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Lebanon: Israeli slaughter, backed by USA

William Briggs

Rally for Palestine and Lebanon, Boorloo/Perth on 5 October 2024. Photo: Vinnie Molina.

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon continues. Hundreds of women and children are among the more than 2,000 Lebanese now dead. More than a million Lebanese are now displaced. Three hundred thousand people have been forced to leave the country and seek shelter in Syria. Israel says it is fighting terrorists, but is a state that practices terror on a massive scale. It is drenching the region in the blood of civilian men, women, and children.

The USA, Australia, and other states that enabled the genocide in Gaza look on and, either by word or deed, support each new crime. Noises are made. Half-hearted calls are uttered about restraint or a ceasefire. The world has seen, day after bloody day just how sincere these calls are. The smoking rubble that was once home to two million Palestinians in Gaza shows the contempt Israel has for international law. They are able to continue to slaughter the innocents, in Gaza, in the occupied West Bank, and now with such diabolical ferocity in Lebanon because the USA gives its blessing.

The USA maintains that "Israel has a right to defend itself." While the world was being told that the USA would not accept any invasions of Lebanon, an aircraft carrier, destroyers and additional fighter jets and troops were being sent to 'protect' Israel.

When Iran fired its barrage of rockets into Israel, the US showed that it would 'protect' Israel by actively engaging against the rocket attack. Biden has since gone a step further. He has acknowledged that he and Netanyahu have "discussed" bombing Iranian oil facilities. Then came the news that America had bombed a number of cities and port facilities in Yemen, seriously escalating the situation. Washington claimed this was to safeguard shipping in the Red Sea.

There is no doubt that America has joined the conflict in the Middle East and has done so willingly and wantonly.

Israel, emboldened by the active support of the world's greatest military power, has increased the viciousness of its attacks. In an awful echo of its genocide in Gaza it has been targeting hospitals and medical centres in Lebanon. According to the World Health Organisation, 28 health workers died in a single day. This is the 'defence' that Western leaders, including Australian political leaders, are supporting.

The plight of the Lebanese worsens with every day of the invasion. It has become almost impossible to physically escape the assault. Lebanon's Masnaa border crossing with Syria has been cut off after a massive bombing attack. Where traffic once flowed, there is now a four-metre crater.

The inability of people to flee has placed an intolerable burden on the 900 shelters in Lebanon. A UNHCR official, Rula Amin, stated that these shelters were already full and that people were now sleeping wherever they could. "With the onset of winter, UNHCR is concerned that conditions for those affected by the escalating conflict in Lebanon will only worsen."

There is an appalling sameness to the behaviour of Israel in Gaza and Lebanon. The plight of the civilian populations is the same. The appeals from WHO or UNHCR officials is the same. The callous disregard for humanity by the Israeli military and its political leadership is the same. The support from the West is the same.

Domestically, the Netanyahu regime has just been strengthened. Gideon Saar, a former opponent of the government has joined the ruling coalition. Saar is regarded as a 'hawk' which, in Israeli politics has a particularly ominous ring to it. Netanyahu was happy to report that the two have mended bridges. "It's no secret that we've had our differences in the past, but since October 7, we have both put all past grievances behind us." None of this is good news. Saar describes his move as "the patriotic and right thing to do now ... At this time, it is crucial to strengthen Israel, its government, and the unity and cohesion within it."

All of this, internationally and domestically strengthens Netanyahu and gives him the confidence needed to wage an horrendous war on all fronts.

While Israeli troops continue their bombardment from the air and their ground invasion, the carnage continues in Gaza and the West Bank. There has been no let-up in the violence in Gaza. Khan Younis has been attacked again, leaving many dead. In the West Bank a jet fighter was used to destroy a café. Eighteen Palestinians were killed. The killing, the violence is simply out of control. Using the pretext of targeting Hamas or Hezbollah leaders, the Israeli armed forces lay waste to more and more civilian infrastructure. Homes, health facilities, schools, refugee and relief centres are all targets of this murderous regime.

ISRAEL VS UN

Israel in its abandonment of any international norms off behaviour has denied UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres entry into Israel and in an astonishing move has 'requested' that members of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remove themselves from the border region that they are there to monitor. Ireland has peace-keeping troops at a border post and has simply refused to comply with this aggressive 'request.'

UNIFIL issued a statement immediately before the ground assault began. It was when the bombardment from the air had already begun. The statement expressed its concern for the safety of civilians. In reference to the bombing and deaths of many hundreds of Lebanese civilians the statement denounced the "deliberate attacks on civilians [as] clear violations of international law."

Israel has shown utter contempt for international law. The International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, and the United Nations have been treated with total disdain. When any criticism of its aggression and crimes have been raised, they are dismissed out of hand as acts of 'anti-Semitism.' In response to the latest international calls for de-escalation, Israel simply moved its attacks up a gear.

THE WAR WIDENS

Syria has frequently been bombed and subjected to Israeli missile and drone attacks. This has taken a new and dangerous turn with an attack on an air base in Syria that is jointly used by Russia and Syria. The attack took place minutes after a Boeing 747 of the Iranian Qassem Fars Airlines landed at the Khmeimim air base.

