten questions at the conclusion of the briefing.

The first to present was the Assistant Under-Treasurer Michael Court who spoke about the review of wages policy having to take place in the context of high interest rates and slower export growth. The Under Treasurer, Michael Barnes said that wages growth would be a risk which could affect the fiscal position of the government and the Treasury would be working closely with Labour Relations and Industrial Relations Minister Bill Johnston, in determining the next wages policy.

Barnes noted that a strong labour market had supported wages growth in the private sector of 4 per cent, but that the unemployment rate had begun to rise. Barnes claimed that WA had one of the highest public sector wage levels in the country.

When Barnes said that the $3000 sign-on incentive for the last wage increase was considered a bonus, he received vocal rebukes from many in the audience! Barnes acknowledged that while electricity rates were lower in WA, housing and rental costs had risen and rental vacancy rates were less than 1 per cent.

The Treasurer and Deputy Premier, Rita Safiotti said they would be taking submissions from the union movement and other sectors of the economy in the formulation of wages policy. Safiotti reiterated that the WA economy had gone through a challenging time, but also that the state had to have a wages policy which could attract and retain its workforce.

The government had reversed the privatisations of previous governments and brought those services in-house which had lowered costs and increased the public sector workforce – 22,000 public sector workers have started since this ALP government came into office in 2017. Safiotti said the government was also hoping to look to other incentives such as increasing regional allowances and improving career progression.

At the conclusion of her presentation, Unions WA Secretary, Owen Whittle thanked Safiotti and then announced it was time for the union delegates from the various public sector delegates to put questions to the Treasurer.

Josh from the Rail, Train and Bus Industry Union (RTBU) asked about the factors which Treasury considers when determining wages policy. Safiotti responded that, while there is a constant demand for government services it was important not to have operating costs so high that you need to borrow to meet daily operating expenses. To which the RBTU official responded by saying that this is what many of his members do to meet their daily expenses.

The Treasurer also tried to deflect a question about whether a drop in 10 per cent of the real wages of her members was a negative, by stating that while real wage growth would be a focus – so too would COVID expenses, public health expenses, an aging population, and the NDIS. The state was also keen to decarbonise its electricity generation.

Photo: Nick Youngson – Alpha Stock Images (CC BY-SA 3.0).

When Josh suggested that the state government should create a wealth tax in such a wealthy state as ours, Safiotti's response was to hose down the suggestion by asserting that the ALP would lose the next state election and the other side would win and engage in a campaign of privatisation to lower debt.

A delegate from the United Professional Firefighters Union asked if Treasury had a process for identifying and addressing areas of staffing shortfalls. The Treasurer chose to answer by talking about the risks of operating budget deficits, and the benefits of diversifying the economy.

With the questions from the union delegates answered by the Treasurer, the forum was now over. The unions had got their questions answered, though hardly the responses they were looking for and the Treasurer and her officials now have a direct appreciation and understanding of the expectations of unions and delegates and officials on what decreases in real wage levels over the last 5-10 years have done to aggravate the cost-of-living pressures being felt by many public sector workers.

After the forum, unions met to debrief they wait for the State government's new wages policy. It was agreed this would be a long campaign where unions needed to consider various strategies to force the government to consider their personal budgets and workload pressures. It is certain that public sector unions would need to ramp up the pressure and tactics to achieve an improvement on the last time.

The Communist Party of Australia supports public sector unions in their campaign for increased wages to match the loss of real incomes caused by the austerity policies forced on public sector unions, first by a Liberal government through wages caps, and then from an ALP government which did not want to bargain in good faith.

The government has now made their position and expectations known which are: they want to continue to be in government, they will do whatever it takes to win elections, they want to balance their books and maintain budget surpluses, and the demands of workers and their unions come after those goals. Unions must show that their goals are as important as those of the government and without a skilled and experienced workforce the government and its bureaucracy will not be able to achieve their goals.

As Rosa Luxemberg said "The masses must learn how to use power by using power. There is no other way."

NSW budget 'miserly' on housing

Denis Doherty

The 2023 NSW budget is a massive disappointment on housing.

The NSW government's miserly and inadequate approach to the housing crisis has dashed the hopes built up by the promises of Housing Minister Rose Jackson of a more generous approach to housing provision.

After 11 years of compassion-free LNP government, some improvement was expected. Instead, we have little more than crumbs with the state government offering no social housing and only 1409 affordable homes over the next 16 years – fewer than 100 a year.

This is a shameful response to the appalling crisis so many NSW families are facing.

The budget claims that NSW is "permanently expanding the number of social housing dwellings by around 1,500 through the $610.1 million Commonwealth social housing accelerator program."

That funding is NSW's portion of the $2 billion extra that Prime Minister Albanese announced earlier in the year to get his housing fund through the Senate. There has not been any matching increase in state funding.

The NSW government is engaged in cost-shifting by taking advantage of Commonwealth spending in the same area to cut back their funding on social housing to almost nothing.

In an ABC interview Premier Minns underlined his government's refusal to take responsibility for dealing with the crisis when he said: "The way we are going to ease the housing crisis in NSW is with the private sector."

The centrepiece of the NSW budget is a $2.2 billion Housing and Infrastructure Plan as the state government aims to address the housing crisis by prioritising funding for infrastructure to underpin private housing developments.

Premier Minns says he has increased the proportion of public housing in the planned Waterloo redevelopment to 50 per cent, up the from LNP's promised 30 per cent. This boast is contemptible because the existing Waterloo estate is 100 per cent public housing.

When the LNP ran the NSW government, maintenance of housing stock fell into arrears. An Auditor General's report exposed a $300 million shortfall in maintenance of public housing. Despite this, the Labor government's budget only allocates a miserly $30 million for maintenance this year.

With thousands sleeping rough, couch surfing, and sleeping in cars, and thousands more facing insecure and inadequate housing, leaving the housing crisis to the profit-driven private sector and the Commonwealth is simply not acceptable.

We need, and we demand far more from the NSW government.

Defend and extend public housing!

Offshore Alliance members at Chevron win on wages and conditions

Offshore Alliance members at Chevron endorsed a recommendation put by the Fair Work Commission at a late night mass meeting of over 350 workers.

Offshore Alliance members from three Chevron gas facilities, Gorgon, Wheatstone Platform and Wheatstone Downstream met at 7pm WA time to consider a recommendation put to both Chevron and Offshore Alliance members yesterday morning by Commissioner Riordan.

The proposed enterprise agreements, which incorporate the Commissioner's recommendations, contain substantial improvements in terms and conditions of employment including increased remuneration, job security, locked-in rosters, career progression and returning all employees to a 40 per cent roster.

The Offshore Alliance will now work with Chevron to finalise the drafting of the three agreements and members will soon cease current industrial action

The Offshore Alliance is an alliance between The Australian Workers' Union (AWU) and the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA).

Offshore Alliance spokesperson, AWU WA Secretary Brad Gandy, says Alliance members carefully considered Commissioner Riordan's recommendation before endorsing it.

"Commissioner Riordan's recommendation contains substantial improvements in terms and conditions of employment," says Gandy.

"The Offshore Alliance is a member-led union and at a late night mass meeting members endorsed the latest offer which incorporates the Fair Work Commission's recommendations."

