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Hands off the CFMEU!

Anna Pha

Photo: Anna Pha

Nine media have launched an all-out offensive on the construction division of the CFMEU. The target is the whole union movement. If successful it will seriously weaken the trade union movement's ability to defend trade union rights and working conditions.

Nine media kicked it off with what it called a "joint investigation" by its print media and TV muckraking program *60 Minutes*. It could hardly be called investigative journalism.

It is nothing short of a rampant smear campaign with references to the Victorian branch's ties to organised crime, bikie gangs, and kickback offers. It is mostly innuendo and allegations with little if any concrete proof.

For example, the *Sydney Morning Herald*: "An undercover sting operation caught a self-styled CFMEU fixer offering to bribe construction union officials to push corrupt building firms onto large taxpayer-funded projects."

Is anyone calling for an investigation of the "corrupt building firms"?

Apart from the union itself, one of the main targets is the now-former secretary of the Victorian branch of the CFMEU John Setka.

The national executive of the CFMEU Construction and General Division was quick to act. In a letter to members, National Secretary Zach Smith announced that the Victorian branch will be placed into administration, and the National Office will assume all senior executive powers.

"This is the first time in our union's history that such action has been taken. However, we have no tolerance for criminality. Anyone found to have engaged in criminal conduct while representing the CFMEU will be identified and removed," the letter said.

"Our union exists for one purpose only: to defend and advance the safety and conditions of workers."

Smith added: "The Victorian Branch has been immensely successful in pursuing this purpose. I want to pay tribute to John Setka for his incredible achievements as Victorian secretary. He is a legend of our union who leaves an enormous legacy. However, recent allegations are serious and demand a thorough response."

It is this success that has made it a target of employers and class collaborationist Labor Party leaders.

"Our union operates in a tough industry where people are injured or killed every week and where shonky developers and contractors are often allowed to run rampant. We know that big business and their political backers will always hate our union because they think blue-collar Australian workers don't deserve decent pay or robust safety standards," Smith added.

PM Albanese, no friend of the Victorian branch or Setka, has directed Fair Work Commission manager Murray Furlong to appoint administrators. Furlong is a former executive director of the ABCC. The union is quite capable of dealing with its own affairs. Albanese should butt out.

As Smith said, "External administration and further interference of the government isn't necessary." He said that a "leading legal figure" would investigate credible allegations of wrongdoing. That was not good enough for Nine media.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* draws a long bow, ignoring the democratic structures of the union, saying. "There are serious questions about whether the CFMEU National Office is in a fit state to do this role, considering its leadership was installed by the likes of John Setka, who resigned over the controversy on Friday [12 July], and Darren Greenfield [NSW], who is fighting serious corruption charges."

The Labor government joined the employers and media with Albanese warning that the plans by the CFMEU national office to "clean up their own shop" might not go far enough. "They're on notice that we'll take whatever action is appropriate."

The federal government's actions might extend to the NSW and Queensland branches

PAST ATTACKS

The ground for this attempted disarming of the union movement was laid by the Labor Hawke-Keating government and its Prices and Incomes Accord with the ACTU in 1983. The Accord tied unions into the government's economic policies, committing them to cooperating with employers and making no extra claims on employers.

Struggle was replaced by "consensus",more accurately class collaboration. It severely restricted the right of unions to make claims on behalf of their members or struggle in their interests. It was the beginning of a slippery slope.

In 1986 the Hawke government and Victorian state government deregistered the militant Builders' Labourers' Federation. The BLF had won considerable gains for workers and struck out as a key voice on the left on social issues.

Deregistration was a sordid affair with BLF members forced to join another union or lose their jobs.

Many members of the BLF later joined the CFMEU.

In 1998 the Howard government and Patrick Corporation set out to destroy the militant Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) and remove it from the waterfront. The Howard government's thinking was that if the most militant unions could be destroyed the destruction of the remainder of the union movement would follow. It was a long and dirty battle with scabs flown in from Dubai to do the work of the wharfies.

The union movement, community groups and public united behind the MUA under the slogan "MUA here to Stay!" Thousands went down to the waterfront to join the pickets and bring supplies for locked out workers. The MUA is still here fighting for members' rights.

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Our union exists for one purpose only: to defend and advance the safety and conditions of workers

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Israel uses 'deliberate starvation'

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Guardian

Issue 2108 22 July 2024

What an envoy says

Do we need an anti-semitism envoy? Do we need an anti-Islamophobia envoy?

These questions may have gone through your mind if you noticed that Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has appointed an Anti-Semitism Envoy, Jillian Segal, former NAB CEO. If you're wondering what envoys even do, you're not alone.

The answer seems to be 'not much' or in the case of Barnaby Joyce 'pretty much nothing' (Joyce was made 'drought envoy' by PM Scott Morrison. There was no evidence of any activity on Joyce's part, but we were told he'd sent a text message to Morrison.)

Envoys are mostly a rubbish way of spending a little money to make it look like the government is taking a topic seriously, so don't hold your breath for Jillian Segal to do anything earthshaking. However, the appointment of an envoy tells us something. In the case of Barnaby Joyce, it told us that Morrison knew people were worried about drought, and that he wanted to keep Joyce's National Party happy.

Segal's appointment tells us that Albanese wants to buy off one section of the Australian Jewish community. He's appointed a fiercely partisan pro-Zionist who has lobbied universities to take disciplinary action against student protestors, and claimed that there is "no evidence that Israel is not observing the laws of armed conflict." She's repeated discredited claims that infants were beheaded by Palestinian fighters and criticised the Australian government for using the term "occupied territories." Segal has also said that calling an attack on hospitals a "war crime" is part of a "new wave of anti-semitism."

Segal is not so much an anti-semitism envoy, so much as an envoy for the Zionist view that absolutely any criticism of Israel is antisemitic. She certainly does not represent all Australian Jews. Jewish Council of Australia executive officer Sarah Schwartz has said that Segal's appointment "risks breeding and fuelling antisemitism ... by aligning us all with the state of Israel."

Segal was at NAB during 12 years of NAB engaging in bribery and forgery, charging customers more than $600 million for no service. What does her appointment say to the victims of Australia's big four banks?

Racism, including anti-semitism, has been a problem in Australia for a long time. Appointing a partisan Zionist envoy won't solve any of it. It doesn't mean as much as Social Services Minister Bill Shorten's recent photo op with professional racist Pauline Hanson, says a lot more to Aboriginal and Asian Australians than any envoy appointment.

Racism in this country, and elsewhere has long been used as a way to distract working people from the exploitation we face from Australia's corporate capitalist class.

You can see the distraction at work when lifelong racism-user Peter Dutton blames migrants for cost of living problems after he spent almost a decade in a government that opposed wage rises or increases in unemployment payments. Labor will happily lean into the racism-as-distraction tactic, as we've seen in its recent public fretting about "faith-based parties."

We don't need envoys. We need to fight the exploitation that racism provides cover for. It's no coincidence that the anti-semitism envoy is being appointed at the same time as Labor is attacking workers' rights by demonising an effective union, the CFMEU.

Envoys are at best useless, just a pretence of doing something. By encouraging the Zionist view of any opposition to an ongoing genocide as 'anti-semitism', this appointment is much worse than useless.

We need effective strong unions, and we need socialism. That's what the Communist Party of Australia is working for.

Hands off the CFMEU!

Continued from page 1

ROYAL COMMISSIONS

There have been four Royal Commissions into the building and construction industry.

The Cole Royal Commission was established in 2001 by Tony Abbott, then Minister for Industrial Relations in the Howard government. It found evidence of massive corruption and criminality on the part of employers. That didn't stop the Coalition using it to justify the introduction of the draconian Australian Building and Corruption Commission (ABCC).

The ABCC was set up to bankrupt and destroy the construction union. Basic trade union rights were outlawed and subject to massive fines running into hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars but the union never let up in fighting for members' wages and working conditions. Safety was one of the biggest issues.

There were numerous costly court cases defending the union and its officials. Union officials were restricted with limited right of entry to workplaces. Many lost their permits for carrying out legitimate union business. Other democratic rights were also removed.

The Gillard Labor government reduced the penalties and transferred the ABCC's functions to the Fair Work Ombudsman.

The Gillard/Rudd government was followed by the Abbott government which established the Heydon Royal Commission. It resulted in only one conviction for criminality of a union official and several employers charged.

The Commission heard a lot of allegations but saw little evidence. The media ran a smear campaign picking up on every allegation on a daily basis – anything to discredit trade unions in the eyes of the public and their members.

For example, the Fairfax press ran headlines about the CFMEU receiving $ 700,000 from a labour hire company associated with "underworld figure" George Alex. This money turned out to be the recovery of underpaid wages that were promptly forwarded to the workers involved. Other allegations and police actions also fell apart.

The ABCC was reinstated in its full splendour, immediately launching an all-out attack on the CFMEU construction division. The union was hit with millions of dollars in penalties and court costs. Workers were also fined tens of thousands of dollars, sometimes over action for a safe work environment.

Construction is one of our most dangerous industries, with employers taking shortcuts, workers being killed and severely injured. The ABCC was blind to corrupt and dangerous practices of employers. It didn't chase up non-payment of wages and benefits or breaches of safety regulations.

The Albanese government has abolished the ABCC, transferred its responsibilities to the Fair Work Ombudsman and reduced the penalties bringing them into line with those faced by other trade unions.

Now Nine media is leading the charge this time with PM Albanese and Victorian Premier Allan, once close to Setka, joining in.

The Master Builders Association is calling on the Fair Work Ombudsman to review CFMEU activities including whether recent enterprise bargaining agreements (EBAs) were in fact genuinely agreed.

There are other calls for the EBA agreements to be abolished – which amounts to collective punishment of the workers covered by them.

IMPORTANCE OF UNITY

Australian households are experiencing a deepening recession. The public health system is in crisis. Wages have not kept up. Inflation is taking its toll. The Reserve Bank of Australia is clobbering households in an attempt to tame the inflation beast. In the midst of a cost of living crisis the government is not dealing with, media and business lobbies are trying to blame the CFMEU over the housing crisis! The CFMEU does not have coverage over housing. It is governments who have failed by abandoning their responsibility to provide public housing.

The government is not tackling the economic crisis. It has embarked on a massive program of military spending. The last thing the government wants now is a militant trade union movement prepared to resist the austerity measures Labor has planned for households and workers.

