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CFMEU: Here for good

Anna Pha

Photo: Anna Pha

Sending out a warning about the unfolding attack on organised labour, in a letter to union members on 2 August, National Secretary of the Construction Division of the CFMEU, Zach Smith, said that within days of allegations against the union being aired, employer groups were braying for a rollback of wages and conditions. "They blamed you for the housing crisis. They blamed you for time lags and cost blowouts in infrastructure projects. The Liberals blamed you for high inflation and mortgage rates!

"It is with your hands, it is with your bodies, that you build the homes and infrastructure for Australia's future. You deserve fair wages and great conditions for working hard, physical jobs in an industry that can be deadly when your voices aren't heard."

This attack is part of the employer agenda to impose the burden of the deepening economic crisis onto the working people; growing unemployment, increased exploitation of labour and the undermining of democratic rights.

As such, the process for the appointment of an administrator to oversee the Albanese government's "once-in-a-generation clean out of the CFMEU" is underway.

Fair Work Commission (FWC) general manager Murray Furlong is responsible for the application to the Federal Court for the appointment of King's Counsel Mark Irving as the administrator of the Victoria-Tasmania, New South Wales, Queensland Northern Territory and South Australian Divisional Branches of the Construction Division of the CFMEU.

Furlong is a former Executive Director of the notorious union-busting Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) and the Office of the Fair Work Ombudsman.

UNPRECEDENTED POWERS

The FWC, in consultation with the government, is proposing a number of powers for the administrator including:

- *remove officers, officials and employees from their positions, engage employees and consultants as required, and apply to the Court for the appointment of assistant administrators.*

This could see approximately 250 democratically elected officials removed from their positions as part of Labor's "once-in-a-generation clean out!"

- *take possession of all property and credit cards*

On what basis? The administrator could spend the union's finances, sell off property. No constraints are specified.

- *bring proceedings to recover funds, impose penalties and award compensation.*

Again, there's no detail. What would the recovery of funds or compensation be *for*? Is it for employers who were 'coerced' into signing enterprise bargaining agreements (EBAs). 'Coercion,' in ABCC language, means pressured by industrial action or even the threat of such action.

- *appoint proxies to represent him at meetings and exercise voting rights as instructed.*

Again, this is undemocratic. It appears these proxies would not even be subject to Court approval.

- *establish and implement policies, including Rule alterations to ensure the CFMEU can be representative of and accountable to its members, operate lawfully and effectively and encourage member participation and democratic functioning.*

This is based on the lie that the union is not accountable to its members.

- *keep and maintain the register of members*
- *prepare financial accounts as required and*
- *issue a certificate when satisfied a Divisional Branch is operating effectively so that the process to remove it from administration can commence, including by commencing elections for office.*

This list of administrative powers upends the democratic processes of **all** unions because this is an attack on the whole of organised labour. The reason the provisions are so vaguely written is to allow the administrator unprecedented powers to strip workers and their unions of their most fundamental rights, including the right to withdraw their labour.

REAL CROOKS

"History shows that the only way to comprehensively crack down on criminality and corruption is to tackle a poor culture underpinned by disregard for the rule of law," crowed the Master Builders Association (MBA).

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US backing means impunity

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Guardian

Issue 2111 12 August 2024

The monopolies we have, the monopoly we need

Quick question for you: what do Qantas, Virgin, Coles, Woolworths, and the 'big four' Australian banks – ANZ, NAB, Westpac and CBA – have in common? Here's a hint. Rex has just grounded services between Melbourne Sydney and Brisbane, and has appointed administrators. Bonza went under in April this year, while Coles and Woolies still control about 70 per cent of the grocery market, and the Big Four banks have been called the closest thing there is to a totally safe bet on the stock market.

What they have in common is monopoly. Rex has fallen victim to Qantas and Virgin's near-monopoly on aircraft slots. Like Qantas and Virgin, Coles and Woolworths are a near-duopoly. They have a lot of power because together they control more of the market than any grocery suppliers in any country in the world. A monopoly does not have to be total for the holder to exert a lot of power, over both customers and suppliers. The big four banks share another almost-monopoly on our banking, and regularly swallow up new competitors.

Monopoly also exerts a power over government. That's why despite a Royal Commission spelling out in detail how the Big Four banks charged dead people fees, charged living people fees on services not delivered and facilitated child abuse by waving through payments for child pornography, the banks have not been placed in administration, or threatened with being shut down. Nor was any administrator given the kind of power over a bank that Fair Work is looking for over the CFMEU (see our front page article this issue).

You might have heard some of this before. We like to talk about competition and monopoly in this country. Australia has a lot of the second and not a lot of the first. As *Crikey's* Bernard Keane says, "the only persistent aspect of competition in Australian aviation ... is the effort of Qantas to destroy it."

It's often suggested that what we need is *more* competition. Perhaps the competition regulator needs more powers, or maybe more resources. Perhaps we need to break up some large businesses into smaller competing parts.

We do not.

It's true that competition can lead to improvements for customers in the short term; if I'm selling flights from Melbourne to Sydney, and another airline starts selling flights on the same route, I could make my flights cheaper because I want to keep my customers. Or I could make my flights nicer and give customers larger seats.

Those are the good things. I could also try to make it impossible for my competitor to get slots at the big airports, or deliberately sell more cheaply until they're out of business.

I could just lie to my customers, like Qantas did when it sold flights it knew had been cancelled.

This is not to pick on airlines. Communists know that the competition capitalists claim to love leads to monopoly by capital.

Capitalist competition is what's brought us the near-monopolies of Coles and Woolies, the Big Four banks, and Qantas/Virgin. We don't need more of it. What has happened to Rex and its customers will happen again and again as long as we have capitalist competition, and bourgeois politicians who can be easily controlled by the largest corporations.

What this country needs is the right sort of monopoly. Working people are the overwhelming majority of the population. Workers produce the wealth of this country, and they should control it. Working people should have a monopoly of power. That would be socialism and also real democracy. That's what we're working for. If you think it's a good idea, join/support the Party, and support this paper by subscribing and/or donating to the Press Fund.

***Australian Marxist Review* #77, the theoretical journal of the Communist Party of Australia is now on sale. Go to cpa.org.au or contact a Party branch near you.**
Here is a taster:

(from the editorial)

... communists armed with the tools of Marxism-Leninism never need despair about the state of the world. Why? Scientific socialism and the deep insights it provides inspire confidence to move forward despite setbacks. Most importantly, as we are now in a phase of qualitative changes in the world the tasks of communists become ever more important. To quote: as the contradictions of capitalism become ever more acute, as these "contradictions mature and threaten both people and the planet, the struggle for socialism becomes ever more urgent."

(from the *World Marxist Review*)

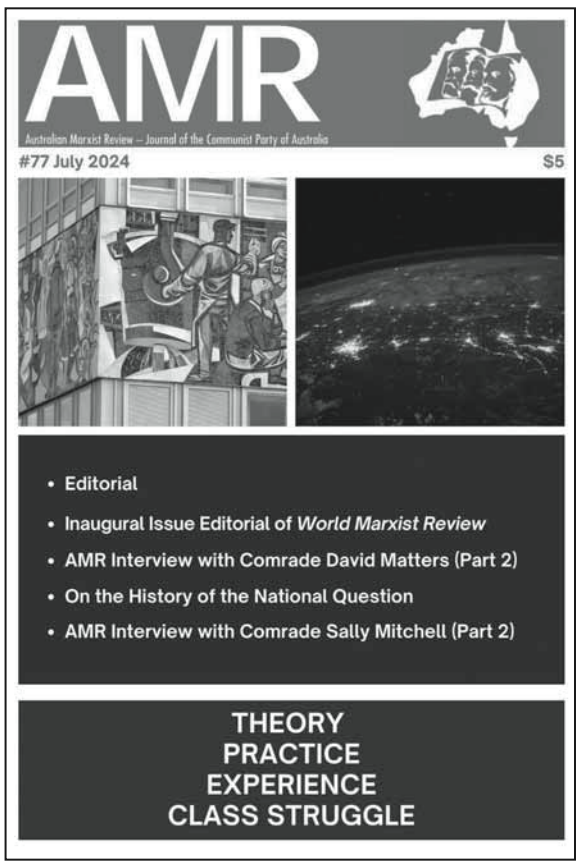
What the past century has demonstrated: that a world ruled by imperialist capitalism can never be peacefully united.

The inherent contradictions of capitalism on a world scale constantly create and re-create the conditions for a socialist transformation of human civilization.

(from an interview with David Matters)

The imposition of the Accord was an aggressive act. It caused a massive amount of division within the working-class movement. It took six ACTU congresses to quell the opposition to the Accord in the trade union movement. There were some right-wing trade unionists who were opposed to the Accord.

I think the main aim of the Accord was to disassociate the working-class movement from the struggle for socialism. The splitting [of the working-class movement] was a part of that process.



(From On the history of the national question)

... the "national question" should always be addressed in light of concrete realities and the specific historical, economic, social, and cultural conditions of a country or region. While this is an obvious point, it needs to be emphasised when considering the Australian context. It will not do to impose a model developed in different conditions. Third, the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle for national liberation is a form of class struggle, an international form of class struggle. This point originally derives from Marx and Engels, but it was the distinct insight from the Soviet Union that turned this point into a basic principle of Marxism. To quote another great communist revolutionary leader:"National struggle, in the final analysis, is a question of class struggle."

(from an interview with Sally Mitchell)

That idea that you couldn't do this was never an issue in my head. It was "I don't know what that tool is, I don't know what the name of it is." The first day was daunting 'cause I am at a work bench, and I open up the drawer and I go "I know that's a file but what's that?!" (laughs) having never touched them before outside of hammering something in the shed. Fortunately,the trainers were really, really good people and I don't know if they did this for me or if it was just the way that they did it but they went and took me from the bottom right through, and they were so helpful and assisting and supportive without being patronising about it.

CFMEU: Here for good

Continued from page 1

"This poor culture is ingrained in some parts of the industry and it is this culture that allows criminals and organised crime to flourish. It also stifles productivity and increases the cost of construction at the expense of the community, taxpayers, jobs and small business."

How true! The industry is riddled with corrupt employers that cheat workers out of wages, superannuation, leave and other entitlements, and syphon off funds before declaring bankruptcy, denying workers what they owe them. The same criminals then set up new companies, and so the process continues, increasing the cost of construction. In fact, the only force fighting to keep the building industry honest is the union.