Offshore Alliance

Climate

Staring down the barrel

As Australia faces another season of drought, extreme heat, and catastrophic fires, Bushfire Survivors for Climate Action (BSCA) is calling on the federal government to pause all new coal and gas approvals, including expansions, until it reforms, as promised, the existing environmental regulatory framework and establishes a new national Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Nearly a year ago, Federal Environment Minister, Tanya Plibersek MP, announced the establishment of a new EPA in response to a review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act which found the Act was ineffective and not fit to address current or future environmental challenges. A public consultation period concerning those reforms is due to start this year.

BSCA believes a robust regulatory framework is critical in ensuring high carbon emitting fossil fuel projects are assessed properly for their climate impact, and not just given the green light. Fossil fuel projects pollute our environment and drive climate change, creating extreme weather events that put our communities at risk from intense bushfires like the Black Summer fires of 2019-2020.

With fire authorities, the World Meteorological Organisation and the Bureau of Meteorology all predicting a return to extreme heat and drought this spring and summer, federal and state governments must do everything they can to protect our communities from more frequent and intense climate-fuelled bushfires.

Serena Joyner, CEO of BSCA, co-founder of Resilient Blue Mountains and wife of a volunteer firefighter, said: "Those of us on the frontline of past bushfires have been watching the recent fires across the northern hemisphere with horror. Now as our summer approaches, the worrying predictions from fire authorities and warnings of a possible El Nino are really scaring people. It wasn't that long ago that the catastrophic Black Summer fires of 2019-20 devastated communities up and down the East Coast of Australia – and many people are still struggling with the financial and bureaucratic burden of rebuilding.

"The Federal government must not make the situation worse. All new coal and gas project approvals must be paused while the right regulatory framework is put in place that ensures our communities and the places they love are protected."

Jann Gilbert, from Mallacoota on the NSW South Coast, said: "Three-and-a-half years after losing my home in the Black Summer fires I've finally moved into my rebuilt house. I should feel safe, but I don't.

"Staring down the barrel of the same conditions that produced Black Summer, I've made the difficult decision to sell and move from Mallacoota. We need real action on climate change and that means investing in renewable energy and reducing emissions as quickly as possible. Until we have that no Australian will be safe from these worsening fires."

Members of BSCA travelled from Queensland, Victoria and NSW to attend meetings in Canberra with MPs and Senators from across the political spectrum – asking them to support a pause in fossil fuel approval until Australia's flawed environmental assessment laws are reformed.

"If we know the system isn't up to scratch, it just makes sense to stop making the problem worse," Serena Joyner said. "That's why we've launched a petition calling on the government to do what it has promised and pause approvals of polluting projects until the reforms are done."

BSCA is asking for the Federal government to:

Pause new coal and gas approvals, including expansions, until Labor's promised environmental reforms and the new EPA are in place.

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

Ensure a climate trigger is included in the EPBC reforms, requiring thorough assessment of all such projects against their impact on climate.

Take responsibility for progressing all 80 recommendations of the Bushfires Royal Commission, for coordination and monitoring of all measures, and facilitating faster implementation across federal and state/territory jurisdictions.

About Bushfire Survivors for Climate Action: BSCA is a nonpartisan community organisation. We are people who have been threatened by fire: some of us lost our homes, some of us are firefighters, some of us are their families and neighbours. We have members across the country, especially from bushfire impacted regions along the east coast. In 2021 we took the NSW Environment Protection Authority to court challenging them on their lack of action on climate change and won.

Our landmark win in the NSW Land and Environment Court was the first time that an Australian Court ordered a government to take meaningful action on climate change.

BSCA

The scale and intensity of those terrible fires will become the norm unless we reduce emissions this decade.

An Australian coup

Marcus Browning

Timor Leste and China have significantly strengthened social, cultural, and economic ties, specifically in energy, agriculture, and infrastructure. This follows Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong's backhanded admission earlier this year of Australia's criminal interference in the internal affairs of Timor-Leste; "It was not in the spirit of our friendship," Wong said, referring to Australia's ongoing attempt to steal away Timor-Leste's Greater Sunrise oil and gas in the Timor Sea on behalf of mining transnational Woodside.

From the earliest days of its formation in 2002 as an independent state with a government led by socialist Fretilin, successive Australian governments have been seeking ways to undermine Timor-Leste. The aim was and is to prevent the country taking an independent path and to instead have in place governments that would comply with Australian policies and do its bidding. Thus Penny Wong's visit to Timor-Leste last week in the face of China's positive influence in the Asia-Pacific.

In 2006 a former Portuguese general Alfredo Assuncao, who commanded a UN force in Timor-Leste told a Portuguese newspaper that, "what interests the Australians most is oil and gas ... So what better way to control these enormously rich resources than to be physically present and control the country's political system?"

He went on to say that the Australians always wanted to control everything and everyone in the country but had been frustrated because President Xanana Gusmao and leader of Fretilin Mari Alkatiri had shown a united front. "The break-up of this union is opening the way for them to take control of the country."

The establishment of a military base under the control of Australian forces and available for use by US forces as a forward base for US troops, tanks, aircraft, missiles and warships, has always been a major Australian objective.

MILITARY BASE

The Australian and US governments had begun preparing, step by step, for a big war in Asia. In October 2005 former military adviser to the Howard government, Ross Babbage, published a booklet *Preparing Australia's Defence for 2020*. He wrote of the possibility of a "major war in Asia in the 2020 timeframe".

The Fretilin government proceeded to implement social and economic policies without resort to the shackling loans, "market forces" economics, and privatisation policies of the IMF and World Bank. Furthermore, Prime Minister Alkatiri stood up to the bullying and threats from then Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer over the control and revenue sharing of East Timor's oil and gas resources.

The Australia-East Timor spying scandal began in 2004 when the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) planted covert listening devices in a room adjacent to the East Timor (Timor-Leste) Prime Minister's Office at Dili, to obtain information in order to ensure Australia held the upper hand in negotiations with East Timor over the rich oil and gas fields in the Timor Gap.

Even though the Timor-Leste government was unaware of the espionage operation undertaken by Australia, negotiations were hostile. The first Prime Minister of Timor-Leste, Mari Alkatiri, bluntly accused the Howard government of plundering the oil and gas in the Timor Sea, stating:

"Timor-Leste loses $1 million a day due to Australia's unlawful exploitation of resources in the disputed area. Timor-Leste cannot be deprived of its rights or territory because of a crime."

Lead negotiator for East Timor, Peter Galbraith, laid out the motives behind the espionage by ASIS:

"What would be the most valuable thing for Australia to learn is what our bottom line is, what we were prepared to settle for. There's another thing that gives you an advantage, you know what the instructions the prime minister has given to the lead negotiator. And finally, if you're able to eavesdrop you'll know about the divisions within the East Timor delegation and there certainly were divisions, different advice being given, so you might be able to lean on one way or another in the course of the negotiations."

Once the UN was removed as an effective presence the way was cleared for other preparations to be put in train. The main objectives were the removal of Mari Alkatiri as Prime Minister, the weakening of Fretilin as the majority Party and its eventual replacement by other political forces and leaders amendable to the political and economic policies favoured by the Australian government.