Trade unions are becoming more militant. Nurses, teachers, health workers, paramedics, academics, we have seen workers prepared to fight and are take industrial action. Charities are now seeing families with two incomes and sometimes workers with two or three jobs struggling.

Construction employers are looking at the infrastructure programs that state governments have lined up. In Victoria $100 billion is on offer. They want to maximise their profits. In their eyes that means getting rid of the CFMEU.

The Business Council of Australia wants the CFMEU immediately banned from accepting government contracts. The track record for anti-union developers to deliver good, timely big infrastructure projects has been fraught with delays and cost overruns.

What we are witnessing now is a sharpening of the constant struggle against the incessant attempts of employers to reduce the share of profits going to the workers in the form of wages.

If employers and their agents in the corporate media succeed in destroying the construction division of the CFMEU, they will not stop there. Defeat of the CFMEU would be a defeat for all trade unions and their members and would seriously weaken the movement.

Disarming the organised working class is thus essential if a widespread austerity program and virtual slavery in the workplace are to be imposed. The bosses have made great advances towards this end.

The defeat of organised labour would remove the main barriers to the government's attack on left and progressive forces. It would remove the main barriers to its austerity measures.

It is imperative that unions, left and progressive parties, and all forces that support basic human and democratic rights unite now to defend our hard won, fundamental rights.

The CFMEU and other militant unions need to take the opportunity of building an independent trade union movement and disaffiliate from the Australian Labor Party.

The communist Party of Australia advocates for disaffiliation from the ALP for independent trade unions.

STOP PRESS: The ACTU has made the appalling decision to suspend the Construction and General Division of the CFMEU. ✪

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CC Statement in solidarity with the CFMEU

HANDS OFF THE CFMEU!

Photo: Anna Pha

The Communist Party of Australia Central Committee condemns in the strongest possible terms the most recent attacks against the CFMEU.

It is the view of the CPA that the rapacious attacks on the CFMEU are an attack on the entire labour movement.

The allegations made publicly by the 9 newspapers and the *60 Minutes program* on Sunday 14 July have the political objective of forcing the ALP federal government to introduce legislation to weaken the trade union movement.

The CPA respects the right of all workers to a job. For some of them it means having a second chance in life regardless of their previous personal circumstances.

The CPA strongly supports the right of unions to use their internal processes to identify issues and rectify shortcomings. The Party rejects external interference from either governments or employer groups.

The CFMEU leadership acted immediately through their internal structures to deal with the allegations labelled against the Victorian Branch, its biggest and most powerful branch.

We stand in solidarity with construction workers and their legitimate representative the CFMEU. A strong union in a tough industry in which workers are often robbed of their wages, conditions and entitlements, where many workers are injured or even lose their lives.

The CFMEU is sometimes the only hope for workers to have a safe workplace with the right to return home after each shift.

This is the time for the trade union movement to show its greatest unity and solidarity, in the spirit that an injury to one is an injury to all.

The CPA rejects the reintroduction of the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC), or federal intervention in the democratic running of unions.

The Communist Party of Australia proudly demands Hands off the CFMEU!

17 July 2024

CFMEU makes unprecedented response to serious allegations

An emergency meeting of the national executive of the CFMEU has decided that the Victorian Branch will be placed into administration, with the National Office to assume all senior executive powers.

CFMEU National Secretary Zach Smith said he would use the new powers to immediately establish an independent process, overseen by a leading legal figure, to investigate any credible allegations of wrongdoing.

"The CFMEU has zero tolerance for criminality and anyone found to have engaged in criminal conduct while representing the CFMEU will be identified and removed," Smith said.

"The CFMEU has one purpose and one purpose only and that is to defend and advance the safety and conditions of workers. The Victorian Branch has been hugely successful in pursuing this purpose, but the national executive also recognises that a number of recent allegations are serious and demand an unprecedented response."

Smith said although serious allegations of wrongdoing demanded a serious response, general smearing of officials and delegates because of their histories or personal relationships was completely unwarranted.

"Cancel culture will never be our culture," he said.

"Our union operates in a tough industry in which people are badly hurt or killed every week and in which shonky developers and contractors are allowed to run rampant.

"There are corporates and right-wing politicians who want our union to go away and they're not motivated by any actual ethical concerns, they just don't believe blue collar workers deserve decent pay or proper safety standards on site.

"The National Office will be uncompromising in cleaning up whatever wrongdoing we find because we know that blue collar workers depend on our union being strong and effective."

15 July 2024

Onshore Alliance: 'Heads must roll'

The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) and the Australian Workers' Union (AWU) are calling for heads to roll at the Western Australian Safety Regulator WorkSafe after failing to prosecute the companies responsible for a potentially deadly incident that was captured dramatically on video and exposed on the Offshore Alliance's social media channels.

Two offshore workers were almost killed in 2021 during the decommissioning of *Santos's Sinbad* oil platform, when the lifting process of an oil platform failed and the removed head of the platform swung wildly from a crane above the scrambling work crew, who hung for dear life on the side of the tower below. The workers were not just at risk of being crushed and killed by the flailing oil platform but could also have been killed by the steel lifting cables that broke during the lift and sliced through the air above their heads.

Video posted online by the Offshore Alliance on social media showed how close to death the work crew were during the incident.

The botched lift involved numerous companies: Santos contracted Dutch company Fugro to remove the *Sinbad* platform, Swiss-based Allseas supplied the crane-equipped vessel, and rope-access technicians were from the then Singapore-listed AusGroup.

The MUA and the AWU, through the Offshore Alliance, have pushed the WA safety regulator to investigate and pursue prosecutions over the reckless indifference to human life. However, the regulator wrote to the Offshore Alliance last week to claim too much time had passed since the incident to prosecute.

"Santos and Fugro would rather do a job quickly and cheaply than safely, but the WA safety regulator apparently doesn't want to take any action against these reckless industrial cowboys," said the MUA's Assistant National Secretary Thomas Mayo.

"If a safety regulator can't or won't do its job then that agency needs a clear out from top to bottom.

"The MUA will never stand idly by when there has been such a flagrant disregard of our members' safety by reckless and negligent companies."

Will Tracey, the Maritime Union's WA Branch Secretary, said the incident should have led to swift and vigorous prosecutions launched against those deemed responsible.

"Our message to the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety (DEMIRS) in WA is that if they won't prosecute this breach we are coming after them too," Mr Tracey said.

"It is unconscionable that the safety regulator sat on its hands for almost three years. If heads don't roll for this at WorkSafe the entire agency must be broken apart and rebuilt."

One of the key reasons Worksafe WA has refused to prosecute the incident is a flawed and dangerous logic that only prosecutions which would cost less to run than the maximum potential fine should be progressed. Worksafe WA claims that the maximum potential fine for the Work Health and Safety breach that occurred at the *Sinbad* platform was $110,000 at the time of the incident.

"This is an alarming and inexcusable failure from the safety regulator," said Kade Wakefield, AWU Acting National Secretary.

"DEMIRS exists to keep workers safe and to hold employers acting recklessly to account, but it is failing that mission.

"Workers need to be confident that there's a safety regulator with teeth that's willing to act in the interests of their safety at work. Right now, all we have here is a regulator rolling over and abandoning workers in the hydrocarbons sector."

Maritime Union of Australia

Babies in prison?

Graham Holton

Prisons in Australia are expensive, costing $7 billion per annum, and this cost of incarceration as punishment is ever increasing. According to Anthony Morgan's report, *How Much Does Prison Really Cost?* (2018), the net operating expenditure for an average prisoner is $268.59 per day, or $42,006.49 per annum. This is equivalent to having someone staying in a good hotel. Is there a better way of reducing crime without the need for tougher laws that are increasingly incarcerating ever more women?

Half of all women in prison have at least one child, and as many as 10 per cent are pregnant when entering prison. Little considered is the background to these women and why they are there. At least 50 per cent of imprisoned women have a history of mental illness, and/or suffered abused as a child. Indigenous women make up more than a third of female prisoners, although they constitute only 3 per cent of the country's female population.

In most states, except South Australia, women can bring their babies and young children with them, as few have partners to care for them. The only other options are grandparents or foster care. Tougher bail and sentencing laws have meant women are increasingly being denied bail for minor charges. High incarceration rates are not fixing criminality, but creating a worsening social problem, with 43,000 children having a parent in jail.

A baby at the Mae Rim Juvenile Correction Facility Thailand, sits with his teenage mother. Photo: SIM Central and South East Asia – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Little attention is given to the babies and toddlers who are in prison with their mothers. There are 13 women's prisons that accommodate children up to school age, to live with their mothers. Prisons have rooms purpose-built for up to ten mother-child pairs. Residents have their own bedroom and share a living area, kitchen and bathroom. Women work together to clean, buy food and prepare meals. Their parenting skills are monitored. Bringing children into prison is a privilege, which can be lost if they "slip up," by failing a drug test, disciplinary issues, or suffering from acute mental health problems. Few mothers are able to pass the stringent tests required to have their baby with them in prison. ✪

Long way to go on wages

'Profits, not wages driving inflation'

Despite recovering some lost ground, an OECD report has found that in Australia real wages are still 4.8 per cent lower than they were pre-pandemic in the last quarter of 2019.

Wages have grown less than in most OECD countries and below the median OECD average of 8.3 per cent.

The report also debunks any claims that there is a 'wage price spiral' in Australia, pointing out that excessive profits have caused inflation and hurt workers real incomes.

"As real wages are recovering some of the lost ground, profits are beginning to buffer some of the increase in labour costs. In many countries, there is room for profits to absorb further wage increases, especially as there are no signs of a price-wage spiral," the report states.

ACTU Secretary, Sally McManus says that the OECD report "shows the damage done by ten years of wages suppression under the last government." She added that Australian workers are "finally getting ahead."

"Unfortunately, the Coalition in office had a track record of delivering low wages growth and they still believe that it is a good thing. Last month, Shadow Finance Minister, Jane Hume said that the prospect of real wage growth for workers on awards would be 'the worst thing for Australians.' The reality is the worst thing for Australians is wages going backwards and this shows how out of touch they are.

"Now we have the OECD saying that real wages have ground to recover here, saying there is room for company profits to absorb further wage rises. They also point to profits, not wages, as driving inflation."

ACTU ✪

National staff strike to disrupt classes for hundreds

Classes have been cancelled for hundreds of students at SAE University College campuses across Australia as staff launched major strike action.