"In construction, it is almost inevitable that even with the CFMEU in administration, other strongly aligned unions on site will use the powers to cause maximum disruption in retaliation for its demise," Innes Willox, CEO of the major employer organisation AiG warns.

The other members of the CFMEU include plumbing, electrical, and maritime, suggesting that powers of the administrator and consequential anti-union legislation could be extended to other unions. Willox, who pushes for the return of the ABCC, clearly has other unions in his sights for tougher anti-union laws.

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

"Touch one, touch all" ✪

CFMEU

Here for wages

Here for conditions

Here for safety

Here for ever

***Australian Marxist Review*: new issue!**

Issue #77 celebrates the relaunch of *World Marxist Review* with a reprint of its inaugural editorial as an important development in the regeneration of the international communist movement. It brings forward a new article on the development of the Marxist Leninist understanding of the national question through the experience of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, and presents the national question as a theoretical concept that has evolved in the light of practice, very relevant to Australia's national question. It also continues the interviews that commenced in *AMR* #76 with David Matters and Sally Mitchel to deepen the body of work of recording oral histories of veteran party members' experience within the communist movement.

Available from cpa.org.au/australian-marxist-review/

‘Betrayal’ on disability reforms

Anna Pha

“Disabled people will no longer accept being kept out of view, restrained to our beds, locked in institutions, or subjected to ableism and segregation by government policies. Labor’s lacklustre response to the DRC [Disability Royal Commission] shows they are willing to let these injustices continue, in order to balance their budget,” Greens spokesperson on Disability Rights Senator Jordon Steele-John said commenting on Labor’s response to the DRC’s recommendations.

It’s taken almost 11 months for the federal government to come up with that response. The disability community has expressed deep disappointment. The government has accepted 13 relatively minor recommendations in full while planning $14.4 billion in cuts to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability was established in April 2019. Nearly 10,000 people shared their experiences of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation through online submissions, public hearings or in private sessions.

“Disabled people and our families gave so much to this commission, and this government has given so little in return,” Steele-John said. The response is an insult.

Ross Joyce, CEO of the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, said it appeared as though many recommendations had been “kicked further down the road.” “The whole sector is disappointed … we thought there would be a whole lot more coming through,” he told the ABC.

The Royal Commission cost $600 million and released its report in September 2023. It made recommendations of necessary changes to the laws, policies, structures and practices that affect people living with disability, their families and carers, advocates and service providers.

In addition to accepting 13 recommendations, the government says it accepts another 117 “in principle.” We will now have another wait to see what that means in practice.

It rejected the recommendations for a Disability Rights Act, a Federal Disability Department and Minister. A new complaints mechanism and an improved minimum wage were both marked as “needing further consideration.”

The government was silent on segregation in education, employment, and housing – critical issues relating to inclusion, reaching full potential and ending abuse and exploitation.

Marayke Jonkers, president of People with Disability Australia, said “our members are devastated.”

Children and Young People with Disability Australia CEO Skye Kakoschke-Moore said the lack of a firm commitment on inclusive education was “a failure of leadership” and a “betrayal” of young people with disability.

“We owe it to the next generation of students with disability to act swiftly and decisively in phasing out segregated education,” she said in a statement.

“States and territories must step up, but they need support from the federal level to make inclusive education a reality.”

People With Disability Australia (PWDA) have said “We won’t stop fighting so the violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation doesn’t happen to the next generation,”

ROBODEBT CUTS COMING

A Senate committee is currently holding hearings into the government’s *National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment Bill 2024*. “Labor’s proposed NDIS Bill would expand the government’s ability to pursue debts against disabled people, their families or guardians, without fundamental debt protections in place,” PWDA said.

Image: Kunyoi/UNDP in Europe and Central Asia – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Legal representatives presented alarming evidence that debts raised under the legislation would not be subject to review. In other words, there would not be an opportunity to dispute an incorrect decision or explain the situation that led to the debt. At least under the highly discredited Robodebt people could seek a review.

Instead, they will need to apply for a special circumstances waiver for a review.

“We now know that it puts disabled people at risk of Robodebt 2.0. No wonder Labor opposed this inquiry,” Steele-John said.

“My office regularly hears from participants who have urgently needed to change supports to address risks to their health and safety, and are then penalised for this. The system needs to support participants in these circumstances, not disadvantage them,” Steele-John said.

95 per cent of the $14.4 billion in cuts to the NDIS is expected to come from reducing ‘intraplan inflation’ and changing the way that plan budgets are constructed from ‘reasonable and necessary supports’ to ‘reasonable and necessary budgets.’

The government says it wants to hire trained assessors, look at a person’s overall needs and give them a budget instead of constructing a plan brick by brick, for the services they require.

The government puts balancing the budget and funding nuclear submarines ahead of the wellbeing and needs of people with disability. It’s all-too-familiar, peanuts and promises for the vulnerable and billions of dollars for the USA’s war plans. ✪

CPA members at the Hiroshima Never Again commemoration in Boorloo/Perth, 6 August.

WA ‘climate bomb’ project

Reports that the WA Environmental Protection Agency is poised to recommend against Woodside’s massive polluting Browse gas project make clear the choice for the Albanese government: will it protect our environment and a safer future for our kids? Or back in one of the country’s biggest carbon bombs?

Woodside wants to drill more than 50 gas wells around the Scott Reef off the coast of the Kimberley in WA, and pump gas along the ocean floor to the North West Shelf/Karratha Gas Plant at the Burrup Hub for export. If built, the proposed mega gas project would be the Southern Hemisphere’s largest and Woodside estimates it could add up to 1.6 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent over its lifetime, or more than three times’ Australia’s annual climate pollution.

Climate Council Head of Policy and Advocacy Dr Jennifer Rayner said: “Browse will destroy habitats for protected species like whales and turtles in the short term, and unleash billions of tonnes of climate-wrecking pollution in the decades ahead – it’s an environmental disaster in the making.

“The answer couldn’t be clearer here: the Albanese government needs to say no to this mega-polluting project so our precious places are protected against further harm. This decision is the litmus test for the government’s approach to gas and Australians are watching closely.”

Climate Council ✪

Eyewitness report from the West Bank: Faz3a

Richard Titelius

On Friday 2 August 2024, Friends of Palestine WA held an event to publicise the work of Faz3a in the West Bank at the State Library Theatre in Perth. The event featured a short film. After the film a Zoom link was established to the West Bank in Palestine itself to hear from a number of activists of the group.

Faz3a is a solidarity and support network in the West Bank which seeks to build a strong network of nationals and internationals on the ground to reinforce capacity for 'Samud' (holding on to the land), and for regaining ground which has been lost to Israeli settler and state violence. Rushdie Fox from Friends of Palestine introduced the film about the increase in settler and state violence in the West Bank since 7 October 2023 – against Bedouin herders and shepherds. The settlers harass the herders with the intention of intimidating them to leave their land. They then establish settlements usually in between existing Palestinian communities and keep building to divide and overrun the Palestinian communities, all with the active support of the Israeli Defence Force.

Detention without charge has increased tenfold since 7 October 2023. The settlers also use religious discourse to justify land-theft. Palestinian shepherds and herders are not armed and neither are members of Faz3a who support them. Faz3a have motor vehicles and international activists who know the rights of the Palestinians and wage a non-violent war of attrition with the settlers and IDF, pushing back on the most egregious violations of Palestinian rights.

Despite Faz3a's efforts, the settlers and IDF have succeeded in ethnically cleansing 18 Palestinian communities since 7 October 2023. Since the 1967 war, 700,000 Israeli settlers have now taken up living in the West Bank, displacing or killing the existing Palestinian inhabitants. It is now estimated that Palestinians now only occupy 13 per cent of their land around Bethlehem, while the Israeli settlers have taken the rest. Palestinian people have also taken to living in caves around Hebron to try to protect and retain access and occupation of their land.

Having activists from other countries or internationals as they are known, helps the Palestinian people defend their land. It is harder for the IDF to detain international activists without charge than to do it to Palestinians. There is virtually no one else standing up for the rights of the Palestinian people as the Palestinian Authority has little power or resources.

On the Zoom link, activist coordinator Estin, explained how Western Imperialism through the US and a few countries in Europe allows or enables the settler violence to occur and stands behind the Israeli state. However, Estin also said, international support for Palestine has also been growing.

There are also Israeli activists who have joined the resistance to settler violence. The maintaining of the olive trees on their lands and the harvesting of the olives is an integral part of their way of life. The Palestinians have also chained themselves to the olive trees to try to save them from Israeli bulldozers. The result has been more Israeli violence.

During a question-and-answer session, a question was asked about what the Palestinian people in the West Bank think about the regional support by countries such as Syria and Iran and also Hezbollah and the Houthis in Yemen. Sahrwa replied that the actions of these countries do not give them much hope. The settlers alert the IDF who come and detain activists. The settlers are also ramping up their violence, sensing that the Israeli state continues to support them and worrying that international pressure might one day end their impunity.

The Communist Party of Australia commends the actions of the activists of Faz3a on the ground in the West Bank and condemns the illegal settlements on the West Bank and the actions of the Israeli Defence Force in aiding and abetting this illegal and immoral displacement of the Palestinian people and the seizure and destruction of their land and homes.

3 August 2024

'Cruel and unfair' uni jobs threat

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) has labelled Universities Australia's threat to 14,000 jobs a cruel and unfair attack on higher education staff.

At a Senate inquiry, Universities Australia warned 14,000 staff could face job cuts under the federal government's proposed changes to international student numbers.

NTEU National President Dr Alison Barnes said university managements and the federal government must rule out any job cuts.

"Threatening to slash 10 per cent of the university workforce as a bargaining tool against the federal government is a cruel and callous way to treat staff," she said.

"It's absolutely outrageous for the vice-chancellors' lobby group to be threatening the jobs of 14,000 academic and professional staff who are an indispensable part of our higher education system.

"Uncertainty around these changes has created a vacuum allowing opportunistic vice-chancellors to put job losses on the table.

"Australia's broken governance model has fostered an insidious culture in which staff are always the first to pay the price when policy changes are on the horizon.

"It's simply not good enough to use university staff as political footballs that are regularly subjected to wage theft, insecure work and unmanageable workloads.

"The federal government must step in to ensure university leaders are held to account and don't ram through damaging cuts that hurt students, staff and society.

"The NTEU has told the Senate inquiry there needs to be changes to the bill before parliament to remove extraordinary powers it gives to ministers to make changes to international student levels.

"The federal government must fully fund universities to ensure there's no job losses because of changes to international student numbers."