LONG-TERM OBJECTIVE

This coincides with the long-term objective of the Australian government and was behind the earlier use of Australian troops at the time of East Timor's independence in 2001. It was presented at the time that the Howard government had become genuinely committed to the independence struggle of the savagely suppressed population of East Timor. This was never the truth of the matter.

MEDIA BIAS

All major Australian newspapers and their journalists consistently demonised Mari Alkatiri and promoted any and every rumour biased against the elected government. The media had no intention of reporting on democratic processes when a government not to their liking was elected.

Book Review by Graham Holton

Fighting with America

In September 1951, during the Korean War, Australia and New Zealand, signed the ANZUS treaty. In *Fighting with America* James Curran, Professor of History at the University of Sydney,examines how Australia has viewed its relationship with the United States since then.

The treaty is not equivalent to the NATO agreement, in which an attack on one member is an attack on all. John Foster Dulles, US Secretary of State, saw ANZUS as the US coming to Australia's defence only if it was in US interests. Today at a time of US hostility towards China, Australia is even closer to the US when it was during the Vietnam War, as witnessed by the AUKUS agreement in March 2023.

The ANZUS treaty reflected the supposedly strong ties Australia had with the US. On 8th January 1940 the White House announced bilateral diplomatic relations between the two countries and on 9th July 1946 the Australian and American legations were elevated to embassy status.

In October 1966 President LB Johnson privately addressed Cabinet ministers during his visit, the first time for a US president. Johnson warned that "if the United States were to pull out of Vietnam tomorrow, other countries of South East Asia would quickly fall. And the aggressor would get to Australia long before he got to San Francisco." This 'Domino Theory' was believed by the Liberal Party at the time. They committed 8000 troops to the Vietnam conflict. In 1967 the US embassy in Canberra viewed Australia's support as a "reaffirmed and nearly total commitment to the alliance."

Change came in 1972 when Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam announced that "adherence to ANZUS does not constitute a foreign policy," and a senior member of the Liberal frontbench, warned that the "days of sycophancy" with Washington were "finished." Australia withdrew its troops from Vietnam on 18th August 1973.

By the 1980s Labor PM Bob Hawke and the ALP professed a more robust commitment to ANZUS. Hawke declared that Australia and the US would be "together forever," however Cabinet noted that: "Australia has reservations about giving blanket expressions of support for US strategic perceptions and activities and would be reluctant to have the ANZUS treaty invoked as justification for such blanket support." In 1983 the Australian government condemned the Reagan administration's invasion of Grenada, and Australia did not support the US's low intensity wars in Central America, causing irritation in Washington.

Curran argues that Liberal PM John Howard's view of the US was "deeply rooted in a historical vision of US global leadership." Howard invoked the ANZUS Treaty in response to the 11th September 2001 attacks on New York and Washington DC, and followed up by sending our military to Iraq and Afghanistan. Even so, in 2004 Foreign Minister Alexander Downer argued that this did not mean that there was any obligation under ANZUS to militarily support the US in a war with China over Taiwan.

In 2011 President Barack Obama told Labor PM Julia Gillard in parliament that Australia was to be a "pivot" to Asia, as US military personnel: will be rotated out of Darwin; use the Cocos Islands for surveillance and air patrols; and US navy vessels will use WA port facilities.

After an AUSMIN (Australia-US Ministerial Consultations) meeting in 2015, the Chinese company Landbridge took an 80 per cent stake in the Port of Darwin, much to the shock of President Obama. In August 2016, after much negotiation with the US, Liberal PM Malcolm Turnbull blocked Chinese and Hong Kong companies seeking the 50.4 per cent lease of the NSW electricity provider, Ausgrid. Treasurer Scott Morrison pointed to unspecified "national security concerns."

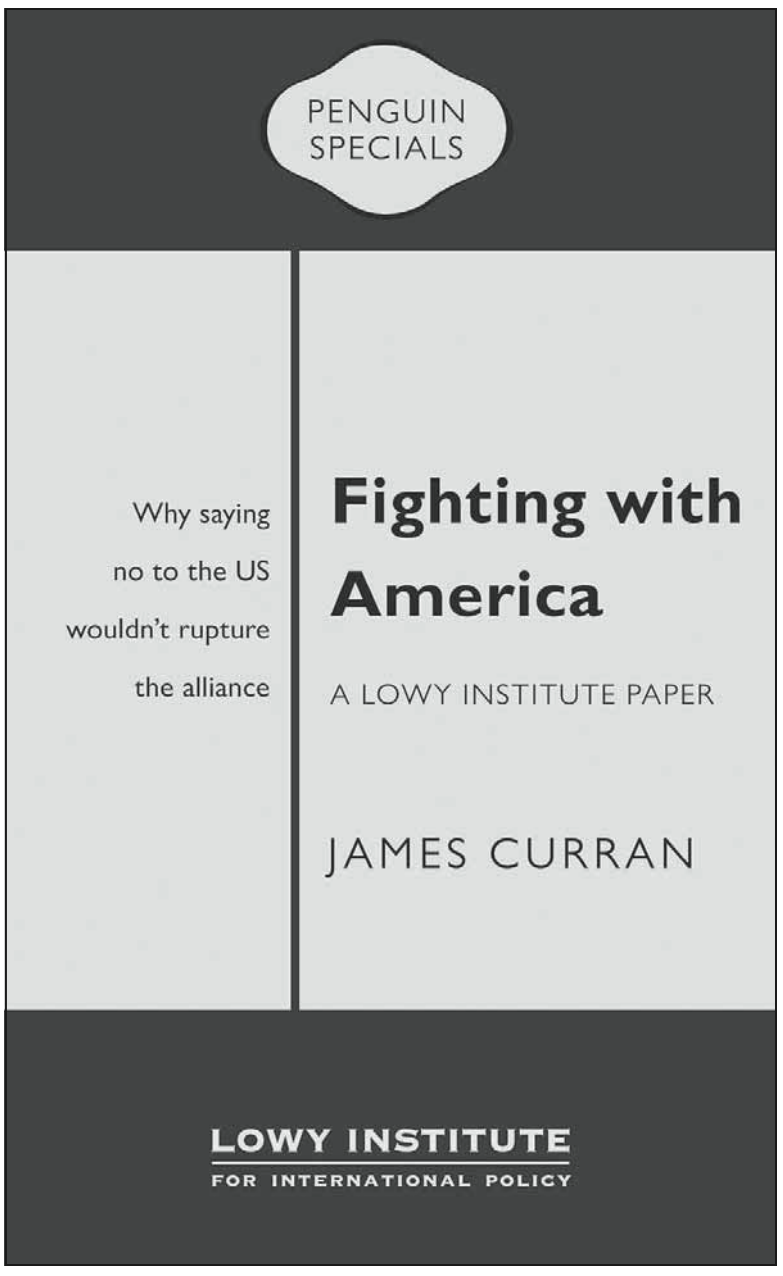
In October 2016 Turnbull signed a Joint Statement on Defense Cooperation. Curran acknowledges that this did not mean that the Australian public would automatically guarantee support for future US conflict in Asia.