National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members at SAE – a national creative industries educational institute – have walked off the job in a significant escalation of their push for a fair pay rise and reasonable workloads. Staff have been in negotiations for nearly two years.

Almost all classes in Perth during the five-hour strike are expected to be affected, with NTEU members at the Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, and Byron Bay campuses also taking industrial action.

Management has proposed a pay increase just one cent above the minimum award rate, while negotiations over soaring workloads have also stalled.

NTEU National President Dr Alison Barnes said:

"SAE's leaders are out of touch with the needs of their hardworking staff.

"Union members have been left with no choice but to go on strike in the face of SAE's insulting pay offer and lack of progress on out-of-control workloads.

"For SAE staff enduring a cost-of-living crisis, this terrible pay offer is totally at odds with what people need to survive.

"SAE management needs to take these negotiations more seriously. This is the first enterprise agreement at SAE, and must include clear steps to relieve the pressure on staff.

"SAE staff are incredibly passionate about student learning outcomes, but they need to see meaningful progress on a fair pay rise and reasonable working conditions."

National Tertiary Education Union ✪

Dingo bytes

This week's target of US interventions and aggression since the end of WW2 is **Guatemala 1953-1990s:** A CIA-organised coup overthrew the democratically elected and progressive government of Jacobo Arbenz, initiating 40 years of death-squads, torture, disappearances, mass executions, and unimaginable cruelty, totalling well over 100,000 victims, indisputably one of the most inhuman chapters of the 20th century.

Arbenz had nationalised the US firm, United Fruit Company, which had close ties to the American power elite. As justification for the coup, Washington declared that Guatemala had been on the verge of a Soviet takeover.

The real problem in the eyes of Washington, in addition to United Fruit, was the danger of Guatemala's progressive ideas spreading to other countries in Latin America.

The leader of Nepal's largest communist party was inaugurated as Prime Minister at a ceremony in Kathmandu last week.

Khadga Prasad Oli, who heads the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist), was named for the post following the collapse of the previous coalition government.

The new government is a coalition of Oli's party with the Nepali Congress. The two parties are the largest in Nepal.

Two deputy prime ministers and 19 ministers appointed by him also took the oath of office.

The last government, headed by Pushpa Kamal Dahal, collapsed on Friday after Oli's party pulled out of the coalition to join the new partnership.

The new prime minister will have to seek a parliamentary vote of confidence within a month to continue in office, but that is not expected to pose a problem, since the two parties in the new alliance have enough votes between them.

One of biggest challenges facing Oli, who has been prime minister three times before, will be balancing Nepal's relationship with its giant neighbours India and China.

He worked his way up through the ranks of his party and, before the monarchy was abolished, spent a total of 14 years in jail for opposing autocratic rule.

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: Javier Milei As the Albanese Labor government prepared to launch an offensive against the unions with its attempted deregistration of the CFMEU, in Britain Argentinian trade unionist Adriana Pella brought greetings to the Durham Miners' Gala from Argentina's trade union federation the CGT.

She had a serious message for trade unionists, with Argentinians facing a war on the working class led by hard-right President Javier Milei as vicious as that waged by Margaret Thatcher against mining communities 40 years ago.

The CGT has led the way in opposing Milei's savage attacks on the public sector and workers' rights, holding two one-day general strikes and managing to get courts to pause his plans to increase probationary periods to make it easier to sack workers, cut compensation due to workers unfairly dismissed and reduce maternity leave.

Pella is in no doubt that the movement still faces the fight of its life. "We must defend the core values of trade unionism. Solidarity is the key to resistance."

Unions battled his attacks on labour rights because they were concerned they were unconstitutional, she explains, but Milei will need to be defeated industrially and politically, not in the courts.

"Solidarity is the key. And building working-class consciousness. To beat Milei, we are going to have to be smart," she says.

Jim Chalmers: ‘you can bank on us’

Photo: pixabay.com (CC0)

William Briggs

Australian Treasurer, Jim Chalmers’, has announced that the government will inject $6.3 million for initiatives to bolster Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Terrorism laws in the Pacific. The claim is that it’s all about making banking less risky. It has a good-news feel to it. Chalmers made it seem even cosier when addressing the Pacific Banking Summit in Brisbane. “The message we are sending today to the entire Pacific family is clear – you can bank on us.”

The Australian government and the Americans have expressed concerned about local banks pulling out of the region due to risks arising from breaching these laws. A process known as ‘de-risking’ looks to be underway. Banks either end or restrict relationships with customers rather than managing the potential risk to those customers.

For banks to withdraw their services from these small island states would have a devastating impact. We need look no further than regional and isolated communities in Australia who suddenly lose contact with a bank branch as it closes operations. The concern being shown by the Pacific nations’ big-brothers’ in Washington and Canberra may seem touching but the motivations are not entirely altruistic.

The US Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, Brian Nelson, spoke of his government’s recognition of the “economic and strategic significance of the Pacific region … De-risking – and the weakening of international financial ties more broadly – can impede financial access and inclusion for significant populations, drive financial activity into unregulated financial systems, inhibit investment and trade, and undermine financial stability and resilience.”

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told the Summit that the Biden administration remained committed to an Indo-Pacific that was “free and open, connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient … A key part of achieving that is making sure people and businesses in the region have access to the global financial system.”

The real commitment for Yellin, Nelson and for Chalmers is how to make sure that China does not offer any sort of banking lifeline to these states. Nauru, for instance has just one bank – Bendigo Bank. It had planned to shut up shop but has since delayed the move (possibly with a little persuasion from Canberra). News reached the Albanese government that a Chinese state-owned bank had expressed an interest in filling the void. This would not be permitted.

Chalmers said at the Brisbane conference that “the Albanese government is doing the hard work to make Australia the partner of choice for you all. We’re restoring trust and we’re rebuilding relationships in the Pacific.” That is very nice of the Australian government.

ANZ is the largest lender in the Pacific. It is in talks with the government about ways to make its business that little bit more profitable. They are playing the China card and almost declaring that their actions are ‘patriotic.’ ANZ CEO, Shayne Elliott went so far as to say that if “we were there purely commercially, we would have just shut it down.”

The conference was told that from 2011 to 2022, the Pacific region lost almost 80 per cent of its correspondent banking relationships (where one financial institution provides services to another one, usually in another country). Clearly these institutions do not have a Shayne Elliott at the helm who decry “purely commercial” interests.

The problem for countries like Australia and the US is that they have held these island nations as virtual colonies for decades. Economic realities and a steady capitalist crisis mean that profiteers like banks are simply cutting losses. China’s willingness to enter into ‘win-win’ relationships in key areas of trade and finance is, for imperialism, a terrifying prospect.

For the people of the Pacific islands, the prospect of the withdrawal of banks is more than simply inconvenient. The fact that slackness in the existing laws has allowed money laundering to become such a problem as to necessitate international intervention is concerning. It is hoped that a remedy can be found.

The broader concern for Treasurer Chalmers is to ensure “the ability of the Pacific to engage with the world,” or at least with those bits of the world that he considers appropriate. ✪

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GREEN NOTES

Endgame

Temperatures continue to rise, breaking records on a monthly basis accompanied by an increase in catastrophic weather events. In a paper published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (*PNAS*), a peer-reviewed journal of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), researchers from the University of Cambridge propose a research agenda to focus on “catastrophic” heat changes.

The agenda would include what they call the “four horsemen” of the climate endgame: famine and malnutrition, extreme weather, conflict, and vector-borne diseases (diseases carried by an agent, like a mosquito, a virus or bacteria). Global heating is already on a “catastrophic” path for humanity. The consequences of far higher temperature rises than many predict and the cascades of events that result are understudied. The world needs to start preparing for the possibility of a “climate endgame,” the researchers warn.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) says that by 2050, food production must increase by 60 per cent in order to feed the 9.8 billion people projected to be on the planet. Yet every 1°C increase in temperature during cropping seasons could lead to a 10 per cent drop in rice yield and a 6.4 per cent drop in wheat yields worldwide. High temperatures cause sterile pollen and so slash the number of seeds a plant can produce. Pollinators such as bees find it difficult to adapt to heat while drought, scorching heatwaves and floods destroy crops. For example, in April 2022, farmers in India’s Punjab state lost over half of their wheat harvest as a result of a scorching heat wave. Until now, we have no commercial crops modified to resist heat.

According to the Cambridge study we face outcomes ranging from a loss of 10 per cent of the global population to eventual human extinction. Paths to disaster are not limited to the direct impacts of high temperatures, such as extreme weather events. Knock-on effects such as financial crises, conflict, and new disease outbreaks could trigger other calamities and impede recovery from them. Dr Luke Kemp from Cambridge’s Centre for the Study of Existential Risk says that “there are plenty of reasons to believe climate change could become catastrophic, even at modest levels of warming.”

“Average annual temperatures of 29 degrees currently affect around 30 million people in the Sahara and Gulf Coast,” says co-author Chi Xu of Nanjing University. “By 2070, these temperatures and the social and political consequences will directly affect two nuclear powers, and seven maximum containment laboratories housing the most dangerous pathogens. There is serious potential for disastrous knock-on effects.”

More focus should go on identifying all potential tipping points within “Hothouse Earth” the researchers add: from methane released by permafrost melts to the loss of forests that act as “carbon sinks,” and even potential for vanishing cloud cover. “The more we learn about how our planet functions, the greater the reason for concern,” says co-author Prof Johan Rockström, Director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research.

The Australian government *must* halt the approval of new fossil fuel projects, accelerate the transition to renewables, and increase the funding to CSIRO to carry out climate research.

As Hannah Middleton put it in *Fighting for the Future*: “We face a ruling class with a single-minded fixation on profit and power. We face a constellation of powerful institutions and corporate power. The task ahead is monumental. Our actions must be truly historical in their sweep and consequences or we will lose the future. Humanity can opt for the preservation of capitalism or the preservation of a habitable environment.

“Our challenge is to build a movement powerful enough to overthrow the existing destructive order and begin the task of building socialism.”

Expose the crime, do the time

Anna Pha

The case of Julian Assange is well known. He spent years in tortuous confinement with the threat of deportation to the US and a life sentence hanging over his head. He was hounded and punished for doing his job as a journalist. His 'crime' was embarrassing US authorities by exposing their war crimes, spying, and corruption. The alleged criminals have not been punished, just whistleblower Assange.