NTEU

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This week's historic target of US aggression is **British Guyana, 1953-64**: For 11 years Britain and the United States went to great lengths to prevent a democratically elected leader from occupying his office. Cheddi Jagan had been elected three times.

A progressive nationalist taking an independent path, Jagan was a marked man, for he represented Washington's greatest fear: building a society that offers an alternative to capitalism.

Using a wide variety of tactics – from general strikes and disinformation campaigns to terrorism and British legalisms, the US and Britain finally forced Jagan out in 1964.

The first fracking proposal for Western Australia since the state lifted its moratorium has been referred to the federal government, prompting outrage from community groups who fear the project will be a Trojan Horse for the full-blown industrialisation of the Kimberley.

American company Black Mountain Energy has submitted its "Valhalla" project for assessment under federal environment laws.

If approved by the Albanese government, Black Mountain would be permitted to construct six new fracking wells near Broome in WA's Kimberley region.

The application shows Black Mountain Energy does not intend to undertake a full environmental impact assessment under the EPBC Act despite admitting impacts on threatened wildlife like the Greater Bilby and on water.

The company's referral identifies the Greater Bilby as a Species of National Environmental Significance that the project could impact, with fauna surveys identifying fresh bilby 'diggings' in the development area.

The referral also acknowledges it will take a minimum of 100 million litres of groundwater per annum for each well. Community action group Lock the Gate Alliance WA coordinator Claire McKinnon said, "This is what we feared – the first real attempt by a multinational fracking company to begin industrialising and contaminating the much-loved Kimberley since the lifting of the moratorium.

"Minister Tanya Plibersek has made a promise of no new extinctions. She must protect threatened animals like the bilby, which have been recorded on site, and require a full environmental impact assessment of this fracking project. Fracking requires massive volumes of groundwater, combined with millions of litres of toxic chemicals and sand pumped deep underground at high pressure, and poses a serious risk of water drainage and pollution.

"Minister Plibersek needs to apply the updated water trigger in national environment laws to this project. Failure to do so makes a mockery of these laws.

"Fracking is a dirty and dangerous way to extract fossil gas. Gas is fuelling the climate crisis and the International Energy Agency has made it clear the world can't afford new gas projects if we want to protect communities from extreme weather driven by climate change.

"Black Mountain's direct impact on water and the local environment and broader contribution to climate change should be sufficient for Minister Plibersek to require full environmental impact assessment."

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: BHP. The transnational mining giant is crying poor, and last week joined the union-bashing chorus coming from employers: "unproductive workplace laws, uncompetitive tax system, profit-hitting protection of the environment".

Government slashes CSIRO

Shem Kinchi

CSIRO, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, has a lot of runs on the board, including Aeroguard, the polymer banknotes we all use, and essential parts of wi-fi technology. Recent achievements include vital contributions to the development and commercialisation of BarleyMAX (a high fibre wholegrain with high levels of resistant starch), DHA Canola (containing long chain omega-3 fatty acids) and plant-based meat-alternative start-up v2food.

There will be fewer achievements in the future if Labor government cuts go ahead. More than 600 jobs are slated to be cut and it is feared that hundreds more are headed for the same fate, as large-scale restructuring cuts core scientific research, ends long term projects and shrinks science support roles.

Cuts announced to date include:

- Approximately 400+ jobs from Enterprise Services
- 43 jobs from Health and Biosecurity (human health)
- 30 jobs from Agriculture & Food
- 5 jobs from Manufacturing
- 120 jobs from Data61 (AI, robotics, cybersecurity)
- it is rumoured that 65 jobs from Environment are set to go.

The cuts to health and biosecurity (human health) are in their final stages. As a result, CSIRO is set to exit clinical trial research, leading to the closure of the clinical trial unit based at Sydney's Westmead hospital and the complete removal of CSIRO from the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) in Adelaide.

These cuts will also cause long-term projects to end prematurely, including further research into the development of high amylose wheat, which improves digestive health, and provides protection against bowel cancer and Type 2 diabetes, as well as allergy research such as the OmnisOva program which produces new generation allergen free, egg white products for families.

A recent Staff Association poll unsurprisingly revealed plummeting morale throughout the organisation and concerns over Australia's ongoing research capability.

Despite receiving more than one hundred submissions from staff and stakeholders, Human Health Research Director Erica Bremner Kneipp and business unit supremo Brett Sutton have ignored pleas urging CSIRO to protect the priceless research.

KINTORE AVENUE

CSIRO will also abandon research into Value Added Nutrition, effectively ending the Health and Biosecurity presence at Kintore Avenue – located at the University of Adelaide campus – the site of breakthrough nutrition science over the past 50 years.

There, CSIRO has contributed to the development and commercialisation of BarleyMAX (a high fibre wholegrain with high levels of resistant starch), DHA Canola (containing long chain omega-3 fatty acids) and plant-based meat-alternative start-up v2food.

MORALE DOWN

When enacted, these job cuts will reduce the total CSIRO workforce at Kintore Avenue by nearly thirty per cent, jeopardising the long-term viability of the historic laboratory.

The impact of rolling job cuts is being felt across the organisation and staff morale has taken a big hit.

In May, more than 650 Staff Association members participated in a snap poll, where more than two thirds of respondents reported feeling worse off since the announcement of rolling cuts in Enterprise Support Services and multiple business units including Health and Biosecurity, Agriculture and Food, Manufacturing and the likely prospect of more to come in Data61.

COLLAPSE IN CONFIDENCE

Almost 80 per cent of participants from the same poll reported feeling less confident about the current state of job security in CSIRO, with less than 2 per cent reporting feeling more secure.

There are indications that the cuts to jobs and research are damaging the sense of mission within CSIRO across the organisation. CSIRO's most recent culture survey has revealed a steep drop in confidence when it comes to the strategic direction and vision set by senior executives for Australia's premier science agency.

Those impacts are most pronounced in South Australia. Analysis of the culture survey report shows a near total collapse in confidence in CSIRO's strategic direction and intent at Kintore Avenue and SAHMRI, and a massive 22-point decline at Waite Campus.

PREVENTABLE TRAGEDY?

For CSIRO's Human Health researchers based at Kintore Avenue, there is a strong belief that a research tragedy could have been prevented, but for the inaction of senior executives and an inexplicable failure to avoid this slow moving trainwreck.

Workplace sources at Kintore Avenue have described frustrated attempts over recent years to put Human Health science on a more sustainable funding footing by attracting external earnings; only to have these efforts ultimately rejected by senior leaders within the research program.

The Human Health program cuts will also impact jobs and research into public health and wellbeing, including applied public health, nutrition and behaviour and behavioural and wellbeing science. ✪

Technician conducting experiments in CSIRO laboratories at Griffith, NSW, 1995.
Photo: CSIRO – Wikimedia Commons (CC BY 3.0)

PEACE NOTES

Surprisingly Japan-like

Peter Farmer

This paper has used a lot of space to explain how Australian military forces have been turned into a working part of the US military, while our real estate has been handed over in the form of bases and runways for nuclear-missile capable bombers. One incredible feature of the AUKUS deal is that Australia will become even less independent than before, paying for subs which are part of the USA's fleet in all but name.

Australia is not the only country with these issues. Japan, once described by one of its Prime Ministers as an "unsinkable aircraft carrier," is host to an enormous quantity of US military assets. The island of Okinawa has given over fully 40 per cent of its landmass to the US military. Having the marines living with them is so resented in Okinawa that non-Japanese men who aren't in the US forces often grow beards so that the locals will know they aren't in the military.

Like Australia, Japan has seemed locked in to being a reliable US military asset for so long that it's surprising to hear that things can still get worse. Last month, Japanese Communist Party Secretariat Head, Akira Koike criticised the US and Japanese governments for expanding US 'deterrence.' Koike said that the upgraded deterrence and use of the US 'nuclear umbrella' will "trample on A-bomb victims and the wishes of A-bomb survivors." Strengthening the expanded 'deterrence' "is in complete disregard of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki peace declarations which were issued last August. Those declarations criticised the whole idea of nuclear deterrence.

There is also the 'Quad', an alliance of Australia, India, the US and Japan, based on the idea that China must be 'contained' in the interests of US dominance of the Pacific – or as pro-US cheerleaders here call it, the "rules-based order."

The attraction for arrangements like this to the Japanese leaders is many sided. There's a long-term project to re-militarise Japanese society. Any military involvement helps with that. This is driven partly by wanting to have real armed forces instead of having to call them 'Self-Defence Forces', and an urge to get away from the perceived humiliation of the wartime Constitution, complete with the famous Peace clause that bans Japan from engaging in any military actions except in self defence.

There's also a fear of a "resurgent" China, and unease over what Japan did to China during its' occupation. Japan could apologise properly and make real peace with China, but the government wants to keep the extreme right on side. So it is that Japanese ministers keep visiting the Yasukuni Shrine where the spirits of war criminals are interred. So it is that Japan lives with a fear of China.

Like Australia, Japan gets a lot out of relations with China. It's handy having the world's second largest economy so close, and Japan has profited a lot from China's peaceful expansion over the last 40 years.

Also, like Australia, Japan is softening its citizens up for war. We don't have a constitution that bans us from foreign military adventures – a lot of Australians would not have died if we did. What we do have is 'defence schools' in South Australia, and a government determined to get us used to nuclear submarines and a doctrine of 'containment'.

China, Australia, and the future: an i with Chinese Consul-General (WA) Lo

Interviewer: Floyd Kermode

The Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China recently concluded (July 15 to 18) Can you tell us a bit about the significance and achievements of this session?

CG Long: The Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China is a very important meeting held at a critical juncture of building a great country and advancing national rejuvenation in all respects through Chinese modernisation. The session delved into the new circumstances and challenges facing Chinese modernisation, formulated systemic plans for further deepening reform across the board, and provided an important window for the world on China's pursuit of high-quality development and high-standard opening up in the new era. The most important outcome of the session was the adoption of *Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Further Deepening Reform Comprehensively to Advance Chinese Modernization*, a blueprint for China's progress.

One focus of the session is the expansion of China's high-standard opening up. The Resolution spells out in detail the next steps in the area of opening up and makes it clear that opening up is a defining feature of Chinese modernisation, and that we must remain committed to the basic state policy of opening to the outside world, promote reform through opening up, and develop new institutions for a higher-standard open economy.

The plenary session stated that China must remain firm in pursuing an independent foreign policy of peace, be dedicated to promoting a community with a shared future for mankind, and foster a favourable external environment for further deepening reform comprehensively and advancing Chinese modernisation. We will follow the guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on diplomacy, fully act on the guiding principles from the third plenary session, and turn the strategic plans for further deepening reform into great momentum for major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.