In 2021 the PM Scott Morrison announced that he had signed the AUKUS deal with the US and UK. According to the US State Department website, AUKUS will "develop and provide joint advanced military capabilities to promote security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. Arms control and counter-proliferation is another area of close US-Australia cooperation." Australia will be a depot for US and UK nuclear powered submarines and will eventually build nuclear submarines.

One thing Curran fails to consider is the role ANZUS has played in trade agreements. The US had proposed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Australia in 1945, but it was not agreed upon until 1st January 2005 when the Australia-United States Free Trade Agreement (AUSFTA) was signed. The US agricultural sector had lobbied strongly against the agreement, fearing cheap Australian imports. US pharmaceutical companies also lobbied against the agreement, concerned that the Australian Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme subsidised medications.

In recent years the US and Australia have agreed upon bilateral cooperation on trade issues and scientific research. In 2019-20, Australia's goods and services exported to the US were $27.4 billion, while Australia imported $53.4 billion from the US.

Despite its limitations, *Fighting With America* is worth reading for anyone interested in questioning our relationship with the US, something more Australians should do. ✪



Auto workers still standing

Mark Gruenberg

DETROIT: United Auto Workers (UAW) called on 38 more locals to join its "Stand Up! Strike," starting on 22nd September. All are at GM and Stellantis parts plants from coast to coast, as those two firms have not moved in bargaining, unlike Ford.

UAW President Shawn Fain's announcement, means 41 locals are now striking. He read the decision in a YouTube video seen by 46,300 people.

"We will be everywhere from California to Massachusetts and we will keep going and keep expanding the Stand Up Strike as necessary," Fain said.

Ford gave up on its two-tier wage system, increased its profit-sharing offer to 13.3 per cent, restored the cost-of-living increases (COLAs) it dropped in 2009, and agreed to "immediate conversion of all temporary workers to full-time" and the union's right to strike over plant closings.

So no other Ford locals were added to the strike list. But that list still includes a key Ford local, at the paint and final assembly plant in Wayne County, Michigan.

"We're not done at Ford, but they're serious about wanting a deal," Fain said. "Stellantis and GM are going to need some serious pushing." Stellantis is also getting a serious push in Italy, where 6000 Fiat workers have gone out on strike.

"It's time to show the companies we are united, fed up, and standing up against corporate greed," said Fain, reiterating a class struggle theme from previous speeches.

"We will shut down parts distribution centres until they come to their senses," Fain said of the two recalcitrant car companies. Workers at those plants "are permanently stuck at the second" and lower "tier and they're at $25 an hour for eight years" until they graduate to the top tier.

Both GM and Stellantis haven't budged on refusing to reinstate COLAs, Fain said. Those two firms, and the UAW, were forced to accept the end of COLAs in 2009. That, and two tiers, were among key concessions the federal government wrung out of the workers and the firms as part of its loan guarantee rescue plan after Fiat, Chrysler, and GM went broke due to the 2008 financier-caused Wall Street crash. Ford did not declare bankruptcy then, but it, too, dropped the COLAs.

"It's time to show the companies we are united, fed up, and standing up against corporate greed."

Both GM and Stellantis "have rejected our job security and profit-sharing" proposals, Fain said.

The union may not be done with calling locals out on strike. While urging members of other locals to participate and aid those called out, Fain said, "To Spring Hill (Tennessee), I know you're ready to go and to Kokomo (Indiana), stand with us."

Fain also included messages for the public in his video. One was to warn customers against company price-gouging and the firms' attempts to blame price hikes, when they come, on the workers. He said in a prior video that UAW members actually had lost money relative to inflation over the last four years, and that while car prices rose 34 per cent, workers' pay rose only 6 per cent.

The other was to encourage public support from the strikers, inviting everyone "from the families on up to the president of the United States" to join the picket lines.

Democratic President Joe Biden, who in a prior press conference adopted the union's slogan of "Record profits = record contracts," has so far ducked the question of whether he'll come to a picket line.

But other Democrat Senators, including Bernie Sanders, and top Michigan officeholders have either spoken out, walked picket lines, or both.

By contrast, Republican presidential hopefuls have attacked the auto workers. Senator Tim Scott proposed the companies fire all the strikers. The leader in Republican presidential polls, former Oval Office occupant Donald Trump, is scheduled to visit Michigan for a rally next week in an attempt to convince workers he is their candidate rather than the representative of the ruling class that he really is.

Fain did not mention either political support or opposition in his remarks but said public opinion polls show increasing support for the workers, across party and age lines. As for Trump, Fain told CNN earlier in the week, "We can't keep electing billionaires."

People's World

(edited for reasons of space)

[editor's note: two-tier: new workers are paid much less for doing the same work as current workers. In 2022, the CEOs of GM, Ford and Stellantis were paid 362, 281, and 365 times their average worker's salary respectively.] ✪

Guinea-Bissau: Unity, Struggle and Progress

On 24th September, Guinea-Bissau observes Independence Day, a national holiday commemorating the country's unilateral declaration of independence from Portugal in 1973. It was part of the liberation struggle in several Portuguese colonies that resulted in those areas gaining independence.

The holiday is usually marked by large celebrations and festivities across the country, solemn speeches and calls to continue defending national sovereignty.

Colonial old town of Bafata, Guinea-Bissau.
Photo: jbdodane – flickr.com (CC BY-NC 2.0).

GUINEA-BISSAU'S STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

At first, the Portuguese who settled in the Cabo Verde Islands in the western part of the continent carried out raids on the mainland to capture slaves for sale in Latin America. In the 16th century, they began to establish forts and trading posts, important for the slave trade.

However, the Portuguese made little effort to colonise or explore the interior of the country until the 19th century. Several attempts to penetrate the interior were thwarted by the indigenous resistance.

In 1879, Guinea-Bissau, previously administered as part of the Portuguese Cabo Verde Islands, became a separate colony – Portuguese Guinea. Over the years, Portugal's right to the territory was disputed by England, France, Spain, and the Netherlands. In 1886, Portugal ceded a significant part of the territory to France. The colonization of the interior areas was completed at the beginning of the 20th century.

After World War II, the liberation struggle of the people of Portuguese Guinea against the colonialists intensified under the leadership of Amilcar Cabral. In 1951, as a result of the reform of the Portuguese colonial system, this territory received the status of an overseas province.

The armed independence movement, under the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), was supported by several countries of the socialist bloc, including Cuba, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia. It was a protracted guerrilla war that was extremely costly in men and materiel and caused considerable internal political turmoil in Portugal.

The war lasted more than ten years. By 1973, the PAIGC had gained control of about two-thirds of the country, and despite Cabral's assassination in January that year, Guinea-Bissau declared itself an independent republic on 24th September.

This and other revolutionary events in Portuguese territories led to the Carnation Revolution [in which the authoritarian Estado Novo regime in Portugal was toppled by left-wing military officers] in April 1974. The new Portuguese government then began talks with the overseas territories, which led to the formal recognition of Guinea-Bissau's independence on 10th September 1974.

After the gaining of independence, the PAIGC was established as the only legal political party in the country, which had chosen a socialist path of development, and Luis Cabral, Amilcar Cabral's brother, became president. Since then, the country has seen numerous military coups and more than 20 attempts by the military to seize power by force.