A trend is emerging whereby whistleblowers acting responsibly and carrying out their public duty are being punished while the criminals they expose go free. The whistleblowers lives have been upended; some have lost their homes , and others lose their freedom.

A recent example is the case of **David McBride**, a former military lawyer who alleged that members of the Australian Special Forces had committed war crimes in Afghanistan. Before going public, McBride had raised his allegations through the proper Army channels, but they fell on deaf ears.

The Brereton report that followed McBride's allegations found evidence of 39 murders of civilians and prisoners by (or at the instruction of) members of the Australian Special Forces, subsequently covered up by ADF personnel. The report found that 25 ADF members were involved in the killings.

On 14 May this year, McBride was sentenced to five years and eight months imprisonment with a non-parole period of 27 months. He was not sentenced for whistleblowing, but for his conduct in unlawfully gathering evidence – secret documents – that he considered would support his disclosure of the alleged war crimes.

It is a catch-22 situation. McBride did what was necessary to back up his allegations. This was the crime. Reforms are urgently needed to close that loophole.

As Rex Patrick, former independent Senator and founder of the Whistleblower Justice Fund, said, "The only person imprisoned for war crimes committed by Australian forces in Afghanistan is the whistleblower, not a war criminal – that's not right."

The case of **Richard Boyle** also illustrates the failings of current whistleblower protection legislation. He faces criminal charges with a jail sentence of up to 46 years. He revealed a garnishee practice (dipping into a debtor's bank account), being used illegally by the tax office. At the same time as large corporations failed to pay taxes, the Australian Taxation Office targeted small businesses in order to meet key performance indicators.

South Australian Supreme Court Justice David Lovell explained in a decision on 19 June 2024 that Boyle, "faces criminal charges, not for the disclosure of information he believed needed to be disclosed, but for his conduct in unlawfully gathering evidence he considered would support his disclosure."

In other words, it is not the whistleblowing that is illegal but the conduct in gathering the evidence. Whistleblowers need evidence when making allegations. This is another catch-22. Boyle's allegations have since been vindicated, and the ATO has changed its practices. His sentence has not changed.

Tony Watson is a former tax lawyer and partner at PwC-owned tax advisory firm, Greenwoods & Herbert Smith Freehills. He alleged that the firm's largest partner, Lendlease, had incorrectly claimed hundreds of millions of dollars in tax deductions on a $1.7 billion purchase of retirement villages.

He was forced out of the company and is now fighting to keep his house. The *Treasury Laws Amendment (Tax Accountability and Fairness) Bill 2023* was passed in May this year. It is supposed to protect whistleblowers who disclose information to the Tax Practitioners Board (TPB).

David McBride and Richard Titelius, Perth 2022.

Watson is calling for a well-funded and well-resourced Whistleblower Authority to ensure that concerns raised by whistleblowers are acted upon; that would promote good corporate governance and discourage misconduct and malfeasance. An authority like that would save public money and ensure protection is genuinely available to all whistleblowers.

It would also engage barristers and level the playing field.

Australia needs whistleblower protections that work.

Adam Greenwood is facing criminal charges for alleged harassment by sending 8 emails to police alleging corruption on the Wingecarribee Shire Council in NSW. In the emails he made demands for the police to act on the corruption.

The matter has dragged on for almost five years and even involved terrorism police!

These and other cases reflect the grave injustices being meted out to whistleblowers. The current whistleblower protection legislation, in practice protects the corrupt and the criminal, and not the whistleblower.

In each of the above examples, Attorney General Mark Dreyfus has the power to intervene, but he sits on his hands. Both he and Albanese have praised whistleblowers in the past. More legislation is planned but will it overcome the catch-22 situation that has rendered current laws ineffective in the cases of McBride and Boyle?

Sunshine Coast 'RAP-Up'

Che Janz

This year I attended a public flag raising event in Nambour as part of NAIDOC week. Various dignitaries where there, including local Indigenous Elders, and the Mayor of the Sunny Coast, Rosanna Natoli.

Talking to Indigenous people and supporters, the main view was that the Gubbi Gubbi/Kabi Kabi land title victory is significant, but more focus is needed on other traditional owners of the land who don't have such representation on the Sunshine Coast especially the Jinibara people. Attendees also felt that more needs to be done for the Torres Strait Islander peoples.

After the discussions, the beginning of the ceremony began with some beautiful and iconic Indigenous music from a local Gubbi Gubbi/Kabi Kabi performer, with stories telling of harvesting Bunya nuts and respectful tributes to elders of the past. A young girl also spoke about how passionate she is to be a member of her mob.

Mayor Natoli gave a run-down of the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). She also described how Land title recognition affirms that the Gubbi Gubbi people have always been caring for the land, so the Sunshine Council will have direct input from Indigenous bodies regarding future developments.

The speech sounded progressive but was very light on specifics. The ceremony came to its planned conclusion smoothly when Natoli and an Elder raised the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags side by side.

After the celebrations I had an opportunity to speak to the mayor directly. I simply asked what noticeable changes she thought would have come from RAP action by the same time next year.

The response was along the lines of "I cant say, as it's not up to the council who organises the RAP." The mayor couldn't tell me anything that would directly result from the Action Plan she'd been celebrating.

This response cast a shadow over an otherwise poignant moment that bought the community together. Politicians can announce things, but aren't as good at making them meaningful.

It is too early to judge how the RAP will affect the coast, but hopefully it will be more than just tokenistic.

Northern Territory: call for 'justice and fairness'

The upcoming Northern Territory election presents a real opportunity for all sides of politics to commit to a fairer and more just territory, say local lawyers.

Australian Lawyers Alliance (ALA) Northern Territory President Cathy Spurr said the organisation has outlined four areas of consideration by candidates from political parties and independent candidates.

"This election is a valuable opportunity for all parties to ensure we get the balance right regarding justice in our state. We have written to the candidates from political parties and independent candidates highlighting our key priorities and asking for them to share their views on these issues," said Spurr.

The priorities the ALA is focused on are: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice, abuse law reform, protecting human rights and freedoms in the Northern Territory, and raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility.

"There is an urgent need to implement strong legislative human rights protections for all people in the NT," said Spurr. "We are calling for a legislative human rights instrument that will ensure all Territorians are treated with dignity and respect. Currently, most human rights are largely unenforceable and remedies for their breach unavailable.

"We are also calling on parties and candidates to commit to raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility in the NT to 14 years, rather than 12 years under the current legislation. There must also be sufficient resources in place for alternative programs for children, instead of processing them through the criminal justice system.

"If children are to be detained, then they cannot be detained in the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre, which is not fit for purpose.

"Law reform is also urgently needed to resolve compensation claims fairly for people who have suffered sexual abuse as a child, including in an NT institution. There is urgent attention needed to prevent abuse as the risk of harm is ongoing and concerning.

"Work is also needed to ensure that victim survivors of abuse making compensation claims are being responded to in a timely manner, particularly in relation to accessing their own records.

"As a community we can do better, and we are calling on all candidates in the upcoming Northern Territory election to aspire to creating a community that treats everyone, including those most vulnerable, with fairness and respect."

Lawyers Alliance

Climate crisis hits Latin America

Graham Holton

Flooded Cartagena, Colombia. Photo: ChrisGoldNY – flickr.com (CC BY-NC 2.0)

In 2023 climatic changes in Latin America and the Caribbean affected basic infrastructure, clean water supply, electricity generation, and food production. This places livelihoods and basic health services at risk, with the losses of 2 per cent of annual GDP amounting to billions of dollars. Between 1998 and 2020 climate-related events in the region claimed more than 312,000 lives, and affected more than 277 million people. The region's climate crises have severely damaged the regions' health and food security, with 13.8 million people suffering acute food crises.

The United Nation's World Meteorological Organization (WMO) report, confirms that last year was the hottest year on record, with a mean temperature 1.39°C above the 1961–1990 baseline.

Drought has become increasingly widespread in the northern half of South America and long-term drought continues in subtropical South America. In Panama, the Canal's low water levels restricted shipping traffic. Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Argentina recorded their highest September temperatures on record. Since 1991 Mexico has experienced the fastest rate of warming in the region, of 0.3°C per decade. This year temperatures were over 45°C.

South America suffered long, intense heat waves that, combined with soil drying, sparked unprecedented wildfires. Chile experienced its worst ever brushfires. There was an almost total loss of snow cover in the glaciers of the central Andes, which accelerated glacial melting. In Argentina the World Glacier Monitoring Service (WGMS) says the reference glacier, Echaurren Norte, has lost 31 metres of water equivalent since 1975.

Around the western Atlantic Ocean, sea levels rose at a higher rate than the global average, threatening coastal areas and small island states. WMO Secretary-General, Celeste Saulo, said: "El Niño conditions during the second half of 2023 contributed to a record warm year and exacerbated many extreme events." Human-induced climate change has caused rising temperatures and more frequent and extreme weather hazards. The impact of heatwaves, air pollution, food insecurity, and mosquito-borne diseases, such as dengue fever, have worsened. El Niño reduced fishing catches in countries like Peru and Ecuador.

According to the Emergency Events Database of the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), last year there were 67 hydrological and climate-related hazards in the region. Of these, 77 per cent were storm and flood-related events. The economic damage is estimated at over US$21 billion (AU$31bn).

Latin America and the Caribbean only generate 10 per cent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, but the region suffers the worst effects of global warming. As Latin America's climate changes it is facing temperature rises, drought and heavy rains. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, extreme climate and hydro-meteorological events resulted in the displacement of people, numerous fatalities and significant economic losses.

The rising sea levels of the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans are impacting coastal environments. This has disrupted food and water supplies for towns and cities, contaminated freshwater aquifers, eroded shorelines, inundated low-lying areas, and increased the risks of storm surges. Infrastructure systems are collapsing. These changes have detrimentally impacted health and welfare services.

The OECD and the World Bank report, *Health at a Glance: Latin America and the Caribbean 2023*, warns that health systems are being challenged by the present climatic changes. The need to develop health plans and strategies has not kept pace with these changes: "there is less evidence on concrete and context-specific policies and plans that integrate adaptation actions to strengthen health systems."

According to WMO projections, by 2027 world temperatures will exceed 1.5°C above the 1850 baseline. Some scientific reports show that the world is already at this figure. We have reached a major turning point in the fight against climate change, and developed countries have not implemented sufficient production systems that are carbon neutral. The Paris Accord Agreement is for countries to be at 80 per cent NetZero by 2035. Australia lags well behind this target.