How are you feeling about relations with Australia at the moment? Do you think they're moving in a positive direction?

CG Long: This year marks the 10th anniversary of President Xi Jinping's state visit to Australia and the establishment of China-Australia comprehensive strategic partnership. Chinese Premier Li Qiang made a successful visit to Australia back in June this year, the first visit to Australia by the Chinese Premier in 7 years. As Premier Li Qiang pointed out, the most important experience drawn from the past decade of development of China-Australia relations is that the two sides should respect each other, seek common ground while shelving differences and engage in mutually-beneficial cooperation. Since Prime Minister Albanese's visit to China last November, more progress has been made in resuming and enhancing dialogue and cooperation between China and Australia in various fields, leading to a comprehensive turnaround of bilateral relations.

Do you have any comments on how Chinese-Australia relations have changed in your time in the position of Consul-General?

CG Long: As the Consul General of China in Perth from 2021, I have witnessed the havoc wreaked by the COVID-19 pandemic and observed the gradual warming and stabilisation of China-Australia relations from a low point. I am committed to upholding the concept of building a community with a shared future for mankind, and I am willing to work hand in hand with various sectors in WA to promote pragmatic cooperation between China and WA in various fields. Together, we are dedicated to advancing the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Australia, making it more mature, stable, and fruitful for the benefit of the people of both countries.

How are relations with the West Australian government and WA businesses going?

CG Long: China has been Western Australia's largest trading partner for 17 consecutive years, with Western Australia's total exports to China reaching AU$144.6 billion in the 2022-2023 fiscal year, accounting for 55 per cent of WA's overall exports. 85 per cent of iron ore and 99 per cent of lithium produced in WA are sold to China. In addition to traditional sectors such as mining resources and agriculture, there is also vast space for cooperation between the two sides in fields such as health care and medicine, e-commerce, culture, tourism, and education.

Chinese Premier Li's visit to WA has injected more energy to China-WA cooperation. The last visit to WA by the Chinese Premier was 18 years ago. State-to-state relations ultimately boil down to people-to-people exchanges. The foundation of China-Australia relations lies in the people and has always enjoyed broad public support. We warmly welcome people from all walks of life in WA to visit China to experience the vibrant practice of Chinese-style modernisation by using the unilateral visa waiver program as well as multiple-entry visas of up to three to five years' duration for tourism, business, and visiting family members.

Are there aspects of Chinese society you would like to see more widely known/understood in Australia?

CG Long: China-Australia relations are mutually beneficial in nature, and the two countries' development is each other's opportunities, not challenges. China's development is aimed at improving the lives of its people. It has never been about surpassing or replacing anyone, nor about competing to be the world's number one.

China is ready to work with Australia to uphold the comprehensive strategic partnership, give full play to such mechanisms as the China-Australia Strategic Economic Dialogue, expand trade, broaden cooperation in areas like new energy vehicles and renewable energy power generation, and step up exchanges and cooperation in culture, tourism and other fields. We hope that Australia will foster a fair, just and non-discriminatory environment for Chinese businesses, and provide more facilitation for travel between the two peoples.

Could you tell us a little about your background, and how you came to be Consul-General to Western Australia?

CG Long: I started my professional diplomatic career at the Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China in 1987. I have been posted to the Embassy of China in Malaysia and Laos and been the Consul General of China in Lahore, Pakistan. In 2021, I was appointed as the Consul General of China in Perth.

Chinese Consul General HE Long Dingbin delivering his speech for the Chinese New Year, Chinese Co

Sub-national cooperation constitutes an important foundation for China-Australia relations. The Chinese Consulate General in Perth is both committed to promoting political, economic and trade, educational cooperation as well as cultural and people-to-people exchanges between China and WA and to boosting mutual understanding and friendship between our two peoples. The Chinese Consulate General provides high quality consular services to both Chinese and foreign citizens.

My colleagues and I are willing to work together with WA and make contributions to the development of the China-Australia comprehensive strategic partnership and to China-WA friendship and cooperation.

Australian comrades are very interested in China, firstly because all Australians are interested in China nowadays, but also because China is the most successful communist society in the world today. Are there aspects of Chinese communism you think Australian comrades should particularly study?

CG Long: The Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China summarised the valuable experience we have gained since the launch of reform and opening up, particularly from our endeavour to comprehensively deepen reform in the new era, we will implement the following principles:

- Upholding the Party's overall leadership. We must firmly uphold the Central Committee's authority and its centralised, unified leadership and ensure that the Party fulfills its core role of exercising overall leadership and coordinating the efforts of all sides. We must ensure that Party leadership is exercised in every aspect and throughout the entire process of reform so that it always advances in the correct political direction.
- Adhering to a people-centered approach. We must respect the principal position and pioneering spirit of the people and make our reform measures highly responsive to the call of the people, so as to ensure that reform is for the people and by the people and that its fruits are shared among the people.
- Upholding fundamental principles and breaking new ground. Staying committed to socialism with Chinese characteristics, we must keep pace with the times, adapt to the evolution of practice, and take a problem-oriented approach, so that from a new starting point, we can promote innovations in theory and practice, in our institutions and culture, and in all other aspects.
- Strengthening institutional building as our main task. We must strengthen top-level design and overall planning, always establishing new systems before abolishing old ones while attaching equal importance to efforts in both respects. We must consolidate foundational systems, refine basic systems, and innovate important systems.
- Staying committed to law-based governance on all fronts. We must deepen reform and advance Chinese modernisation under the rule of law and ensure unity between reform and the rule of law, seeing that all major reforms have a solid legal basis and that reform achievements are elevated to law in a timely manner.
- Applying systems thinking. We must properly handle the major relationships between the economy and society, between the government and the market, between efficiency and fairness, between vitality and order, and between development and security, thus

China's development ... has nev about surpassing or replacing

interview
ng Dingbin

onsulate in Perth, February 2024. Photo: Vinnie Molina

pursuing reform in a more systematic, holistic, and coordinated manner.

To the extent that they think about Australia at all, how do most Chinese people see Australia and Chinese-Australian relations?

CG Long: As Chinese President Xi Jinping has pointed out, there are no historical problems or conflicts of fundamental interests between China and Australia. The two sides are well positioned to be partners who trust each other and contribute to each other's success. As we all know, China is Australia's largest source of tourists and international students.

Australia, with its developed economy, diverse culture, and unique landscapes, is not only known as the "country riding on the sheep's back" and the "country sitting in a minecart" but also as a dynamic and innovative nation. Its beautiful landscapes, adorable kangaroos and koalas, high-quality educational resources, and delicious wine are all very popular with the Chinese public.

The two governments need to create more convenient conditions for personnel exchanges, enhance mutual understanding and amity between the two peoples, and consolidate public support for friendship between the two countries.

How do you see Australia and China – and their relations – developing in the future?

CG Long: China is ready to work with Australia to sustain and build on the hard-won positive momentum in bilateral ties, and jointly advance a more mature, stable and fruitful comprehensive strategic partnership to deliver more benefits to the two peoples. Furthermore, China is ready to step up coordination and cooperation with Australia at the regional and international levels, stand against bloc confrontation and a new Cold War in the interest of peace and stability in the region, stay open and inclusive, thrive together, and jointly promote regional economic integration and an open world economy.

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Statement from the Communist Party of Bangladesh

To Consolidate the victory of the people, the safety of the people of the country must be ensured – CPB

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) President Md Shah Alam and General Secretary Ruhin Hossain Prince in a statement on 5 August 2024 have referred to the resignation of the Sheikh Hasina-led government as the downfall of dictatorship and the victory of the people in the united struggle of the students along with all the democratic, secular, left political forces. They urged that the formation of an interim government be based on discussions and opinions from all agitating Democratic patriotic forces.

In the statement, the leaders said that the countrymen should be wary that this victory of the people does not flow to different tracks. The movement must continue until full democratic rights are achieved. The statement urged everyone to play a role in maintaining peace, the rule of law and discipline across the country, protecting the lives and property of people including rights of religious and ethnic minorities. In the statement, the leaders and activists have been called upon to stand by the people to protect the lives and property of the people.

Regards,

Adv. Hasan Tarique Chowdhury
Head of the International Department and
Member of the Central Committee

New arms race in Europe

William Briggs

The signing of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty between the USA and the Soviet Union, in 1988, was a break in Cold War hostilities. Europe became a little more secure. It meant that deployment of missiles with a maximum range of 5,000 km were banned. Donald Trump tore up that treaty in 2019. Nothing really changed in Europe but it meant that the Americans began deploying these missiles within easy striking range of Chinese cities.

The United States has just announced that it will begin putting long range missiles into Europe. These will be able to easily reach Moscow from European NATO bases. The announcement was made during the NATO summit in Washington in July. These weapons will be stationed in Germany in 2026. It's the beginning of a dangerous arms race.

Putin immediately announced that Russia would definitely respond. He made it clear that Russia would begin production of intermediate range weapons that, when deployed would be within striking distance of the West. Putin has denounced the US for triggering a new missile crisis. He pointed out that the flight time to targets on Russian territory of such missiles will be about 10 minutes and that Russia will take "mirror measures to deploy, taking into account the actions of the United States, its satellites in Europe and in other regions of the world."

The USA has a long and inglorious record of provocations. NATO itself was formed with the express purpose of threatening the security of the Soviet Union. The USSR responded with the establishment of the Warsaw Pact. After the end of the Cold War and the demise of the USSR, the USA broke the INF Treaty. Russia responded. America is now preparing the deployment of weapons that have Moscow and St Petersburg clearly in their sights.

German Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Sebastian Fischer, portrayed Germany and NATO as the victims, saying that "we will not allow ourselves to be intimidated by such comments." Christiane Hoffmann. the Deputy Head of the German government's Press and Information Office described the US act of militarisation as simply a 'deterrent.'

What is prompting the USA to launch such a destructive policy? It is making Europe a far more insecure continent in an increasingly dangerous world.

Washington always acts in what it perceives to be its own best interests. The arms build-up obviously suits the interests of its military-industrial-complex. It is also using this action to push its allies in Europe into a closer embrace, therefore allowing it to wield greater influence. Deploying weapons in Europe certainly makes Russia a target, but also makes European countries little more than US military bases. Despite all claims to an equal and harmonious relationship within NATO and between the EU and the USA, reality tells a different story.