On this occasion, President Umaro Sissoco Embalo encouraged Bissau Guineans to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the country's independence by reflecting on the nation's journey, especially on "what we have already done, the future we want to build and the legacy that we want to leave for future generations."

The president recalled that Guinea-Bissau was born under the banner of "Unity, Struggle, and Progress," stressing that under this particular slogan "the future we want will be built."

On this day of "great historical significance," Embalo also urged people throughout the country to pay tribute to all those who sacrificed their lives in resistance to colonial oppression, in the clandestine anti-colonial struggle and in the arduous armed fight for national liberation that lasted more than ten years.

Sputnik Africa
(edited for reasons of space) ✪

Alliance of Sahel States formed for collective defence

In an advancement towards mutual cooperation, the governments of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger have formed the Alliance of Sahel States (AES). The move was finalised with the signing of the Liptako-Gourma Charter, named after the tri-border region shared by the three countries, in Mali's capital Bamako on 16th September.

The formation of the AES comes at a critical time in the Sahel region of West Africa. Mali has witnessed a resurgence of attacks by ethnic Tuareg rebels in its northern region, alongside violence by other armed groups. An armed insurgency by Tuareg rebels over a decade ago led to France's military intervention in Mali in 2013 under Operation Serval.

Over the next few years, the attacks spread to other parts of the Sahel, including Niger and Burkina Faso, with armed groups controlling an estimated 40 per cent of the latter's territory. Meanwhile, France expanded its military operations in the region with Operation Barkhane in 2014.

As violence continued to grow even after almost a decade of intervention, France failed to achieve its stated counter-insurgency objectives and generated civilian casualties as a result of its airstrikes. This fuelled protests against the presence of French troops in Mali. Against this backdrop of popular anger, the country witnessed two coups, in 2020 and 2021, finally bringing to power its current leadership headed by Colonel Assimi Goïta.

Burkina Faso would soon follow with a coup in January 2022 conducted in the wake of anti-French demonstrations. The same year, France announced the withdrawal of troops from Mali after Bamako ended its defence accords with Paris.

In January 2023, Burkina Faso ordered the expulsion of French troops from its soil.

Both countries were suspended and sanctioned by the regional Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Confronted by a precarious security situation and punitive measures by their regional neighbours, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea (which had also undergone a military coup in 2021) began taking comprehensive measures to boost cooperation on a range of matters, especially defense.

Globetrotter ✪

Global Briefs

USA: The second US-Pacific Summit took place in the USA. Two Pacific countries decided to stay away from the meeting – the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Last year's summit with 14 Pacific Island nations was aimed at countering China's growing influence in the region which the US considers to be vital for its strategic and military interests. The US pledged $810 million in new aid over the decade, including $130 million to deal with climate change issues. However, in reality the US was more interested in opening new embassies and sending coastal patrol boats to the region. The US is going to propose that the Pacific Island states should join the Quad, which includes the US, Australia, India, and Japan to coordinate maritime surveillance. Preparing for a major conflict with China, the US hopes to establish close military and security relations with the Pacific Island nations and at the same time disrupt their partnership relations with China.

FRANCE: French president Emmanuel Macron has announced the withdrawal of French troops from Niger in the coming months. At the moment France has about 1500 troops stationed in Niger. The former president was overthrown at the end of July, and the new military authorities are keen for French troops to leave the country. "Any person, organisation or structure whose presence threatens the interests of our country must leave the land of our ancestors whether they want it or not. The sovereign people of Niger recall the firm and inviolable principles of the withdrawal of foreign forces of the French junta. Imperialist and neo-colonial forces are not welcome on our national territory," the new government said in a statement.

ISRAEL: The Israeli anti-fascist movement strongly condemned the honouring of a Ukrainian Nazi veteran in the Canadian parliament. "First of all, we condemn the invitation. The West has forgotten what fascism and Nazism are ... We hope that, just like us, our authorities will condemn this action, since the Jewish people have not forgotten those crimes," the chairman of the Israeli anti-fascist movement said. The anti-fascist movement will send a letter to the Israeli ambassador in Canada pointing out the unacceptability of such actions.

ARGENTINA: Argentina wants to create a national park in the Malvinas Islands. The government has sent a bill to the parliament for the creation of a national park in the Malvinas Islands. The environment minister highlighted the richness of the Malvinas ecosystem. "Malvinas is the claim for our historical sovereignty. But the islands are also an ecosystem with albatrosses, marine fauna, wetlands and peat bogs. In the Southern Patagonia region, these peat bogs are of the most important carbon capturers that the planet has," the minister stressed.

RUSSIA: Speaking at the United Nations General Assembly, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Russia was prepared to return to negotiations with Ukraine but will not entertain any proposal for a ceasefire. "We will not entertain ceasefire proposals because we have done so before and were deceived," Lavrov said."Do they want negotiations on the battlefield? Very well, then it will be on the battlefield".

Calling all readers

Give us a laugh

The *Guardian – the Workers Weekly* is in need of cartoonists, or humourists

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The Guardian
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Voice for the young

As a Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander man I am supporting the yes vote for the Voice. Say Yes so we young people can a have a say in our future.

Treaty and truth telling as well as the Voice are all mentioned in the Uluru Statement. So let us work on all of these altogether. The Voice can only help.

In South Australia here we already have a model of how it will work.

Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians need a brighter future.

In solidarity.

Dylan Whiteford-Hall

Something to say?

Write to the Editor!

editor@cpa.org.au

UK: Anti-nuke actions

Peter Lazenby

Peace campaigners were blocked from carrying out an 'inspection' at a military base where it is believed the US and British governments plan to install nuclear weapons. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) formed a "Citizens' Weapons Inspection" (CWI) team to attempt to enter RAF Lakenheath in Suffolk.

Lakenheath is only nominally an RAF base. In reality, it is operated by the United States Air Force (USAF).

CND said that there is growing evidence that the USAF is preparing to deploy B61-12 guided nuclear bombs there as part of a mass upgrade of its nuclear infrastructure in Europe.

The campaign group wrote to the base commander on 14th September warning an inspection would take place.

At the last minute, they received a letter from the RAF denying them access – so they instead staged a protest at the base.

The rally was one of hundreds taking place nationwide and internationally to mark the International Day of Peace on 21st September and the United Nations International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

In its letter to CND, the RAF said Lakenheath was a "busy, sensitive, operational base." It stated that there was a "long-standing UK and NATO policy to neither confirm nor deny the presence of nuclear weapons at a given location."

The RAF claimed that such ambiguity "reduces the risk of deliberate nuclear use by those seeking a first strike advantage."

CND condemned the "lack of transparency and oversight of nuclear weapons deployments that have no democratic mandate or popular support."

Chairman Tom Unterrainer said: "By refusing access to our CWI team the UK authorities are happily going along with US foreign policy – which flies in the face of the will of the British people.

"The majority of the public don't want these US nuclear weapons here, so where is the vote in Parliament? Where is the democratic process?

"The argument that secrecy is needed for safety and strategic ambiguity is a laughable excuse for what is actually a denial of transparency and oversight.