'Austerity Rampage' – the horror of Project 2025

Saranyan Ranjith

On 6 July, Common Dreams, a US progressive news outlet, published an article entitled: "With Attention on Presidential Contest, GOP Goes on Austerity Rampage." The author Jake Johnson highlights that the Republicans have made a concerted effort to impose funding cuts on vital services such as public education, environmental protection, nutrition assistance and reproductive rights. These measures combined with tax cuts to the wealthy, all enacted in preparation for a potential Trump electoral victory in November, will further increase inequality in a nation where 1 in 9 live under the poverty line. The measures line up with the policy recommendations of Project 2025.

Project 2025 is an extensive plan devised by the conservative Heritage Foundation, to be used in the first 180 days of the next conservative presidency. The first 'pillar,' a 900+ page document entitled "Mandate for Leadership: A Conservative Promise." outlines the Foundation's desire for a radically restructured bureaucracy and a more militaristic foreign policy under a president who has direct control over the executive branch.

The plan calls for the abolition of multiple government agencies such as the Department of Education, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. It also calls for the weakening and co-option of others like the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Institute of Health. Other notable domestic proposals include a national consumption tax, an extension of the tax cuts passed during the first Trump administration, the undoing of climate action, the effective replacement of unions with collaborationist "Employee Involvement Organisations," the defunding of vital and under-resourced welfare programs such as Medicare, free school meal programs and Medicaid, and the removal of the requirement for the Federal Reserve to guarantee "full employment" so that it can focus on inflation alone.

Project 2025 also calls for the further modernisation of the US nuclear arsenal, investment in space weaponry, aggressive military posturing towards China, regime change to establish a "sovereign Mexico" that would be 'free' from cartels, continued support for Israel, normalisation and a security pact between Israel and the Gulf states, the US to "unite the [Western] Hemisphere" against Venezuela, and a push for NATO and other allies (such as Australia) to increase their rate of militarisation.

The Heritage Foundation intends for Project 2025 to be a repeat of the original 1981 "Mandate for Leadership" document that they drafted for the incoming Reagan administration. It was extremely influential, with the administration following more than sixty per cent of the policy recommendations, and the political discourse shifting rightwards. In 2005, then-Heritage Foundation president Ed Feulner exclaimed that "Today, these [conservative] principles [in "Mandate for Leadership"] are well established in Washington, well accepted by American voters, and well understood ... in policy."

In Project 2025's case, there have already been cuts to the same government agencies that Project 2025 aims to abolish or weaken, the current Supreme Court has already set the precedent that presidents are immune from prosecution, and it has recently limited the ability of federal agencies to regulate industry.

Characteristically, Trump has denied any connection to Project 2025, but there is ample evidence of involvement from people who have worked with him.

Beijing hosts rival Palestinian groups

Stijen Kinch

Reports from *Al Arabiya* say that senior officials from Fatah and Hamas, two major Palestinian groups, will meet this month in Beijing to aim for reconciliation.

The Fatah group will be headed by Mahmoud Alul, and Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamas political chief, based in Qatar will head Hamas' delegation.

After Hamas won a 2006 election, Hamas fighters expelled Fatah from the Gaza Strip, and the two groups have been rivals ever since. Hamas has ruled Gaza from then on.

Fatah, more secularist, has partial authority in the West Bank, although Israel occupies that territory. Fatah controls the Palestinian Authority.

Calls for reconciliation have grown since the Hamas 7 October attacks on Israel set off Israel's genocidal attack on Palestine. In the West Bank violence from Israeli settlers and soldiers has also increased.

A meeting scheduled for June was postponed, after Fatah and Hamas were hosted by China in April this year.

Fatah's central committee deputy secretary general Sabri Saidam says that Chinese officials will meet with representatives of the two groups in Beijing on 20 and 21 July. He also said that the two groups could meet before then.

The goal, said Saidam, is to "end the state of division," and agree on a relationship between Hamas and Fatah.

China recognises Palestine, but has otherwise been cautious in statements on the conflict, unlike the USA which arms and funds Israel.

NATO Summit beats the drums of war

William Briggs

The 75th anniversary of NATO has concluded. At its recent Summit, Ukraine was top of the agenda, and it is clear that its proxy war against Russia will drag on. The assembled warlords spoke of how their organisation promotes stability and holds "autocrats" at bay and to account. Such an anniversary allows for reflection on the history of the pact and a view of how it sees the world and its role.

NATO's birth came just as the Cold War was beginning. In 1946 Churchill made his infamous iron curtain speech. In 1949 NATO was created, ostensibly to provide 'collective security against the Soviet Union.' In fact the Warsaw Pact was not formed until 1955 and was created to act as a defensive bloc against NATO. As someone said, NATO existed to solve the problems caused by its existence.

In 1991 when the Warsaw Pact was dissolved, the end of the Cold War should have meant that there was no longer the need for such blocs. Since then, NATO has got bigger, more aggressive and now threatens to expand into the Asia-Pacific area.

Michael Carpenter, senior advisor for Europe at the US National Security Council spoke to the media, at the beginning of the NATO Summit, saying that "today, our Alliance is larger, stronger, better resourced, and more united than ever before ... Our alliances make us safer and stronger ... Over the past few years, NATO has also enhanced our global partnerships."

This was in reference to new partnership arrangements with Australia, Japan and South Korea as a forerunner to an Asian expansion of NATO, designed to further threaten China, as well as the closer integration of Ukraine as its membership of NATO gets closer. He stressed the importance of this because, 'the global threats and challenges we face, including from authoritarian actors and terrorist organizations, are all inextricably linked.'

While the scope of this belligerent group has grown, so too have the military budgets of its member states. Twenty-three NATO states now spend in excess of two per cent of total GDP on their militaries. Carpenter expressed his personal satisfaction and that of the USA which has repeatedly urged sometimes-reluctant allies to spend more, even as their economies crumble.

He was also happy to report that, "our allies are not just spending more on defence, they're also spending more to ensure Ukraine has what it needs to prevail on the battlefield." Those few words sum up the way the US views the world.

When any representatives of a major capitalist economy speak of defence, the defence of their economies is never far from their minds. The crisis in capitalism leaves little room for developments in economic growth, beyond the promotion of the arms trade and the manufacture of weapons.

A driving factor behind the talk of 'defence' was revealed by Carpenter when he said to the assembled media that the increased spending by NATO states, "is helping to revitalize production lines across the Alliance, including here in the United States. We're manufacturing weapons that improve our military readiness and make the United States and Allies more secure while at the same time strengthening our economies." The needs of government and capital go together.

The additional military spending has been demanded by the US, which uses NATO as a front organisation. When President Biden speaks of 'running the world' and alarms, the world and his Democratic Party apparatchiks, he is simply telling the world and his 'allies' how things are!

The NATO Summit produced a 38-point joint statement. The most significant elements of this statement revolve around Ukraine and NATO's war with Russia. Moscow was declared to be the major threat to the security of all NATO members. Any doubts about Ukraine joining the military bloc were removed. The declaration was unequivocal in stating that Ukraine's "future is in NATO" and that Ukraine is on an "irreversible path to full Euro-Atlantic integration, including NATO membership."

The declaration also turned its attention to China, which was described as a "decisive enabler of Russia's war against Ukraine" because of its "large-scale support for Russia's defence industrial base." The US and its allies say this a lot, but that doesn't make it true. Beijing denies it.

NATO leaders also made it clear that Iran and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) are in their sights for "fuelling Russia's war of aggression" by providing direct military support to Russia. For NATO, sovereign rights only apply when they fit with the demands of the USA.

The declaration also boasts that NATO has undertaken the biggest reinforcement of its "collective defence" in a generation. That means the capacity to shift its sphere of operations and influence to any part of the world, and to target any state that dares not accept the dictates of the US rules-based-order.

Photo: NATO/WO FRAN C Valverde – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

NATO Secretary-General, Jens Stoltenberg, was quick to promote the importance of what he described as the most "comprehensive defence plan since the Cold War." The plan includes having 500,000 troops "at high readiness" and spending more on air and defence missile systems and "defence industry cooperation."

The NATO meeting announced what it coyly described as a "further integration" with Ukraine's military. It has pledged an additional US $60 billion for the next year and has promised F-16 fighter jets. Stoltenberg said defensively that NATO didn't want to "prolong a war," which would be more convincing if they hadn't been prolonging one for years.

When NATO was born 75 years ago, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists set the hands of the 'doomsday clock' at three minutes to midnight. The dubious reason for NATO's creation no longer exists and yet the militarisation promoted by NATO in Europe and increasingly world-wide continues. The hands of the doomsday clock are now at 90 seconds to midnight.

Activists protest NATO Summit in Washington

Demonstrators representing a diverse coalition of anti-imperialist and anti-war organizations staged a mobilization ahead of the NATO summit, held in Washington, DC from 9-11 July. This protest was organised by the Resist NATO coalition, which includes organisations such as the International League of Peoples' Struggles, the Resist US-Led War Movement, and BAYAN-USA, which engages diaspora Filipinos in the struggle against imperialism.

"NATO's 75th summit is occurring during Russia's counter-aggression strategy against US-NATO military escalation and NATO territorial expansion, which has enabled NATO to call on its members to provide billions in weapons and military aid. The summit is also occurring when NATO is building military partnerships with Indo-Pacific countries to counter the influence of China," said organisers from the Resist NATO coalition.

Organisers also pointed out that Washington and NATO partners "supply the means for the state of Israel to conduct its genocidal war on Palestine."

Globetrotter

Macron delays mandate for New Popular Front

The results of the general election in France are in: the left-progressive alliance New Popular Front (NFP) will be the largest parliamentary group with 182 seats, followed by 168 seats held by Emmanuel Macron's liberal coalition, and 143 seats by the far-right National Rally, which includes supporters from the Gaullist party Republicans. However, none of the three groups secured an absolute majority of 289 seats, leading to uncertainty about the next steps.

While most have no doubt that the NFP, which ran on a platform of strengthening public services and addressing the cost-of-living crisis, should be given the chance to form a government, President Emmanuel Macron himself asked Prime Minister Gabriel Attal to "stay for a while longer" when he offered his resignation on Monday, in order to "ensure the stability of the country."