It's a dangerous strategy for the US, for Europe and for the world, but for the USA, maintaining unconditional power is worth any risk.

War is knocking at the door

The view from Türkiye

Kemal Okuyan, TKP General Secretary

Israel wants a full-scale conflict. Its interests and the fanaticism it constantly nurtures require that. It believes that it has seized a favourable opportunity to consolidate and expand the territories it has occupied.

There is evidence that the United States, scheming to break the growing influence of Iran and Russia in the region, is also encouraging Israel to wage a wider war. The US special forces and intelligence are already directly involved in the war in Gaza. The US air force and navy are periodically striking Shia militias in Iraq and Houthi targets in Yemen, and US troops continue to be present as an occupying force in Syria, which has been at war with Israel since 1948.

The Middle East is a region where the competition and crisis within the imperialist system has intensified and come brink of a major rupture. The fact that the Gazans are paying the biggest price of this conflict does not change the fact that we faced the same heavy balance sheet yesterday in Iraq and later in Syria.

So what will happen today? What are the dimensions of the issue that concern Türkiye? Let's go one by one.

1. Iran, which has suffered a succession of heavy blows and serious weaknesses in its institutional structure, has no choice but to try to compensate for the loss of prestige caused by the inability to protect an important guest in Tehran. This is what Israel also wants.

2. Similarly, Hezbollah, which is being questioned due to the economic crisis in Lebanon for a long time, has no chance to ignore Israeli provocations any longer.

3. Israel has decided to deploy the full capabilities of its war machine and its extensive intelligence network. It must be taken into account that this will have a deterrent effect on some elements and may even create serious internal problems in some countries.

4. Israel is determined not to tolerate any Palestinian authority, not to mention an independent Palestinian state. Therefore, what we are witnessing is a border expansion operation from Gaza to the West Bank, from the Golan Heights to South Lebanon. It is impossible for this operation to succeed through low-intensity conflicts and massacres of civilians.

5. For the Arab countries (and Türkiye), which have been advocates of a policy of rapprochement with Israel, to enter into such a détente with Israel today, when Palestine is on fire, would represent an enormous domestic political risk. Israel will not receive any meaningful support even from the most co-operative regional countries.

6. Despite all claims of a new axis, Iran is as isolated as Israel. China and Russia do not intend to intervene directly in an Israeli-Iranian conflict. Türkiye, which has taken a stance against Israel on Gaza, is in competition with Iran as much as with Israel.

7. Israel, on the other hand, can count on the military and political weight of the US in the region, the bases in Cyprus, which the UK and the US use as they wish, and its deep-rooted relationship with the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) in Iraq. The KDP's close co-operation with Turkey should also be noted.

8. In addition, any force in Syria that keeps the Damascus government and the pro-Iranian forces under pressure is of value for Israel. Who are these forces? The PYD (Democratic Union Party), which the US continues to support, is one of them. But it does not end there. Israel is also associated with some jihadist groups in Syria and provides them with logistical support. The Syrian National Army, proudly patronised by the AKP, is in partnership with Israel in the fight against the Syrian army and pro-Iranian militias.

Photo: Karolina Kaboompics – flickr.com (CC BY SA2)

9. Israel will want to utilise every opportunity in the countries of the region in case the war expands.

10. The problem and rivalry between Iran and Türkiye is one of these opportunities. In this sense, the Sunni Hamas, an extension of the Ikhwan movement, moving away from the influence of the AKP and coming under the influence of Shia Iran is one of the biggest failures of the Neo-Ottomanist policies.

11. In Türkiye, some media and official organisations linked to the government, which started a race to insult Iran after the helicopter crash in which Reisi was killed, displayed the same attitude after the killing of Haniyeh and started a psychological war against Iran. Regardless of the strange picture of Iran, which has been dragged into deep problems by the mullahs' regime, it is necessary to note this aside.

12. In this picture, we need to understand that it is not Iran's willingness to risk such a conflict that raises the possibility of a wide-scale war, but Israel's goal of spreading the war and expanding its borders.

13. We need to know that Türkiye faces the risk of being dragged into new and much more severe situations in order to solve the problems accumulated as a result of AKP policies in a possible regional war with Israel at its centre.

14. The neo-Ottomanist mentality may want to turn the expansion of the scope of the war into an opportunity in Syria, Cyprus and even Iraq. It is useful to evaluate Erdoğan's recent discourses from this perspective.

This is an edited version of an article from the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Türkiye. The full article can be found at tkp.org.tr/en ✪

Olympic Grift – Part 2

Thomas Heenan

SOCIAL CLEANSING THE CITY

The Games' social costs can be felt for decades. Over the past 50 years, millions have been forcefully relocated because of the Olympics. Around 1.25 million were displaced by the Beijing Games. A further 720,000 were forcefully evicted by the South Korean military junta for the 1988 Games. In the seven years prior to the Rio Olympics, 70,000 were evicted during the government's 'pacification' sweeps of favelas.

Paris continues this tradition of social cleansing. At most risk are migrants and the homeless. They are victims of the city's ongoing cost-of-living and housing crises. France has an estimated 200,000 homeless of whom half live in Paris' squats and encampments. Their displacement commenced in March 2023, prior to the Rugby World Cup. It has worsened with the Olympics. The anti-Olympic activist body, *Le Reverche la Medaille*, estimates that 12,500 people have been removed from Paris to regional locations. The removals include those housed in the city's low-end hotels as part of the government's emergency accommodation plan. With the Olympics approaching, hotels cancelled their contracts with the government in expectation of profiting from an influx of tourists. The homeless were bused to temporary accommodation in regional cities. Over 80 NGOs have called on the government to halt social cleansing. The government refuses, arguing that an increased accommodation will be one of the Olympic legacies. This is merely Olympic-inspired spin-doctoring. Paris has a 10-year waiting-list for public housing. The Olympics will have little impact.

The so-called legacy is based on the fiction that Olympic village accommodation will boost housing stocks after the Games. Situated on 50 acres in the north-eastern department of Seine-Saint-Denis, the village is close to the Stade de France and the Olympic Aquatic Centre, and is the focal-point of the Games. Saint Denis also has high levels of poverty, unemployment and crime, and is home to a large 'illegal' migrant population. Placing the Games in Saint Denis was less about sport and more about the planned gentrification of the suburb.

At 79 per cent Saint Denis has the highest rate of public housing in Paris. The official boast was that after the Games one-third of the village's apartments would be set aside for public or affordable housing. But this won't be the case. Europe's biggest rail project will link Saint Denis to the Metro. Real estate agents have bought into the village's development. They will sell apartments on the open market, putting them out of the price and rent ranges of Saint Denis current residents.

The IOC is part of the problem. In 2019, it signed a $500 million sponsorship with the homestay company, Airbnb. Higher returns from short-term rentals have driven evictions near sporting venues in neighbourhoods like the IOC's next Olympic stop, Los Angeles' Inglewood. The same will occur in Saint Denis. The locally based anti-Olympic activist group, Saccage, is fighting this move. With No OlympicsLA, it has been instrumental in forging a global anti-Olympic movement that seeks to defend public spaces against the IOC and corporate capitalism's encroachments.

ORWELL'S PARIS

Central Paris is now barricaded. Ten Metro stations and numerous roads have been closed. Movement across the city is difficult. But IOC delegates have not been affected. They have their own traffic lanes. Residents, tourists and workers, however, need a QR code to access 'sensitive zones.' Watching them is the latest in AI facial recognition technology. This Orwellian Paris has been cleansed of unwanted people and anti-Olympic thought. Games volunteers must prove their 'sincerity' to the Olympic cause. There is too much money on offer for dissent or change. From 2017-21, the IOC pocketed $US7.6 billion from the summer and winter Olympics. The money trickles upwards. The richer get richer, while the poor are moved on as capitalism's foremost sporting circus cannibalises the town. ✪

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Op-Ed: China-Ukraine talks, Western hypocrisy

C Bartholomew

China's diplomatic efforts have been subject to largely unfriendly discussion in Western media recently, following China's recent talks with Ukrainian officials. While most of the world sees these and other diplomatic efforts as a positive avenue for peace, the USA and its allies have been quick to smear such actions, revealing more about themselves than China.

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba led a delegation to Guangzhou, in China's Guangdong Province, in July this year. Discussions at this meeting, the first since the Russia-Ukraine conflict began in 2022, focused not only on China and Ukraine's relationship, but the future of Ukraine's attitude towards both Russia and the West. Kuleba announced that Ukraine is willing and prepared to begin negotiations with Russia, while acknowledging China and Brazil's joint outline of six understandings for a political resolution to the conflict. This readiness, Kuleba qualified, is reliant on good faith from Russian leadership. Russia has been issuing similar statements in support of peace negotiations. The question now is what compromises will be made by either side, as both seek to protect their interests.

Some Chinese experts have stated that Kuleba's four-day visit to China may in part have been motivated by uncertainty in Washington. Biden's withdrawal and the potential of a Trump re-election pose a risk to Ukraine of abandonment by the US, or pressure to cede sovereignty and territory to ensure a quick resolution. The West's plans to carve up a post-war Ukraine to suit Western corporate interests has been known for some time, with the plan already underway given the selling off of Ukrainian assets and industry for a pittance. With the acceleration of Israel's genocidal colonisation of Palestine and a shift in Western rhetoric towards confrontation with China, Ukraine may indeed already be feeling abandoned. Ukraine's move towards discussions with China and potential peace negotiations are therefore likely to be a pragmatic measure.

TAIWAN

Kuleba has stated that Ukraine greatly appreciates China's role in encouraging peace negotiations and maintaining international order. Kuleba also said that China and Ukraine are friends and expressed support for China's stance on Taiwan. These statements are at direct odds with US talking points, as the West has continually attempted to conflate the Russia-Ukraine conflict with the issue of Taiwan. Recent AUKUS propaganda has tried very hard to establish the idea of an "Axis of Upheaval," composed of an alleged "cabal" made up of Russia, China, Iran, and the DPRK. It has become increasingly apparent that the US and its allies are terrified of multipolarity, the end of the US stranglehold over global economics and politics.

WESTERN SPIN

It is no wonder, then, that China's growing status as a world leader in diplomatic efforts has been under attack by the press. The spin from Western media outlets such as *CNN* has largely been that China is trying to clean up its image by presenting itself as a force for peace in the wake of Western criticism of China's Russia ties. Indeed, these outlets and the Western 'experts' they quote from have alleged that China is merely attempting to pressure Ukraine into making a deal amenable to Russian interests. Of course, this analysis completely ignores the fact that China has maintained a consistent position since the very beginning of the conflict, one which promotes diplomatic solutions and international dialogue.