"We know the base is being readied for the B61-12. We know they are doubling the amount of F-35 jets to be stationed there."

He said it was clear that in the event of nuclear war "Lakenheath is going to be on the target list."

CND vice-chairwoman Sophie Bolt said: "Today's action shines a spotlight on this nuclear base and the efforts to keep what is really going on out of the public eye.

F15 Eagle, RAF Lakenheath. Photo: Airwolfhound – flickr.com (CC BY-SA 2.0).

"Under NATO nuclear doctrine, the F-35 and B61-12 are more likely to be used in a first-strike attack than a retaliatory one.

"The British public have no say in their siting here, but we'll be on the receiving end in any nuclear attack.

"Instead of allowing this to go ahead, the UK government must immediately block this deployment and use its influence to advance the possibility of peace and disarmament."

Peace activists in Yorkshire targeted another US base, RAF Menwith Hill, which is run by the US National Security Agency.

The base gathers military, political, and economic information from US spy satellites.

In the small Pennine town of Hebden Bridge in West Yorkshire's Calder Valley, a crowd gathered as CND and supporters provided music, songs, poetry, and speeches in a Day of Peace.

According to a science-based "nuclear clock," the world's risk of nuclear Armageddon is now assessed at 90 seconds from midnight.

Morning Star

Call for reparations

Roger McKenzie

Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo has told the United Nations General Assembly that it is time for African nations to be paid reparations for the historical injustices caused by the transatlantic slave trade.

He said for centuries the developed world has been unwilling the confront its role in the inhuman enslavement of Africans. Speaking to the UN General Assembly in New York last week, Akufo-Addo emphasised that now is the time to bring the subject of reparations to the fore.

"Reparations must be paid," he insisted, adding that while no amount of money would make up for the horrors of the slave trade, payment would make the point that millions of "productive" Africans were put to work without compensation.

Akufo-Addo insisted that it is time to openly acknowledge "that much of Europe and the United States have been built from the vast wealth harvested from the sweat, tears, blood, and horrors of the transatlantic slave trade."

The Ghanaian president is a long-standing advocate of reparations, who said last year that the time was long overdue to intensify discussions on the issue. He has also called on a number of occasions for a formal apology by European nations that were involved in the trade, and urged the African Union bloc to engage the diaspora to advance the reparations cause.

The transatlantic slave trade, which affected millions of Africans, was the largest forced migration in history. Ghana was one of the main points of departure for the slave trade's horrific middle passage from Africa to the Americas.

In another reference to past injustice, Chilean President Gabriel Boric told the General Assembly that the US-backed coup that deposed his predecessor Salvador Allende and ushered in 17 years of brutal military dictatorship under General Augusto Pinochet had been "a tragedy," but he added that a coup "is never inevitable, because there are always other alternatives where violence is not present."

Honduran President Xiomara Castro told the General Assembly that she believes in a multipolar world in which exchange for development is based on the principles of independence, sovereignty, and non-interference.

She said that the military-industrial complex consumes the majority of the budgets of developed countries, amounting to trillions of dollars and that this contrasts with their indifference and inability to contribute to humanity and the defence of nature.

Global capitalism and the neoliberal model only generate misery, inequality, and insane individualism of consumer societies, while millions of human beings suffer great deprivations, Castro argued.

Morning Star

Zelensky, Trudeau praise fascists

On 24th September Volodymyr Zelensky and Justin Trudeau led the Canadian Parliament in a standing ovation for a Waffen SS member.

The incident, noted obliquely in a photograph caption on the Associated Press website and in footage of 98-year-old Yaroslav Hunka acknowledging the applause, caused consternation online but has been largely ignored by media outlets.

[editor's note: Right-wing Murdoch outlet *The Australian* described the standing ovation to a Waffen SS member as "accidental"]

Hunka was in the audience when the Ukrainian president addressed the parliament seeking continued support against Russia's invasion of the country. Zelensky's speech had framed Russia as Ukraine's nemesis throughout history, citing the 1930s Soviet famine (in which millions of Russians also died) as a deliberate genocide of Ukrainians by Stalin.

Hunka was applauded for fighting against the Soviet Red Army with the "first Ukrainian division" – as the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS ("Galicia"), a largely Ukrainian Nazi collaborator unit, was renamed in March 1945 as Germany was on the point of losing the war.

Following the incorporation of openly neo-Nazi units like the Azov and Aidar battalions into the Ukrainian military, the incident underlines the way the war is being used to rewrite history and rehabilitate fascist collaborators while depicting the Soviet Union as the aggressor in World War II.

Monuments to the Red Army, in which millions of Ukrainians fought against Nazism, have been torn down in Ukraine as well as in other eastern European states including Latvia, Bulgaria and Poland.

Speaking to the *Morning Star* last year, former East German leader Egon Krenz noted that right wingers across Europe were using the passing of the last generation that fought in World War II to "erase the popular memory" of the Soviet role in liberating Europe and "assert that everything about European socialism was illegitimate."

Morning Star

Holding the Line

Scenes from the US Auto Workers strike

Cameron Harrison

DETROIT: Picket signs in hand, United Auto Workers with Local 900 Region 1A in Wayne, Michigan, occupy the gates at the large assembly plant just off Michigan Avenue across from their union hall.

These workers have been out on strike since Friday 15th September, at midnight when the union announced the first facilities to be targeted in the "Stand Up Strike."

The Michigan Assembly Plant is where the Ford Motor Company produces the Bronco as well as the Ranger pickup truck. Roughly 4600 people work here. The final assembly and paint departments are currently conducting the initial work stoppage.

"Ford makes so much money that it only makes sense that we strike to get what's ours," a young worker told *People's World*. He noted that despite being employed at the plant for only 60 days, the union is still paying him the full strike pay.

The union has no tiers for strike pay, regardless of how long the workers have been members, but at Ford, General Motors, and Stellantis, workers performing the same job make vastly different wages based on the companies' tiered system.

Solidarity on the picket line is a constant. It doesn't matter what time of day it is – one will hear dozens of honks from vehicles driving by, fists of support thrown up outside of passenger windows, workers from other unions showing up to walk the line, and community members stopping by to let the workers know they are valued and supported.

One car drove by covered with pro-union slogans painted on the windows and filled with children smiling and waving. They drew cheers from the picket line.

Afterwards, a woman who works on the line in Livonia explained that she brought her grandchildren out to the picket line the day before. She said she wants them to know what their grandma is fighting for, "A better life for them and for the future" of all her fellow worker's families. She was hoping that her plant would be called out to strike that first night, but she's ready for it if the time comes.

Donated supplies fill the hall of UAW Local 900.
Photo: Cameron Harrison – *People's World.*

A semi-truck drove by and honked in solidarity. "They must be with the Teamsters! They will never cross our picket line," declared another picketer. This is important because at Michigan Assembly, the workers are not only fighting the bosses, but also keeping a watchful eye out for scabs and independent trucks who do not care if they cross a picket line.

"I was there for two hours, and we blocked six semis for the maximum 10 minutes each. The line is very strong, and vehicles cannot sneak in," he said. "The management of the picket line is very good."