"Emmanuel Macron wants Gabriel Attal to stay on as prime minister 'to ensure the stability of the country.' It's a strange democratic concept to act as if the election didn't produce a clear result: Mr Attal is in the minority. True stability would mean letting the majority, i.e., the NFP, govern," said Éric Coquerel, a representative of France Unbowed.

"The president has the duty to call the NFP to govern," Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of France Unbowed, said after voting stations closed. "Voters have chosen between two radically opposed projects. The NFP is ready to govern. It is the only well-constructed, coherent, and united alternative option, equipped with an organised and detailed program."

A countervailing view is that the NFP was cobbled together out of a large number of left groups that wanted to stop the neo-fascist Marinne Le Pen gaining power. Those groups disagree on many issues, so may have difficulty governing.

Globetrotter/Guardian, the Workers' Weekly.

Capitalism and terror: Trump $2 billion richer after assassination attempt

CJ ATKINS

Being shot turned out to be a very profitable experience for former US President Donald Trump.

He personally made $2 billion as shares of Trump Media & Technology Group surged 55 per cent early Monday morning. At one point they were up as much as 71 per cent before settling at the opening of the market. The company operates Trump's propaganda social media platform, Truth Social.

Wall Street, convinced that the attempt on Trump's life has boosted his election chances in November, is pouring cash into the Republican nominee's money-losing company and other firms seen as benefiting from another MAGA administration. Some bookies peg Trump's odds of winning at 72 per cent as of Monday morning; Biden's chances stand at 18 per cent.

"The events on Saturday, if they do anything, they strengthen the case for President Donald Trump to win the election in November. I think that's what the markets have reacted to," stock analyst Rob Casey of Signum Global said. Another investment advisor told clients, "Trump was already the clear frontrunner, and the shooting will only cement that status."

Matthew Tuttle, CEO of Tuttle Capital Management, was even more direct: "You are seeing the Trump trade on steroids here. DJT is the go-to!"

Trump launched Truth Social after the 6 January 2021, coup attempt got him temporarily banned from mainstream apps like Twitter (X) and Facebook. The alternative social media platform is an insulated online world where users only see pro-Trump "news" and cultural content that reinforces or supports Republican policies.

Trump himself is the majority shareholder, owning 114.75 million shares, or 60 per cent of the company. As of this writing, those shares are worth approximately $5.6 billion, up from $3.5 billion at the market's Friday close. That means the former president saw his personal wealth grow nearly $2 billion since a bullet grazed his ear.

The company, which uses Trump's initials as its stock code, DJT, has seen volatile trading all year long, with its fortunes moving in tune with the GOP leader's legal and political ups and downs.

It hit $79 per share when it debuted on the New York Stock Exchange in March but sank in April when Trump's porn star hush-money trial started. It plummeted again, nearly 50 per cent, in the weeks after his felony conviction.

Truth Social has been persistently plagued in the eyes of investors with a small user base, which is still dwarfed by those of the corporate social media giants. It also struggles to secure ads from all but a handful of openly pro-Trump firms and clickbait dating websites.

DJT's CEO is former Californian Republican politician Devin Nunes, who played a key role in Congress trying to derail the first Trump impeachment. Under his leadership, the company has rarely made money, and has also been investigated for possible money laundering.

In its most recent quarterly earnings report, the company said it generated only $770,500 of revenue in the first part of the year and lost $327.6 million. But after the failed assassination, many Wall Street watchers are gambling that Truth Social is about to see a major turnaround.

Neil Wilson, the chief analyst at the Finalto brokerage firm, called the huge jump in share price "a bet on Trump." But it's also a sign, he argued, that investors believe "more people will be drawn to the platform to access a re-elected Trump."

It's not only Truth Social that's attracting fresh investments in the wake of the Pennsylvania terror. Capitalism finds profit opportunities in every situation, and the perception that another Trump presidency has become more likely is brightening the prospects for many industries.

Shares of gun and ammunition manufacturers all jumped, some as high as 14 per cent – a common occurrence after mass shootings and terror attacks, which prompt calls for gun control and in turn elevate gun sales. Geo Group and CoreCivic, operators of private prisons, rose 9.4 per cent and 5.6 per cent, respectively. They are seen as likely beneficiaries of Trump's promise of mass immigrant arrests.

Bitcoin, the biggest player in the shadowy cryptocurrency market, was up almost 10 per cent Monday, hitting $63,000 per coin. A Trump-inspired crypto token, MAGA, went vertical on Saturday. The coin has a market capitalisation of nearly $400 million, up 40 per cent since Friday.

According to one analyst, crypto investors believe Trump would free them of government oversight. Rania Gule of XS.com, told the press, "If re-elected, Trump may seek less stringent regulatory policies towards cryptocurrencies, potentially improving regulatory conditions and encouraging more investments."

Health insurance giants Humana and UnitedHealth Group are also seen as big winners in a second Trump term, with investors believing less regulation and the dropping of some of Biden's pharmaceutical price controls will boost their bottom line. Both companies added to their share prices on Monday.

On the opposite side of the ledger, the shares of clean energy companies slid, a reflection of Trump's promise to reverse the climate change mitigation policies of the Biden administration. Invesco Solar ETF fell 5.7 per cent, and iShares Global Clean Energy ETF shed 3.6 per cent.

Emboldened by the fist-pumping and bloody-faced Trump, a growing number of billionaires have made official what most observers already knew: They're backing the MAGA campaign. Within hours of the shooting, Elon Musk and Bill Ackman both tweeted out their support.

While the bookies, betters, and gamblers among the capitalist class are all putting their cards on the table and showing their hands for Trump, there is one thing that none of their markets, models, or media are measuring: The determination of millions of people in the US to march to the ballot box in November to block fascism and reactionary corporate rule.

People's World ✪

Global Briefs

China: China has released a white paper on marine ecosystem preservation, detailing China's issues, actions, and achievements to the international community to advance understanding and encourage international co-operation. Key areas addressed include efforts to improve the marine environment, the promotion of co-existence between humans and marine ecosystems, and the use of systematic governance and scientific and technological developments to improve conservation and restoration. Strategies include regulation of industries such as maritime transportation, as well as new technical standards and permit systems set to be implemented for marine engineering and waste disposal. Risk assessments and contingency response plans have also been conducted and implemented for more than 5,400 enterprises involved in hazardous chemicals, heavy metals, nuclear power, and similar areas.

Japan: Concerns about a Pacific arms race, or the dissolution of diplomatic relations in the region in favour of drawing military divisions, have been raised in light of the increasing willingness of Western-aligned nations in the region to welcome NATO intervention. Plans are reportedly underway to establish the exchange of confidential security information between Japan and NATO, which observers have noted are part of the US plan to construct an 'Asian NATO' with countries like Japan at the centre. Australia, South Korea, and New Zealand are also involved, once again attending the NATO summit as allies. In 2023, Japan and NATO signed the Individually Tailored Partnership Program to expand co-operation across all areas of warfare, while Japan has also signed multiple defence training and capacity building agreements with NATO members.

Ecuador: A court ruling has found that the Machángara River's rights have been violated by pollution in the capital of Quito. Ecuador is one of a few countries in the world (another is New Zealand) which recognises the rights of natural features such as rivers not to be polluted. This recognition is enshrined in Ecuador's Constitution. The complaint on the river's behalf was launched by the group Kitu Kara, and is currently under appeal by the Ecuadorian government. In the meantime the government must implement a plan to clean up the river. Specific concerns raised include dangerously low oxygen levels in the river and practices of wastewater dumping.

Colombia: Vice-President France Marquez's motorcade was attacked by an unknown shooter with a rifle. The attack took place in Valle del Cauca while the Vice-President was carrying out duties in the city of Cali. The attack hit the car in which the Vice-President normally travels, without causing any injury to the occupants.

Sahel: The biggest states in the Sahel region – Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali – have held the first summit of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), further breaking away from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). ECOWAS has long been plagued by interference and control by France and other Western states. Countries such as France rely on the AES countries as sources of gold, uranium, and other mineral resources, while the working peoples of these countries endure mass poverty, food insecurity, and other symptoms of imperialist exploitation. Interventions such as NATO's destruction of Libya have also contributed to far-right violence in the region. The three leaders of the AES – Assimi Goita (Mali), Ibrahim Traoré (Burkina Faso), and Abdourahamane Tchiani (Niger) – have condemned Western control of the region. Traoré and Burkina Faso's Prime Minister Apollinaire Kyélem de Tambèla, for example, have called upon the tradition of Pan-Africanist and Marxist movements such as that of Thomas Sankara, while the AES has moved to establish financial sovereignty by developing alternatives to the imperialist World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Book Review

The Rare Metals War: The dark side of clean energy and digital technologies

by Guillaume Pitron

Graham Holton

French Journalist Guillaume Pitron has written a fascinating, well-referenced and important study on the consequences of the world's increasing demands for the rare earths necessary to manufacture new technologies. He has produced an eye-opening analysis of what is required to mine and refine the requirements for our 'Green' technologies. Pitron raises the question of how green is "Green," and what impact it is having on developing countries, indigenous peoples and the environment.

To meet the Paris Accord goal of NetZero by 2050, the world needs green technologies. These require large deposits of rare earths – so named, not because they are hard to find, but because high concentrations of the metals are rare. These minerals consist of a family of seventeen elements, including scandium, yttrium and lanthanum. Rare earth production will need to double exponentially every fifteen years, which Pitron says is equivalent to mining "more mineral ores than humans have extracted over the past 70,000 years." Inevitably, the way extractive capitalism works, this rush for mineral deposits will have a devastating impact on the environment, indigenous peoples and civil and sovereign rights in developing countries.

Without these rare metals, modern technology would not function, whether it is telecommunication, electrical and hydrogen engines, renewable energy technologies, computers, lighting, or satellites. While the world maintains adequate supplies of base metals, even they have limited life spans. Antimony, necessary for car batteries, has only 12 years of known reserves, while zinc and tin have around 18 years of reserves remaining. Rare earth metals are rarely recycled, as so little has been used until now. There is an acute shortage of rare earths, so more reserves must be found quickly.

Most of the minerals needed for the modern green revolution are supplied only by a few countries. China has already placed tough restrictions on its rare earth exports to ensure it has enough for its own industries, forcing other industrialised nations to search for new supplies. China accounts for 85 per cent of global rare earth production, 86 per cent of tungsten, 83 per cent of germanium, and 73 per cent of natural graphite. South Africa supplies 71 per cent of the world's platinum, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has 63 per cent of the world's cobalt. Russia supplies 40 per cent of the world's palladium and Turkey 48 per cent of its borate.