Only time will tell whether China's efforts will lead to a diplomatic resolution in Ukraine. Zelensky has made calls for Russia to be present at the next round of peace conferences, the first of which attended exclusively by Ukraine and Western powers. Whether these sentiments will result in substantial peace negotiations is unclear. In the meantime, those of us in the West must continue to call out hypocrisy and keep up demands for proper action, perhaps by following China's lead. ✪

Maduro: 'We are not going to allow a civil war'

The Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, during a press conference from the Hall of Ayacucho blamed the 'Comanditos' organised by the extreme right, for trying to undermine the peace and order of the country through violence.

In particular, the president pointed to Maria Corina Machado and González Urrutia as leaders of the extreme right and main sponsors and spokesmen of violence and vandalism.

According to the president, the Comanditos are responsible for attacking 3,600 leaders of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV).

"We are not going to allow a civil war in Venezuela," the President said.

"We want everything to remain constitutional. We don't want to go into other forms of revolution. I say this solemnly from the political power. We want to continue on the path that Chávez has laid out, but if US imperialism and fascist criminals force us, we will not tremble to call the people to a new revolution with other characteristics, he said.

Nicolás Maduro added that "the people know it. But if the empire wants to advance its criminal plan, we will defend our homeland. We will protect and defend an entire people."

"The things I have done have been to protect the worker, the merchant, the people on the street to live in peace and quiet. I want to thank the people's power, the police forces, the National Guard, the military forces because Venezuela is at peace at this time," he said.

The criminals, trained, charged, drugged, added the president, while blaming Elon Musk, Jair Bolsonaro, Javier Milei, Daniel Noboa, Nayib Bukele, Spanish party Vox, and Colombian ex-presidents Iván Duque and Álvaro Uribe.

"They wanted a hecatomb," said Maduro. He also said that the United States was "taking advantage" after Venezuela negotiated in good faith with the US, referring to Venezuelan migrants returning to the country from Chile and Peru.

"The Bolivarian revolution is peaceful electoral but not unarmed. The Bolivarian Revolution has roots, it has people and it has military personnel," insisted the head of state.

Telesur ✪

Write to the Editor!

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Global Briefs

CUBA: Russia's dispatch of warships to Cuba indicates that Russia is offering an alternative to relations with Washington and its leadership, commented retired French Army Colonel Michel Guya. "It means that Russia has returned to the international scene as an alternative to the United States. The Russians begin to support the countries that the Soviet Union used to help because they have the means to do so", the military analyst said. Warships of the Baltic Fleet of the Russian Navy entered the port of Havana on 27 July and stayed there till 30 July. The Russian Navy men paid courtesy visits to the commander of the revolutionary Navy of Cuba and the governor of Havana.

BRITAIN: Violent riots are continuing across the country. The new UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer condemned '"far-right thuggery" in his televised address. The riots followed a deadly knife attack in Southport. Three girls died and many others were injured, fuelling hatred towards Muslims and immigrants in general. A 17-year-old was charged with murder. The attacker was born in Britain However, online disinformation about the nationality and religion of the killer has led to continuing acts of vandalism against mosques and motels/hotels where migrants are believed to be present. There have also been spirited anti-racist counter-demonstrations.

RUSSIA: President Putin had talks last week with Indonesian Defence Minister and President-elect Prabowo Subianto, who is visiting Moscow. Subianto won the February presidential election and will take office in October. At present he holds the post of Indonesia's top defence official, while Joko Widodo remains Indonesia's acting president. "We consider Russia as a great friend," Prabovo said in a statement issued by the Indonesian defence ministry. "I would like to continue to maintain and enhance this relationship. In our history, we remember Russia has always helped us in many aspects when we were in difficulties." The two leaders have discussed plans for Indonesia and Russia to strengthen their strategic partnership and cooperation in defence, energy and education.

IRAN: Russian Security Council Secretary, and former defence minister Sergei Shoigu is on a working visit in Iran to discuss global and regional security issues. The agenda includes a wide range of issues of cooperation between Russia and Iran, including economy and security. Shoigu's visit comes at a time when the situation in the Middle East is extremely volatile and the possibility of an even wider conflict a real one in the wake of the assassinations of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh and Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukr. Despite these circumstances, Iran and Russia continue to work towards mutually beneficial projects. The Iranian president has accepted an invitation to take part in the BRICS summit in October. The summit will take place in Kazan and there are a number of countries that are planning to join BRICS. As Masoud Pezeshkian stated: "I will continue to prioritise bilateral and multilateral cooperation with Russia, particularly within frameworks such as BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and Eurasia Economic Union."

MALI: Mali has severed diplomatic relations with Ukraine after an investigation into the involvement of Ukrainian military instructors in a year-long conflict against government troops and on the side of the rebels.

Book review

Geographies of New Caledonia-Kanaky: Environments, Politics and Cultures

by Matthias Kowasch and Simon P J Batterbury (eds)

Graham Holton

Pro-independence Kanak political parties have called New Caledonia *la Kanaky* since the 1980s. It comes from the ethnic name of the indigenous Melanesian Kanak people, who make up 41 per cent of the population. New Caledonia (*Nouvelle-Calédonie*) is a French 'sui generis territory' meaning that there is a New Caledonian citizenship in parallel with French citizenship. The territory is dependent on nickel mines for 90 per cent of its exports and 10 per cent of its GDP. Only two hours flight from Brisbane, Kanaky is important to Australia's Pacific foreign policy. New Caledonian politics matters.

This book has 21 chapters, with topics ranging from politics, geography and anthropology. In chapter 9 "The Decolonisation Process Without Independence in the Light of Changes in the Nickel Sector in New Caledonia," Christine Demmer traces Kanak mining nationalism within a political context is relevant to understanding this May's anti-colonial riots. With a wave of violence unseen since the 1980s, six people were killed and around $335 million in damages, France declared a state of emergency.

Nickel deposits were discovered in 1864. Mining companies used forced labour from Vanuatu, French Indochina (Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam), Indonesia, and Japan, because the Kanak were requisitioned for other works in the French colony. In 1946 the islands became a French overseas territory, giving the Kanak citizenship and voting rights. Kanak students returning from France took on anti-colonialism, with 80 per cent of Kanaks wanting independence. Kanaks were poorly paid and held precarious jobs. The nickel boom from 1967 to 1972 increased immigration, making the Kanaks a minority in their own country. This led to clashes between French authorities and the Kanak independence movement between 1976 and 1988.

From 1981 several pro-independence parties merged into the *Front Indépendantiste* (FI), before forming *Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste* (FLNKS) in 1984. After the rejection of the political solution proposed by the French State and the execution by the elite group of the national gendarmerie of the leader of a Kanak revolt, Eloi Machoro, the French State proposed to develop poorer regions, inviting FLNKS to be involved. The French centre-right government carried out an unequal distribution of land, with more than two-thirds for Europeans and less than a third for Kanaks. This led to roadblocks, armed clashes and property damage in 1986/87.

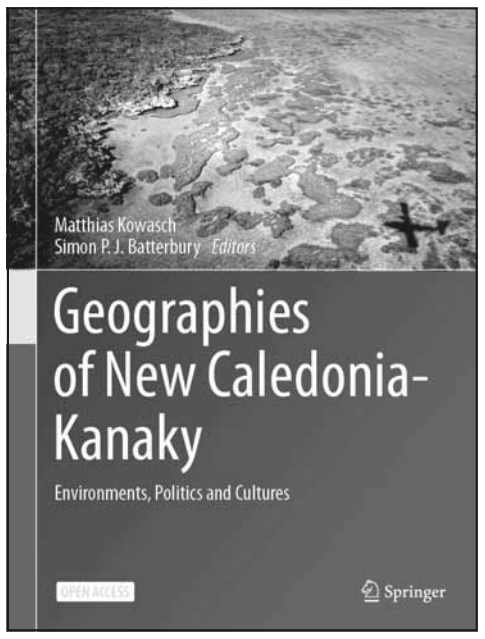
The 1987 independence referendum saw 98 per cent voting to remain part of France. However voter turnout was only 59 per cent, as the Kanaks boycotted the referendum. This was followed in 1988 with the Ouvéa Cave hostage incident, in which pro-independence militants killed four gendarmes, before French forces rescued the hostages, killing nineteen Kanaks. Two soldiers died.

After the Matignon-Oudinot Accords were signed in 1988, pro-independence parties agreed to the economic development policy proposed by the State. France's economic development for the Kanak-majority regions was meant to weaken claims for independence. This decolonisation without independence was called "within the French Republic" by former French Prime Minister Michel Rocard. The Accords provided a referendum on self-determination after a ten-year period, with the independence movement needing to demonstrate its' capacity to govern the country.

The FLNKS set out to claim partial public control of nickel production to build a Kanak sovereign country. The entry of Kanak independence supporters into the nickel industry was perceived by the State and FLNKS as an opportunity to reduce the economic inequalities affecting the Kanak. Under pressure from the president of FLNKS, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, the mining company *Société Minière du Pacifique Sud* (SMSP), subcontractor of *Société Le Nickel* (SLN), was purchased by the *Société de Financement et d'Investissement de la Province Nord* (SOFINOR), to create an economic basis for independence. Pro-independence leaders wanted a nickel smelter in the North, in addition to the SLN smelter in Nouméa, the capital. French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin agreed to the pro-independence leaders' wishes and the Nouméa Accord was signed on 5 May 1998, effectively extending the decolonisation process by twenty years.

Advocating development entrepreneurship was perceived as retaking control of an economy largely dependent on the French State. The 'caledonisation' of metallurgical companies and the 2009 mining code were important achievements of the Kanak struggle for Indigenous control over the mineral resources. To defend the nationalist position, the *Union Nationale pour l'Indépendance* (UNI) organised conferences in 2016 explaining SMSP's strategy and the drawbacks of sustainable management of the nickel sector. In 2018 SMSP signed a Memorandum of Agreement with Yangzhou Yichuan Nickel Industry, on the 51/49 per cent share holding model, to build a future processing plant in China. Being linked to world markets meant the territory could not avoid the nickel price crisis between 2015 and 2023, which stifled economic dividends.

Through SMSP and SOFINOR, FLNKS took a place in a sector previously reserved for non-Kanaks, supporting its aim for building independence. Nickel nationalisation, while retaining French colonialism, did not reduce ethnic inequalities. Decolonisation was not achieved and social inequalities remained, leading to competition between a nationalist vision and the demand for Indigenous recognition. FLNKS regards the establishment of distinct community rights as not achieving a satisfactory resolution to the colonial problem. This hostility led to the riots in May.