A spirited union member, wearing a red Local 900 shirt, said, "Solidarity has been a blessing for us. We had brothers and sisters come from different UAW locals to drop off coffee, donuts, cookies, pizza ... you name it. We've also had support from different union members like United Food and Commercial Workers, Teamsters, Detroit Firefighters, Teachers, Building Trades, and some others, too."

Because of the historic and national nature of the strike, many workers in different industries see the battle at the Big Three as a fight not only for the auto workers, but for the entire working class.

People's World spoke to a UFCW member on the line about why they showed up. They said that the struggle against corporate greed is a fight that impacts the entire working class, whether you work at a grocery store, on an assembly line, or in a meatpacking facility.

"We're keeping a watchful eye on this strike because when these workers win big, and our contract is up, I know my UAW brothers and sisters will be there for us if we vote to go on strike," they said.

The Detroit Club of the Communist Party USA recently held a donation drive for supplies for UAW Region 1. The drive netted a trove of donated supplies, including paper towels, canned food, feminine hygiene products, over-the-counter medications, and other essential items.

For some who donated during the club's drive, it was the first time they had participated in any capacity to support a strike. "It was a whole community effort – we asked our coworkers, friends, family, and neighbors to help out," one member of the CPUSA club said. "We didn't know what to expect at first, but people ended up really contributing."

It appears that the battle for a fair and just contract might be a long one. UAW President Shawn Fain announced recently that if the Big Three don't come to the bargaining table with significant movement, more automotive plants and UAW locals will be called to strike.

The workers in Local 900, however, are optimistic about their struggle.

"This is my first time on strike ever, and I am ready for it," said one striking worker, holding a picket sign that read 'End Tiers: No 2nd Class Workers.'

"It is our work and our time that makes these cars that everybody wants. But we can't even afford to buy them," he said. "Bring it on, Ford!"

People's World ✪

The struggle against corporate greed is a fight that impacts the entire working class.

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Half the Sky

Uniform problems

AS

Almost every Australian has been required to wear a school uniform during their youth and almost every Australian has resented it. As we age, this resentment dulls and becomes replaced with nostalgia. Nostalgia for our carefree youth often hinders our empathy to the needs of young people in the present day. When it comes to school uniforms, empathy is especially needed for the plight of girls and gender diverse young people.

So why are school uniforms harmful to girls and gender diverse people? Well for one, most school uniforms were designed decades ago and reflect the reactionary social views of the past. These social views prescribed a vision of femininity in which girls were to be seen and not heard, passive creatures to be acted upon rather than actors in their own right. As such, the uniforms that were designed reflect this. For example, almost every school in Australia requires girls to wear a skirt or dress as part of their uniform. This is a problem as it makes common childhood behaviours such as playing sport, climbing trees, or doing cartwheels much harder. Consequently, as girls grow into women they learn to be more passive, inadvertently recreating the reactionary views of the past.

Many women can recount incidences in which as children they were the victims of unwanted sexual attention from much older males when wearing their uniform. Often this occurs at a worryingly young age. Although overt sexualization of school girls is generally frowned upon, less overt forms are quite common in the wider culture. Porn featuring school uniforms is freely available and a fetish for school uniforms is one of the more common paraphilias. This fetish nicely dovetails into reactionary cultural ideals of femininity such as virginity and innocence. Girls are often sexualized by their own schools through the implementation of regulation concerning how the uniform should be worn. Most common among these is the policing of skirt length. The rationale is often that the girls are distracting the boys and preventing them from paying attention. This of course unfairly blames girls for behaviour they have no control over.

As previously mentioned, school uniforms are also harmful to gender diverse people. For transgender youth, being forced to wear the uniform that does not match their gender identity can be a traumatic experience. Conversely, young trans people may find it difficult to experiment with their gender presentation as wearing the uniform that conforms to their gender identity will inadvertently out them to their fellow students making them vulnerable to bullying. Strict gendered uniforms also prevent non-binary students from ever being comfortable regardless of the uniform they wear.

One may think that the solution to the problems of school uniforms is to simply abolish them. However, experience from places where school uniforms are not commonly worn such as the US, has shown that this is not the case. Despite not having uniforms, schools in the US will often issue a uniform policy that provides guidelines for student dress. These guidelines often have the same problems with sexualization that uniforms have and police girl's bodies much more strictly than boy's. An organisation called Girls Uniform Agenda advocates giving girls the option of wearing shorts and pants at school. However, this doesn't address the problems facing gender diverse youth and also means that girls with reactionary parents will likely not benefit from the policy as they will simply not buy their daughters shorts.

A much better solution would be to mandate children wear their sports uniform all the time. Most school sports uniforms are unisex and give all children the ability to play actively. In addition, having one unisex uniform alleviates a lot of the issues facing trans youth too. There are other benefits too. Having to only buy one uniform will help with affordability for low socio-economic standing parents. Sports uniforms are more suited to the Australian environment, class distinctions between private schools and public are diluted, and children with sensory processing issues often find sports uniforms a lot more tolerable. Overall, it is a reform with a lot of benefits and no obvious drawbacks.

The Commodification of a Marxist Icon

56th Anniversary of Che Guevara

Graham Holton

In January 1974 I was staying at a cheap boarding house in La Paz, Bolivia, when plain-clothes detectives came in to my room, saw the patch of Che Guevara on my jacket and tore it off. "There is no Communism in Bolivia." I was ordered to go to the CIB where I was lined up with others along a brick wall, which had bullet holes at chest height. After the interrogation I was ordered to leave the country. It was my introduction to the fear Guevara held in Bolivia, then under the dictatorship of Hugo Banzer, a far-right dictator responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Indigenous people.

Che Guevara was executed on 9th October 1967 in the small town of La Higuera, Bolivia. Mario Terán, the Bolivian soldier who executed Che under orders from the CIA, died in March 2022 at the age 80. The names of Che's executioners are long forgotten, but Che's image lived on as part of popular culture and as a symbol of the revolutionary movements against US imperialism. Following the coup in Chile in 1973, paintings of Che Guevara were burnt publicly in Santiago, in an attempt to stop the influence his image held as a symbol of the Left. From a feared symbol of revolutionary movements his image became appropriated as art, a fashion icon and in kitsch portraits. Che had become an image for bourgeois entertainment.

Philip Agee, a former CIA employee and author of *Inside the Company* (1975), wrote: "There was no person more feared by the company (CIA) than Che Guevara because he had the capacity and charisma necessary to direct the struggle against the political repression of the traditional hierarchies in power in the countries of Latin America." The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre described him as "not only an intellectual but also the most complete human being of our age." In the Pan-African community Frantz Fanon saw Guevara as "the world symbol of the possibilities of one man." Black Power leader Stokely Carmichael eulogised that "Che Guevara is not dead, his ideas are with us." Anthony Boadle, wrote in 2007 that Guevara was: "the poster boy of communist Cuba, held up as a selfless leader who set an example of voluntary work with his own sweat, pushing a wheelbarrow at a building site or cutting sugar cane in the fields with a machete." Che Guevara remains a national hero in Cuba. His image appears on his mausoleum in Santa Clara, Cuba, and his face is on the 3 peso banknote. School children begin each morning by pledging "We will be like Che."