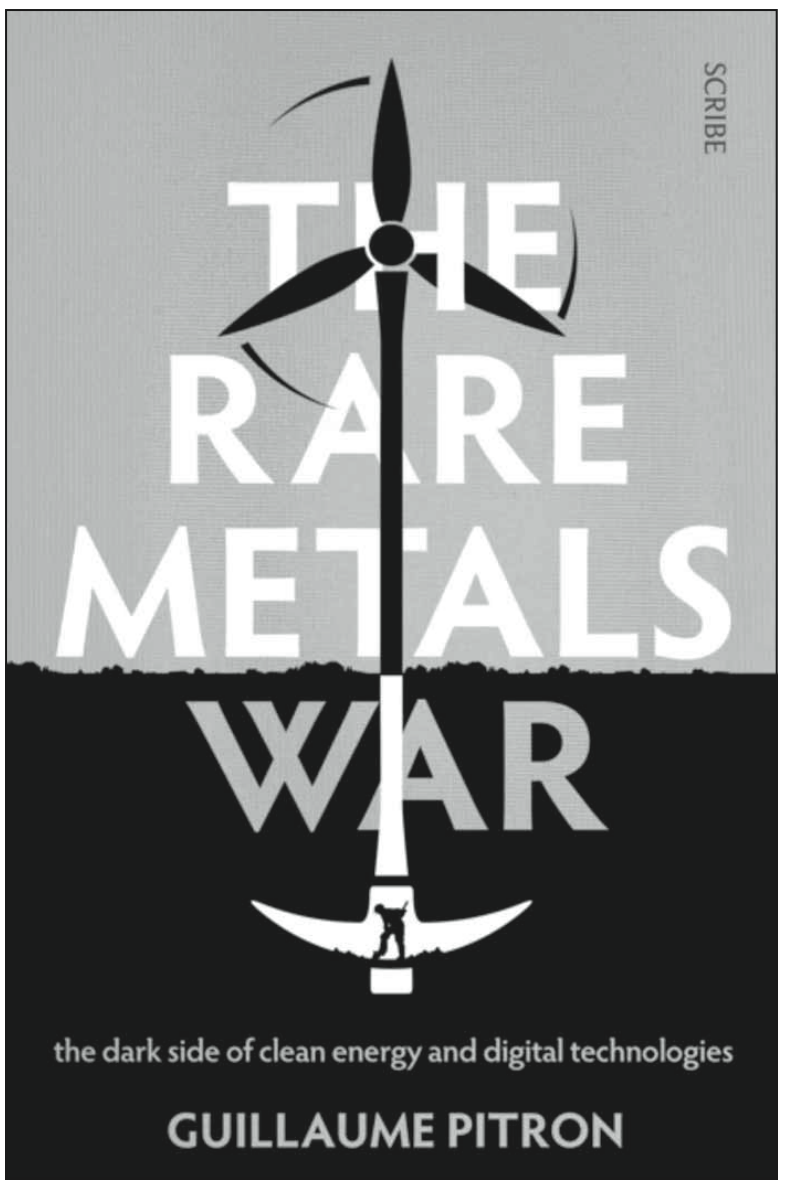
The demand for electric vehicles will require 400 new mines by 2035, including 97 for natural graphite, 74 for lithium and 72 for nickel. The mining and refining of the necessary metals are having a devastating impact on the environment. To purify a tonne of rare earths requires 30,000 cubic metres of water, which becomes saturated with acids and heavy metals. Toxic sludge contaminates soils and the atmosphere around the world. To manufacture a 2-gm microchip produces 32 kg of waste. It is estimated that the amount of worldwide electronic waste from just mobile phones and computers is at least 52 million tonnes annually. Much of this waste is sent to developing countries to be processed to recover the metal content. The mining and refining of rare metals require a huge amount of energy.

As the demand for metals heats up, countries have restricted exports and cancelled production licences. In 2022, Chile cancelled the lithium mining permit to two companies. In 2021, Argentina limited the export of borate, copper, iron, lithium, and strontium. In 2013, the Mongolian government stopped Rio Tinto's operations in a copper mine in the Gobi Desert. India, Russia, Kazakhstan, and South Africa have restricted their metal exports. Mines have been nationalised in Ghana, DRC, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe to ensure resource sovereignty.

In 1998, Kanak separatists gained majority holding of the world's biggest nickel mine in New Caledonia. The consequences are still being felt, as the recent riots and their violent suppression indicate how important the mine is to the French economy. Rare earths have become essential for economic and military sovereignty. In 2022, President Joe Biden invoked the Defense Production Act to support the extraction, processing, and recycling of critical metals.

To meet the Paris Accord goal of Net Zero by 2050, the world will need to install wind turbines. This will require 90 times more aluminium, 50 times more iron, copper and glass, and 15 times more concrete, than is presently being consumed annually. The turbines, as currently built require 3,200 million tonnes of steel, 310 tonnes of aluminium and 40 tonnes of copper. Production of the rare metals required for renewables and digital technologies will consume 8 per cent of global energy.

The problems regarding the guaranteed supply of the minerals and the energy necessary to manufacture new technologies in Australia have not been fully digested by Australia's federal and state governments. What is required to meet the demand for hydrogen technologies and renewable energies necessary to meet Net Zero by 2050? On current projections massive investment in affordable energy and access to rare metals will be needed. Past warnings of limited resources and energy have not been heeded.



Maybe it is time we dusted off old copies of the Club of Rome's *Limit to Growth* (1972) and E F Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* (1973) to read the warnings made fifty years ago. ✪

Fly Me To The Moon

Directed by Greg Berlanti

As a fast-paced rapid-fire banter-filled '60s style from-enemies-to-lovers rom com, this is a hugely entertaining delight.

However, setting it against the space race and America's determination to beat the Russians to the moon with the 1969 Apollo 11 mission, adding the fake moon landing conspiracy to the mix, and doing whatever it takes to sell it to the American public in a bid to make a serious point is where it starts to falter tone-wise.

Directed by Greg Berlanti (*Love, Simon*) it stars Scarlett Johansson, also a producer, as advertising hotshot Kelly Jones. She is a female Don Draper, who is hired to rehabilitate NASA's image and is willing to sell its soul to the devil, ie to capitalist corporate companies, to do it to the horror of true blue launch director Cole Davis (*Channing Tatum*).

Johansson is on sparkling form as the sassy, whip-smart Marilyn Monroe styled Kelly who runs rings around Cole. Her decent on-screen chemistry with Tatum (the less said about his distracting hair the better) and their feisty dialogue (think Doris Day and Rock Hudson, or Katherine Hepburn and Spencer Tracey) keeps you invested. In the meantime, Woody Harrelson is deliciously Machiavellian as the mysterious government figure pulling all the strings.

It is a slick and stylish crowd pleaser.

Morning Star ✪

Kenya Crisis: US responsible

The excessive support and public adoration the US government has given to Kenya's President William Ruto represents the racist contempt this settler state has for all of Africa and the domestic population of descendants from the continent. Two days before African Liberation Day on 25 May and one month before the Kenyan police's brutal crackdown on protests against the US-IMF backed Finance Act that increases taxes up to 35 per cent on essential goods, US President Biden rolled out a red carpet for Ruto at a White House state dinner.

The debt this bill is supposed to address only exists because of the incessant and indiscriminate borrowing by the previous government of Kenya, for which Ruto was vice president. Ruto is a Grade A lackey for US interests reminiscent of the dictator Mobutu of the Democratic Republic of Congo (then Zaire) who imperialism supported for 32 years in order to plunder the Congo.

US neo-colonialism praised as an "endearing" and "enduring" democracy, the Ruto presidency, a puppet government that unleashed its notoriously vicious police to reportedly arrest more than 300, kill as many as 23 and injure dozens of Kenyan citizens in the demonstrations over the past week. These police are the same force US imperialism has manoeuvred into being dispatched to Haiti to contain the people's resistance against imperialism in that Caribbean nation.

An elevation in the parlance of US statecraft is the paternalistic promise of granting Kenya the status of a 'Major Non-NATO Ally,' a role granted to the African Union's African Standby Force. This designation is in sharp contrast to the Alliance of Sahel States newly formed confederation, a declaration of African self-determination.

The Africa Team of the Black Alliance for Peace (BAP) and the organising arm US Out of Africa Network (USOAN) stand in uncompromising solidarity with

Image: Ruto Must Go (@Riziki__) / X

the masses of Kenyans fighting against the proposed Finance Bill 2024. We denounce in the strongest terms the USA's complicity especially its Black misleaders in Congress, in passing this legislation. In fact, on the day the bill was introduced in the Kenyan parliament, members of the US Congress including Barbara Lee were present.

Ruto must go! US Out of Africa! BAP and USOAN salute the courage and determination of the masses of youth throughout Kenya Gen Z! The blood spilled will not be in vain. Our martyrs are alive alongside the living. We stand unwaveringly with the Gen Z Movement, our people of Kenya!

Black Alliance for Peace ✪

Biden-Trump 'Debate' fiasco

Ralph Nader

There was little daylight between Biden and Trump on militarism, empire, genocide and a devouring, bloated military budget. But domestically, Biden could have exposed Trump as an abject tool of the worst of Big Business and Wall Street over Main Street, contrasting his record in the process. Here is one salvo that Biden could have delivered crisply and deliberately:

"Let's look at your record, Mr Trump."

CHILDREN – You blocked extending the child tax credit in January 2022, which was delivering $300 a month to over 60 million children;

WOMEN – You're opposed to their reproductive rights and want to punish them for their choice, not to mention your long history of abusing women;

WORKERS – You and your Republicans in Congress have long opposed raising the paltry federal minimum wage frozen at $7.25 an hour. As President, you displayed your hatred of Unions and weakened job safety protections;

IMMIGRATION – You singlehandedly demanded your Party in Congress abandon a bipartisan immigration reform bill that the Congress was ready to send for my signature earlier this year;

CONSUMERS – You weakened enforcement of life-saving health and safety laws and shut down the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau that worked to make Wall Street accountable;

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH – You think climate disruption is a hoax and tell the main fossil fuel polluters to "Drill, baby, drill" instead of backing planet-saving solar energy and wind power;

PATIENTS – You want to end Obamacare and oppose the expansion of Medicaid in Southern Republican states, taking away healthcare for tens of millions of Americans;

PUBLIC LANDS – Belong to all Americans and their descendants. You want to turn over big chunks of this land to corporations;

TAXPAYERS – In 2017, you gave under-taxed super-profitable corporations and the very rich another giant tax cut which greatly increased the federal deficit; and

Your hatred for the well-being of America shows how phony your MAGA slogan is. That's just some of what you've done to the American people."