On a positive note, the pro-independence Kanak candidate, Emmanuel Tjibaou, was elected to the French National Assembly in July. His election could change the balance of power in any discussions on the territory's future.

This book is an important examination of the failure of decolonisation in New Caledonia and how this led to the recent riots and political unrest.

The unrest will return, and Kanaky should not be taken for granted by Australians, particularly in the light of our role in supporting US imperialism and trying to prevent Pacific nations from freely choosing friendship with China. I thoroughly recommend this fascinating and relevant study. ✪

Mexico boycotts 'biased' Venezuela meeting

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has stressed that Mexico will not participate in a meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS) about the situation in Venezuela.

"We do not agree with the biased attitude of the OAS," said the head of state .

He warned that "before knowing the results, the director of the OAS had already recognised one of the candidates without any proof. So why are we going to a meeting like this? That is not serious, it is not responsible, it does not help find a peaceful, democratic solution to a conflict in a Latin American country."

For the president of Mexico, this call by the OAS and the positions of several countries that are part of that organisation in relation to the internal affairs of Venezuela, is interventionism.

"Enough of that. Enough of interventionism. Venezuela's problems have stagnated. No solution has been found because there is too much interference. People from abroad intervene," he emphasised.

After the elections, where the National Electoral Council declared Nicolás Maduro president-elect, extremist sectors of the right, led by disqualified candidate María Corina Machado, have denied the results and generated a large media campaign against the process.

Faced with such questions, calls for violence and diplomatic friction, Maduro today presented an appeal for protection before the Electoral Chamber of the Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ) with the objective of clarifying and stopping the attacks that the country suffers.

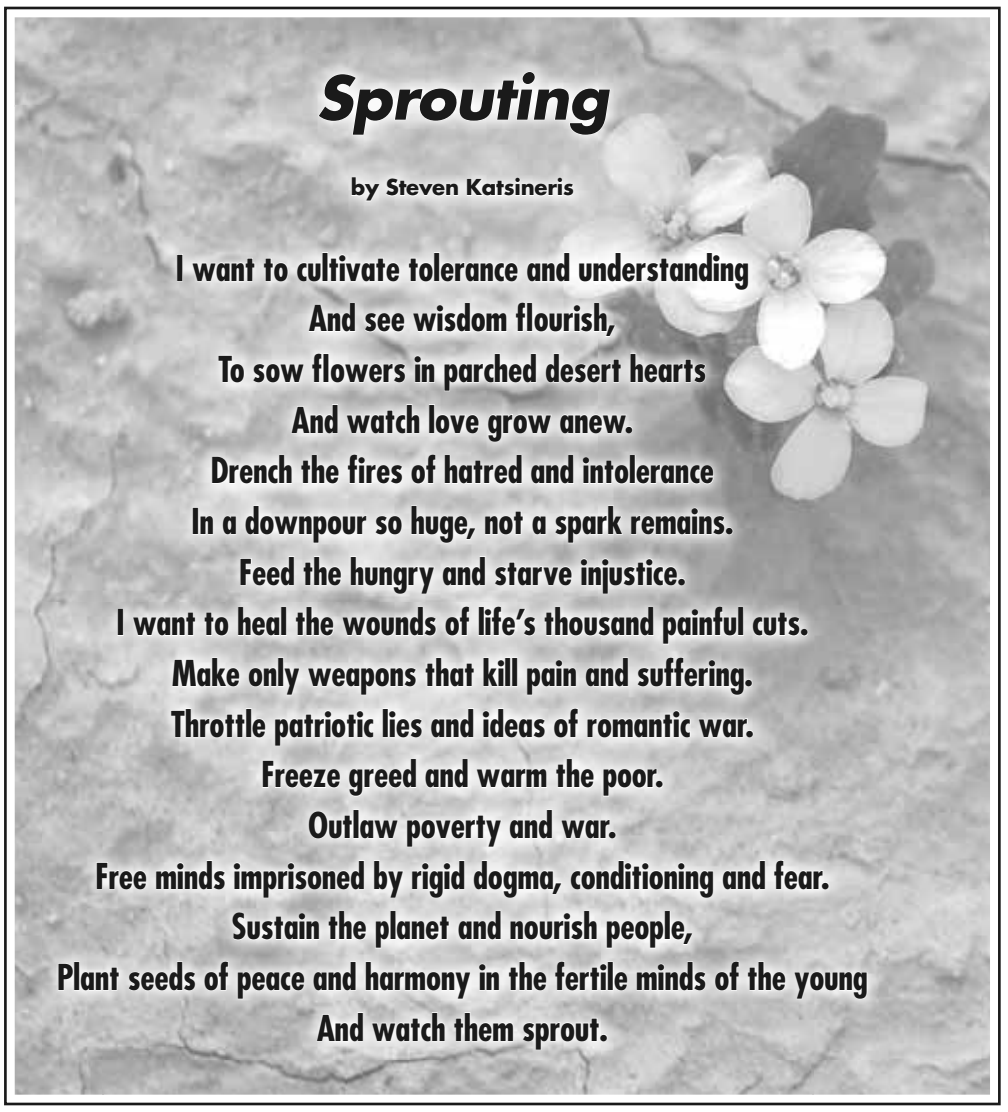
In statements to the press after presenting his argument before the Board of Directors of the TSJ, the president requested that an electoral dispute be activated and expressed his willingness to be summoned, questioned, and thoroughly investigated by that body as the presidential candidate who won the elections.

The appeal for the peace of the country, he stressed, is contained in the Magna Carta, in the Organic Law of Electoral Processes and the Organic Law of the TSJ, in order to settle this attack against the electoral process and attempted coup d'état.

Maduro denied that the electoral process of 28 July in which he was the winner with 51.20 per cent of the votes, was in any way misused, and said that "everything that needs to be clarified about these attacks and the process" is to be clarified.

The purpose is to compare all the elements of proof and certify through "a very high technical level of expertise, the electoral results of the July 28 elections."

Prensa Latina ✪



Sprouting

by Steven Katsineris

I want to cultivate tolerance and understanding
And see wisdom flourish,
To sow flowers in parched desert hearts
And watch love grow anew.
Drench the fires of hatred and intolerance
In a downpour so huge, not a spark remains.
Feed the hungry and starve injustice.
I want to heal the wounds of life's thousand painful cuts.
Make only weapons that kill pain and suffering.
Throttle patriotic lies and ideas of romantic war.
Freeze greed and warm the poor.
Outlaw poverty and war.
Free minds imprisoned by rigid dogma, conditioning and fear.
Sustain the planet and nourish people,
Plant seeds of peace and harmony in the fertile minds of the young
And watch them sprout.

Weaponised Olympic drug testing

C Bartholomew

Western media has been awash with stories of alleged doping scandals regarding Chinese Olympians. The US in particular has been vitriolic towards Chinese athletes and Olympic officials alike, making sweeping allegations of corruption and pro-China bias. A closer look at these allegations, as well as the history of US attempts to seize complete control over Olympic drug testing, reveals the petty political motivations behind the USA's slander.

The USA's 1919 *Rodchenkov Anti-Doping Act* gave the US the right to exercise "extraterritorial criminal jurisdiction" over doping incidents in international sporting events. The law allows US officials to charge, fine, and imprison individuals accused of doping in events involving US athletes. This law has been opposed by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), the official body responsible for investigating doping in Olympic events, as well as by the wider sporting community. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and WADA have both said the *Rodchenkov Act* gives the US too much power over doping enforcement, presenting a serious threat to the fairness of international sporting events.

The *Rodchenkov Act* came about due to US opposition to WADA's handling of Russian doping cases. Once again, the US has taken the opportunity to both slander a geopolitical opponent and grasp for more control over international sports, as the recent bout of doping accusations towards Chinese athletes has been accompanied by more legislative manoeuvres. Lawmakers from both major parties have introduced the *Restoring Confidence in the World Anti-Doping Agency Act*, which would grant the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) permanent authority to revoke funding for WADA, effectively using US funds as leverage to demand WADA be more anti-China.

Since April, the US has been kicking up a fuss about 23 Chinese athletes who tested positive in a 2021 contamination case. The US Department of Justice has also apparently launched an investigation into the case. The influential *New York Times* has been at the forefront of US sensationalism, recently making accusations that two Chinese swimmers tested positive for steroids in 2022 but had their provisional suspensions lifted.

WADA, as well as Chinese athletes themselves, have already felt the effects of US pressure. WADA has stated that it is caught in "the middle of geopolitical tensions," going as far as to say that "certain individuals are attempting to score political points purely on the basis that the athletes in question are Chinese." According to WADA, these attacks have "created distrust and division within the anti-doping system." Chinese swimmers have been subjected to an average of 21 doping tests each, massively eclipsing the average of 4 tests for Australian swimmers and 6 for the US. Pan Zhanle, a 19-year-old Chinese swimmer, won the 100m freestyle gold after being made to take 29 separate doping tests, all of which came back negative.

US outrage lacks any grounding in reality. WADA's Chinese counterpart, CADA, found no evidence of doping regarding the 23 Chinese swimmers in the 2021 case, a finding supported by WADA itself. Similar findings were made regarding the two athletes in the 2022 case. WADA's own investigation also found no evidence of doping, particularly considering findings of consistently low concentrations of the heart medication trimetazidine (TMZ) and the lack of any consistent doping pattern. CADA has labelled contaminated food to be the likely cause for any positive tests, particularly as the presence of certain growth hormones or medications in meat products can result in a positive doping test. WADA has found that the evidence supports CADA's theory, a finding which sparked outrage from the US. The very mainstream BBC has reported on independent investigations supporting CADA and WADA findings, and has found no evidence of pro-China bias or mishandling in WADA's investigations.

What *has* been called into question is the USA's suitability for hosting the 2034 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City and the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles. The International Olympics Committee has reportedly been trying to pressure authorities overseeing the Salt Lake City games to push for a repeal of the *Rodchenkov Act*, and has made it clear that the US must respect WADA's authority to be considered fit to host. Doubts have also risen regarding the 2028 Los Angeles games and the ability of the US to host the games fairly. Regardless of what happens, the USA's international image has been damaged by their demand for power over international sporting events and their obsessive attacks on Chinese athletes. ✪

Who was Ismail Haniyeh?