The Irish artist Jim Fitzpatrick created the graphic image of Che's face in 1968. The poster bearing this image was shown at the Arts Laboratory in London. It quickly became the image used prominently in the student riots that swept across France in May 1968. Since then, Che's face has been commodified, merchandised and objectified, appearing in Australia on T-shirts, ice cream wrappers, posters and mural art. His life is told in films, such as *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004), in documentaries, plays, and in songs. The American singer Madonna uses Che's iconic photo on the cover of her 2003 album *American Life*. Yet the rights to Che's face are not owned by the Guevara family, but by the photographer and artist who created the image.

I was teaching Cuban history at La Trobe University in Melbourne, when I first researched the commodification of Che Guevara. The famous photograph of Guevara in a beret was taken by Alberto Korda (Alberto Díaz Gutiérrez) in 1960, titled *Guerrillero Heroico* (Heroic Guerrilla Warrior). British pop artist Sir Peter Blake regarded it as 'one of the great icons of the 20th century.' This photograph was the beginning of the commodification of the image of Che. Even in death Che was photographed. After his execution, Che's hands were cut off as proof of his death and his body was buried in an unmarked grave. The photograph taken of soldiers examining Guevara's body laid out on a table appears Christ-like, awaiting resurrection. Che soon appears as a 'Saintly Christ-like' figure amongst the Bolivian rural poor and was used as an insignia for youth striving for social rebellion. Carmen Oquendo-Villar writes in *Che to Che: Sexual Politics in Chile* that Che's image is an ever-present political and social emblem that has been morphed in popular culture. It operates as 'both a fashionable de-politicized logo, as well as a potent anti-establishment symbol used by a wide spectrum of human rights movements and individuals affirming their own liberation.'

Che's image has become a counter-cultural symbol that operates independent of who he was as a person, metamorphosed from his life as a revolutionary appropriated into a work of art. Hannah Charlton writes in *The Sunday Times* (2006) that 'Possibly more than the Mona Lisa, more than images of Christ, more than comparable icons such as the Beatles or Monroe, Che's image has continued to hold the imagination of generation after generation.' Marc Lacey writes in *The New York Times* (2006) that '40 years after his death Che is as much a marketing tool as an international revolutionary icon. Which raises the question of what exactly does the sheer proliferation of his image – the distant gaze, the scraggly beard and the beret adorned with a star – mean in a decidedly capitalist world?" Che's image has been preserved in popular myth; a world devoid of its initial reality. The image's commodification has lost its fear by the CIA, that of a revolution in Latin America. Today it makes money for corporations, which have no fear of nationalisation by Left-wing governments.

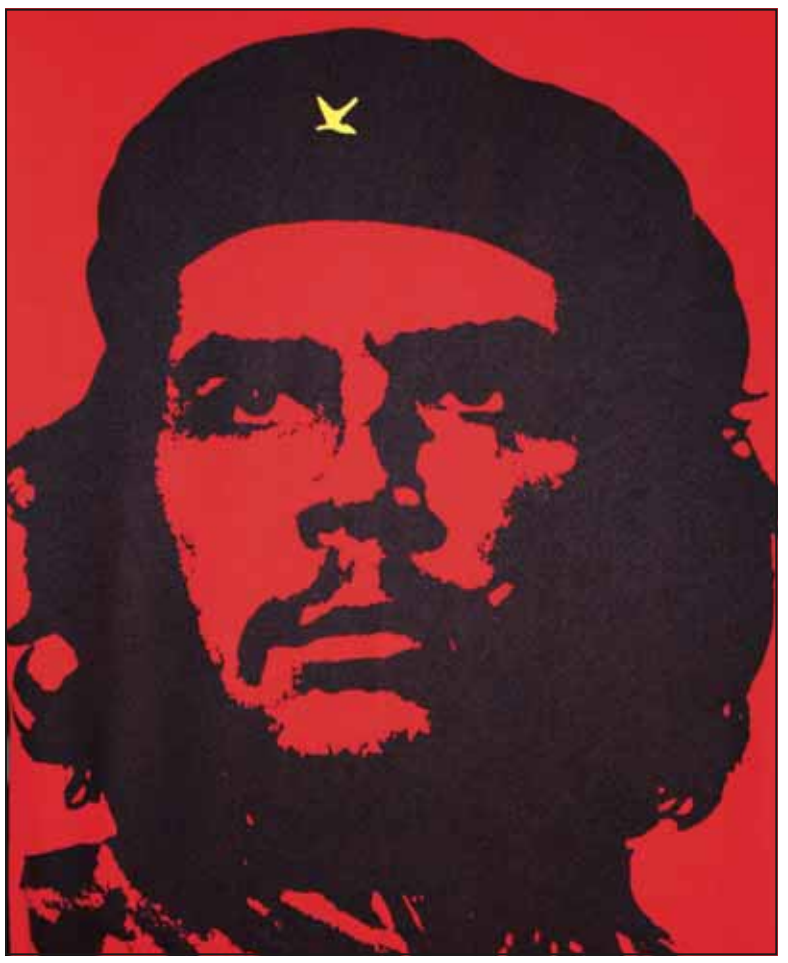

Photo: Matthew Hoelscher – flickr.com (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Vladimir Lenin explains in The State and Revolution (1917) this process of conversion from a feared political image into bourgeois icon. "During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their theories with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonize them, so to say, and to hallow their names to a certain extent for the 'consolation' of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter, while at the same time robbing the revolutionary theory of its substance, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarizing it." ✪

France: protests continue

Families, community groups and activists have marched through cities around France to decry racism and police brutality. Lingering anger over the police killing of 17-year-old Nahel Merzouk in June was widely cited by marchers, but the rallies also included groups with disparate demands for immigrants' rights, affordable housing and economic justice.

Around 30,000 police and gendarmes were working during Pope Francis's visit to Marseille and at three Rugby World Cup matches, according to the Interior Ministry.

The security presence was also reinforced for a three-day visit by Britain's unelected head of state and his wife, Charles and Camilla Windsor.

The protesters' demands include tougher rules limiting the use of police firearms, an independent body to replace the internal agency tasked with investigating police abuses and massive state investment in low-income neighbourhoods.

Marchers lamented what they feel has been a failure to address problems exposed by the killing of Merzouk, a French-born youth of North African descent, in the Paris suburb of Nanterre.

He was stopped by two officers – who subsequently alleged that he'd been driving dangerously – and died from a shot through his left arm and chest. The officer who fired the shot was given a preliminary charge of voluntary homicide.

Merzouk's death unleashed demonstrations against police violence and state oppression in Nanterre that spread nationwide.

"The police kill in France. That is not new," said Belkacem Amirat, a protester who came from the Paris suburb of Antony to march in the capital.

"But we have the impression that the middle classes and others outside the low-income neighbourhoods are gaining awareness of repression by the state."

Law student Justine Larnac said: "The system of police needs to be fundamentally reformed," notably to curb police violence during arrests and traffic stops and address racial profiling.

The protests were organised by left-wing party Unbowed and the CGT union. Climate activists, a farmers' collective and community groups that work to combat racism and police abuse also took part.

Morning Star ✪

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