Marxist-Leninism Today ✪

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Political Party

At first glance, 'political party' is just a bland descriptive expression, like 'red car' or 'blue carpet.'

The Australian Labor Party (which is a political party) has a rule which means that Labor Party people who mention the Greens in public have to call them 'the Greens Political Party' as though it's a clever insult (we don't know what they call the Greens in private, but can guess).

It's not really the 'gotcha' Labor thinks. Everybody knows that the Greens are a political party. 'Greens political party' is only an insult if there's something bad about being a political party and doing all those political things Labor does – standing for seats, trying to get people to vote for them, arguing in Parliament/the Senate, having policies etc. If doing those political-party things somehow tarnishes the Greens, what does that say about the Australian Labor (political) Party?

Identity politics

Lesser Nine newspaper columnist Parnell Palme McGuinness has decided that Senator Fatima Payman's strong feelings about Israel's attack on Palestine are just 'identity politics,' presumably because Payman is a Muslim originally from Afghanistan, the only kind of person who thinks Labor should recognise Palestine and do more about stopping the ongoing genocide. McGuinness has previously written about how people shouldn't be too bothered by neo-Nazis, so some identities annoy her more than others.

Irrepressible

Picture this: someone is obnoxious, bigoted, racist or just wrong all the time, but they're also famous(ish) and you want to get some popularity for approving of them, without looking like you're also obnoxious, bigoted, racist, and/or just wrong all the time. What to do? There are any number of weasel words which will come to your rescue; we've already covered 'outspoken,' 'controversial,' and 'colourful.' This week it's 'irrepressible,' used to make a commentator who has made a mini-career of minimising rape allegations look more lovable.

Precious

One of those words that is weaselly when used with obvious hypocrisy, 'precious' has had an outing thanks to Alon Cassuto chief executive of the Zionist Federation of Australia, part way through being furious with Mary Kostakidis for calling a spade a spade when it comes to Israel's ongoing genocide. Cassuto has said that "For the sake of the precious multicultural nation that we have, we must stand up against racial hatred."

He's going to be furious when he finds out what the Israeli government is doing, precious multiculturalism-wise.

'Unheard of'

US President Joe Biden has said of the shooting of Donald Trump's ear that "the idea that violence in America like this is just unheard of." Putting aside the assassinations of the Kennedys and the attempted assassinations of Presidents Ford and Reagan, the USA averages almost 50 thousand deaths from firearms every year. If Biden hasn't heard of that, he's not listening.

'Could'

Someone has written that an elected Donald Trump *could* unify the USA. Sure he could, in the same sense that the Loch Ness monster could be a prank from a crack team of aqua-acrobatic wombats with a keen sense of humour. It's a borderline call as to whether this is a true weasel word, or just a 'could' working ridiculously hard.

Lowering the temperature

Anthony Albanese, asked about the Trump ear-clip by a Nine reporter keen to make it all about Australia somehow, has connected pro-Palestine demonstrations outside MP's offices by urging people to "lower the temperature" to avoid "escalation." It's silly to imply that protesting outside a Labor MP's electoral office might somehow 'escalate' to shooting at a US presidential candidate, but there are definitely risks. Albanese might do a ligament stretching a point that far.

Israel uses ‘deliberate starvation’

William Briggs

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has moved to charge Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and his Defence Minister, Gallant with promoting ‘deliberate starvation.’

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres spoke for humanity when he said, “just when we thought it couldn’t get any worse in Gaza – somehow, appallingly, civilians are being pushed into ever deeper circles of hell.”

As each awful day turns into another awful week, Israeli tanks continue to shell civilians. Jets turn homes to rubble and then bomb the refugees seeking shelter in the rubble that was once home.

Melbourne

PEACE INITIATIVE

Hamas has offered a new initiative that Israel is all but certain to refuse. Husam Badran, a senior Hamas official, has stated that “first and foremost, we want the Palestinian people in Gaza to recover from this war.” Hamas has declared it would support the creation of a government in Gaza and the occupied West Bank made up of independent figures.

What is particularly significant is that Hamas is prepared to give up civilian and police control of Gaza. It would consent to a security force organised by the Palestinian Authority, which is the effective state authority for Palestine.

Badran made it clear that “we’re keen that the people will not be from Hamas or considered close to Hamas.” There was just one qualification and this was singularly positive. He insisted that members of this new government have the support of both Hamas and Fatah. The two groups have been in serious dispute for many years.

This should be the basis for an end to the horror. Israel, however, indicated that such a proposal would not be acceptable or tolerated. Netanyahu has remained totally intransigent. For him and his extremist power-base, there will be no peace while Hamas exists. He will not shift from his pledge to destroy Hamas, regardless of the cost.

A response to any possible peace deal came in the form of a statement from Netanyahu’s office. It went under the title of ‘Principles for a Hostage Release Deal.’ The ‘principles’ include the demand that “any deal [must] enable Israel to resume its offensive operations until it achieves its war goals.”

The slogan, ‘the day after the war’ has been used by many to describe the future for Palestine and its relationship with Israel. For some Western leaders this means a relatively long-term cessation of hostilities. For some it means the beginning of reconstruction of Gaza. For some it means the beginning of a meaningful path to Palestinian statehood and a two-state solution. What comes after is vitally important. Netanyahu cynically altered that slogan. He repeatedly speaks of the “day after Hamas.” This has important ramifications as it relates to Israel’s plans for Gaza, and by implication, for the West Bank which he belligerently refers to as “Judea and Samaria.”

Israel refuses to countenance peace, except on its own barbaric terms. The USA and its allies make what they feel are appropriate noises to the effect that the war must end and that Israel must negotiate in good faith. They blame the breakdown in negotiations on the Palestinians and continue to arm Israel. The USA and acquiescent governments like Australia are partners in an awful crime against humanity.

The slaughter is not hidden but conducted in plain view. Israel still acts with impunity.

IMMENSE DESTRUCTION

It is impossible to cite all atrocities committed or every act of Israeli terror. A residential area in Gaza City, Shujaiya, is one example. Israel’s military stated that it had completed its “mission” in Shujaiya. Sixty bodies were found under the rubble. More than 300 residential units and 100 businesses were destroyed. Mohammed Nairi, a Shujaiya resident, spoke of returning to the neighbourhood and seeing the “immense destruction that defies description. All the houses were demolished.” The tanks had simply rolled out of the suburb and onto other targets. For Israel this is ‘mission accomplished.’

The Israeli military once more told civilians to leave Gaza City and head south. There is a vicious cycle of orders. Move south. Move north. Move south again, but safety never comes. A recent ‘evacuation order’ told the people to go south along two ‘safe routes’ to the town of Deir al-Balah. This town and the nearby Nuseirat refugee camp are in the alleged ‘humanitarian safe zone.’ Strikes from Israeli forces made a lie of that. Eight people were killed in Deir al Balah and another 12 in the Nuseirat camp.

There were four airstrikes, in four days, that killed dozens of people sheltering in schools that had become refugee centres in the area. Israel’s military chief, Herzi Halevi, waved away criticisms of his forces, saying that the armed forces were at work in Gaza “to carry out a very important mission: pressure.”

The General failed to comment how that ‘pressure’ is being applied. Israeli munitions are increasingly being packed with shrapnel in the form of tiny metal cubes about three millimetres wide that pierce the skin and destroy bone and organs while leaving just a scratch on the skin. The use of such munitions has been documented in past Israeli offensives in Gaza. They are manufactured by Elbit Systems of Haifa. Elbit markets these weapons as “highly lethal against dismounted infantry.” We are becoming only too well aware of the connection between Australia and Elbit and the profits that come from slaughter.

BOMBING CONTINUES

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant has praised the pilots who bombed the al-Mawasi displacement camp, killing 90 and wounding hundreds. Airstrikes have demolished Gaza’s UNWRA headquarters. On 15 July 17 Palestinians were killed by an Israeli missile attack on a UN school in Nuseirat refugee camp.

INTENTIONAL STARVATION

The genocide being perpetrated by Israel comes from the gun and the bomb, and also from a program and campaign of deliberate starvation. The ICC’s charges against Netanyahu and Gallant have been fully substantiated by UN personnel who are in absolutely no doubt that famine now exists.

Michael Fakhri, the UN Special rapporteur on the right to food, and another nine independent UN experts have declared that “Israel’s intentional and targeted starvation campaign against the Palestinian people is a form of genocidal violence and has resulted in famine across all of Gaza.”

Three conditions must be proven to declare a region to suffer from famine. At least 20 per cent of the population must be facing extreme levels of hunger. Thirty per cent of children must be shown to be too thin for their height. The average death rate for adults and children must have doubled. These conditions exist in Gaza.

The United Nations and its Secretary-General have been accused of anti-Semitism for stating the obvious fact that the Israeli war is a war of genocide. UNWRA, The ICC and the International Court of Justice have been labelled anti-Semitic. When the fact that thousands of children have been slaughtered, it is dismissed as an anti-Semitic ‘blood libel.’

Tens of thousands of civilians lie dead. Thousands more bodies are missing. Thousands of children are dead. The number of traumatised is beyond calculation. The people are “being pushed into ever deeper circles of hell.” ✪

UK Labour ceasefire calls ‘meaningless’

Organisations including Al-Haq, Global Legal Action Network (GLAN) and Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) have demanded the new UK government end its complicity in Israel’s genocidal attacks by stopping arms exports to the country.

GLAN lawyer Charlotte Andrews-Briscoe said: “The new Labour government’s calls for a ceasefire are meaningless while it continues to arm Israel. British weapons have killed too many Palestinians.

“This government knows that the only lawful and moral decision is to stop.

“They also know that they have an obligation under the Genocide Convention to use every tool at their disposal to prevent the commission of genocide.”

CAAT media co-ordinator Emily Apple said: “Labour promised in its manifesto that it “would be a defender of international law.

“Now it needs to put that commitment into action by imposing an immediate arms embargo.

Morning Star

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