Haniyeh was born in a refugee camp near Gaza City in 1962, joining Hamas in the late 1980s during the First Intifada, or uprising.

The 62-year-old served as prime minister of the Palestinian Authority between 2006 and 2007, after Hamas won a majority of seats in the Palestinian legislative elections at the time.

After the establishment of a Hamas-led administration in the Gaza Strip, as a result of Hamas' spat with rival Fatah faction, Haniyeh served as the leader of the de facto government in Gaza in 2007-2014.

In 2017, he was selected to replace Khaled Meshaal as Hamas's political bureau chief.

Haniyeh left Gaza in December 2019, living in Türkiye and Qatar, and building up his authority to represent Hamas abroad.

His most notable previous visits included the funeral of Qassem Soleimani, a top commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) who was killed by a US drone strike in 2020, and the inauguration of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in 2021.

In April of this year, Israeli airstrikes killed three of Haniyeh's sons and four of his grandchildren, with Haniyeh making clear at the time that their deaths would not affect the ceasefire, and the hostage talks that were under way back then.

Sputnik ✪

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Half the Sky

Women and work: the struggle goes on

Anna Pha

In 1907, Justice Higgins awarded women 54 per cent of the male basic wage, taking into consideration the need of a male (breadwinner) to provide for his wife and two children. In 1969 The Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission (forerunner to the Fair Work Commission) set the female award minimum wage at 85 per cent of the male wage for work assessed to be equal to that of a man. A 1972 study noted that only 18 per cent of working women were assessed as performing work equal to that of a man. So much for the 85 per cent!

The Fair Work Commission is now required to base its wage decisions on 'equal pay for work of equal value.' In a work value case last year, with the support of the Labor government, the Health Services Union, and the Nurses and Midwifery Federation, aged care workers received a 15 per cent wage rise. It still falls short of the value of these highly qualified, mostly female workers.

Until 1966, women in the Australian Public Service had a choice: give up their jobs when they married, or attempt to conceal their marital status. The public service union was among the strongest supporters of the marriage bar. As the work of typists was regarded as unsuitable for men, women were allowed to return as temporary staff members after marriage. When computers hit workplaces in the 1980s, all of a sudden men could type!

The 1942 book *Public Service Recruitment in Australia* expressed a position that was not uncommon (amongst authorities and some men): "There is some evidence that they [women] are more adaptable to monotonous work than men. Women are still prepared to undertake such work at comparatively low salaries, and their retirement upon marriage is still an important factor ensuring rapid turnover, thus mitigating the problem of blind-alley employment." "But it is perfectly clear that some public service authorities – or at least some governing legislation – go further than this, and presume to decide whether women in accepting employment are evading their domestic responsibilities."

It took until 1973 for the Commission to grant an equal minimum wage to all Australians, regardless of sex. It was still virtually impossible for a single woman with children to get a home loan or credit card. Banks sent out unsolicited credit cards to men but not women. When I was knocked back by a bank manager for a home loan, I was told I was a risk; "you might get pregnant." During the 1970s economic crisis, *The Australian* newspaper accused working women of taking their husband's and sons' jobs. A woman's place was in the home!

Married women were discriminated against in superannuation. Women holding permanent positions in the public sector could not join the same scheme as male colleagues. They had to access an inferior scheme that was not much more than a savings account – minus interest if they quit before retirement age. This lasted until Labor Treasurer Paul Keating introduced the Superannuation Guarantee in 1992.

Further Commission decisions have fallen short of granting women genuine parity with men. Adding to discrimination is Australia's highly segregated workforce, with 'men's' work on average higher paid and more likely to offer overtime, job security, bonuses, and allowances. The average annual pay gap between men and women is $24,419.20 or $469.60 a week. Women still bear the brunt of unpaid domestic labour although there are signs that is changing. Shared parenting is also becoming more common through the provisions of paid parental leave.

One of the main barriers to women entering the workforce is the cost of early childhood education and care which eats into their meagre wages. The other is the high cost of higher education and the daunting prospect of a large debt hanging over their heads for the rest of their life. Lifelong education and childcare should be free and easily accessible. The struggle for workplace equality continues.

Israel takes the Middle East to the brink

US backing means impunity

William Briggs

The assassinations of Hezbollah leader Fuad Shukr in Beirut, and Hamas chief spokesperson Ismail Haniyeh have shown the world that Israel does not want peace. The killings also show that despite the feigned concern from Washington, Israel as America's placeman in the region, will continue to act with impunity.

The murder of the two leaders was calculated to draw the region into an even more intense conflict. Any armed response from Hezbollah or Iran, will be an excuse for Israel to broaden the conflict. The USA has already given its assurance that it will support Israel in any conflict, either with Hezbollah in Lebanon or against Iran.

President Biden acknowledged that he had spoken to Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and that he had reaffirmed America's commitment to Israel in the event of any conflict with Iran. This includes "new defensive US military deployments."

At the same time US Secretary of Defence, Lloyd Austin, declared America's firm commitment to "defend" Israel if Hezbollah retaliates. In a press conference he bluntly stressed that "if Israel is attacked, yes, we will help Israel defend itself."

It is inconceivable that Israel launched the two assassinations without the knowledge of its American patron. The murder of Haniyeh in Iran was carefully planned and executed. It involved Israeli agents infiltrating Iranian territory and planting a bomb that would be detonated when the Israelis knew it would do the most damage; not simply the killing of the Hamas leader, but damage to any prospects of peace for Palestine.

NO TRIUMPH

There are commentators who are portraying this as a triumph. It is not. It is a disaster in the making. These commentators tell the story as if it were the plot-line of a political thriller. Jake Epstein, senior defence reporter for *Business Insider*, epitomises this dangerous tendency in some areas of the media. His coverage of the killings described the "sophistication" of the Israeli strike in Tehran and of 'the stunning, back-to-back killings [that] mark two significant intelligence successes for Israel, and demonstrate its ability to secretly track its enemies and strike them with cold precision.' What Epstein and his ilk do not describe is the 'stunning' demolition of any chance for peace or for a stop to the genocide in Gaza.

A chance for a settlement had seemed almost possible. The Beijing Declaration signed by 14 Palestinian resistance organisations was the most significant step taken in decades. All Palestinian voices expressed a desire to work in concert and speak with one voice in negotiations for peace and for a Palestinian state. Western governments were supportive and called for serious talks to continue. The United Nations, the International Court of Justice and all international organisations have been speaking as one. Now there is no real chance for a settlement. The Israeli bomb in Tehran has re-stated Israel's position; that there will be no peace and no Palestinian state. There could be no clearer message of intent than assassinating Hamas' chief negotiator.

Israel has refused to accept responsibility for the assassination of Haniyeh in line with its usual 'neither confirm or deny' approach to many of its attacks beyond its borders, except of course when it bombs Lebanese targets, kills hundreds of Hezbollah fighters and Lebanese civilians and drive hundreds of thousands of Lebanese from their homes. Its 'targeted' assassination of Hezbollah leader, Fuad Shukr was almost gleefully acknowledged.

The killing of Fuad Shukr was in response to an alleged Hezbollah rocket attack on a Druze village in the occupied Golan Heights. Hezbollah has denied responsibility. The truth is impossible to know.

The US was informed of Israel's intention to strike Beirut. The attack destroyed the building in a Beirut suburb where Shukr was staying.

Western responses were quick and predictable. All knew that the threat of war had just grown considerably. Travel advisories were issued. Australia called on its citizens to leave Lebanon immediately.

Australian Foreign Minister, Penny Wong, stated that "now is not the time for Australians in the region to wait and see what happens. Now is the time to leave." Before the Israeli attack she had echoed the words of the West condemning Hezbollah. In doing so she described the town of Majdal Shams that had been hit by the rocket as being in "north-eastern Israel." The Golan Heights were seized from Syria as spoils of war after the 1967 six-day war. Israel's illegal occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan frames the current confrontation.

'IRONCLAD' SUPPORT

A spokesperson from the US State Department, Vedant Patel, spoke of finding ways to avoid an "escalation" of the situation, saying that the US is working towards "a diplomatic resolution that would allow Israeli and Lebanese civilians to return to their homes and live in peace and security." In the same statement Patel stressed that American support for Israel remained "ironclad" and that "Israel has every right to defend itself", adding that it "faces threats like no other country does in that region."

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

Israel's chief military spokesperson, Daniel Hegari claimed that Israel is not looking for war "but we are well prepared for it." It is certainly well-prepared and is a perpetual threat to all neighbouring states. Hegari tried to place the blame on Hezbollah for "dragging Lebanon and the entire Middle East into an escalation."

Israeli Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, responding to the news of Shukr's death, issued a threat to Hezbollah, Hamas, Iran, and anyone who might stand in the way of Israel, "tonight, we have shown that the blood of our people has a price, and that there is no place out of reach for our forces."

The region is aflame. The genocide in Gaza goes on. Israel is deliberately stoking the conflict. It is deliberately targeting Hamas and seeking a conflict that will have potentially catastrophic consequences. It is doing all in its power to draw Iran into its war. Israel knows that any response by Iran would almost inevitably involve the USA.

Iran's new president, Masoud Pezeshkian's inauguration had barely concluded when the Israeli bomb killed Haniyeh. Iran has pledged a response. Hamas has promised revenge. Hezbollah's Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah, has also said it will respond.

THREAT LEVEL

Israel was well aware of this when they chose to escalate the situation. The United States was well aware of Israel's plans. American naval movements in the region are designed to increase the threat level even further.

US Secretary for Defence, Lloyd Austin announced that a naval strike group led by the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln was heading to waters off Lebanon. A statement from the US Department of Defence said that Austin "has ordered additional ballistic missile defence-capable cruisers and destroyers to the US European Command and US Central Command regions. The Department is also taking steps to increase our readiness to deploy additional land-based ballistic missiles."

These announcements are designed to increase the threat posture of the USA, to give Israel more freedom to act and to present blatant acts of aggression as deterrent measures.

It was Israel that killed the Hamas leader, Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran. It was Israel that violated the sovereignty of Iran. It was Israel that bombed Beirut, killing Hezbollah leader, Fuad Shukr. It is Israel that has bombed Gaza to rubble and killed tens of thousands of Palestinians. It is Netanyahu who has been indicted by the International Court of justice as a war criminal. It is the United States that has armed, funded, and given political succour to Israel in all of its crimes.

The US is backing Israel with warships and ballistic missiles. If the region explodes into war, it will be Israel that has precipitated it and the USA that has permitted it. ✪

Israel is deliberately stoking the conflict

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