It must be remembered that this attack, on sovereign Syrian territory, and the bombing and ground invasion against sovereign Lebanese territory could not be imagined without the support, materially, diplomatically, and politically of the United States.

In the last year this has allowed Israel to kill at least 42,000 Gazans, and in just one week kill more than 2,000 Lebanese.

The slaughter of the Lebanese intensifies. Western governments seek ways to repatriate their citizens and so they must. Australians of Lebanese background caught in the horrors have almost been blamed for being in Beirut. Politicians of all stripes and the media that serves them have repeated the call that "they" should have got out months ago. If only life were as simple as that.

While thousands of Lebanese may be able to leave, millions will not. Their lives hang in the balance. Israel's blood-lust indicates that many, many, thousands more innocent men women and children will die. The trauma of Gaza is being visited upon Lebanon. The USA goes on as partner, accomplice and increasingly active participant in every crime against humanity that Israel commits. ✪

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Climate terrorism in South America

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Guardian

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Cracking down

There's a lot to protest about just now. It's a year since 7 October 2023, which means a year of genocidal assault on Gaza, the West Bank and now the attack on Lebanon, all by Israel, supported and assisted by the USA and by this country. A Labor government has assaulted organised labor by undemocratically seizing control of the CFMEU, an effective and democratic union. We've got good reasons to protest, and you'd think we have the right to do it.

You'd think that, but you'd be wrong. The right to protest always depends on the people with power. In this country, that's capital and those who serve it. The ruling class don't mind people 'letting off steam,' but just as they cracked down on one of the country's most effective unions, they find ways of cracking down on demonstrations which are too uncomfortable for them.

Lately, the powers that be in Australia have been very worried. Not about the ongoing genocide being carried out by Israel – that's more of a problem they'd like to brush under the carpet. If our bourgeois politicians cared about Israel's aggression, they'd stop Australians for fighting in the IDF, or cancel our contract with Israeli military contractor Elbit Systems.

What's got our Liberal and Labor politicians calling for repression in the name of "social cohesion" is the flags people wave, and the slogans they chant. That's worse for them than the ongoing genocide. As Alex McKinnon has said, "social cohesion is the new 'national security' – a meaningless catch-all phrase to justify any new method of brutalising people who object to genocide."

Capitalist politicians love the freedom to protest when the protests are something they're into. The Liberal-National Coalition were really into freedom of speech at universities, when there were protests against bigoted visiting speakers. Once the uni students started protesting in support of Palestine, they forgot their love of freedom, and started calling for expulsions and police, in the name of "social cohesion."

The Australian Democracy Network, defending the right of the 7 October protestors, cited Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (the ICCPR) which requires all governments "to guarantee and respect the right to peaceful protest." Australia has signed that treaty, but if quashing protests will keep bourgeois politicians in power, or give them a quick sugar-hit of approval, they'll ignore it.

There will be more of this. The pro-Palestine demonstrations will go on as long as the genocide goes on. Pro-union protests will be back because workers, especially workers in effective unions, know what's what.

That covenant the Australian Democracy Network signed is something Australia signed up to. Here's some more of it: "governments and their agencies are required to protect all forms of peaceful protest regardless of wherever it happens or what form it takes. These protections are owed to all people and must be provided to everyone free from discrimination of any kind. Australia, which loves to talk about the "rules based order" when it supports the US internationally, has an obligation to 'comply with international law and realise its principles in legislation.'"

Right to protest? Yes, it's very right to protest. We'll keep doing it.

Cost of living crisis pushes Australians 'to the brink'

New research from charity Good360 Australia reveals an unprecedented surge in community demand for non-food aid, with 82 per cent of charities reporting that demand for essential items like hygiene products, clothing, furniture, and education supplies is higher than ever before. As the cost of living crisis continues to impact Australians, 84 per cent of charities across Australia expect the year ahead to be tougher and the demand for non-food aid to increase further.

The Good360 Australia *Communities in Need Report* features new research into the concerns and challenges of charities and disadvantaged schools nationwide, alongside Good360's latest donation data, and paints a stark picture of the impact the cost of living crisis is having across Australia. With 65 per cent of charities unable to meet the demand for non-food aid in their communities and 60 per cent witnessing a broader range of people needing support, the findings underscore the critical and growing need for non-food aid.

Good360 donation data reveals a 40 per cent surge in the value of new, donated essential items delivered to people in need via Good360's charity network in the last financial year, the highest on record. In addition, Good360 saw an 11 per cent increase in charities and schools seeking support, highlighting the escalating need in the community.

The research also reveals the types of items in highest demand, with personal hygiene products (76 per cent), clothing (72 per cent), and educational supplies (69 per cent) topping the list.

Alison Covington AM, Founder and Managing Director of Good360 Australia, says the findings emphasise the urgency of addressing the rising demand for non-food aid.

"The cost of living crisis is pushing more Australians to the brink, and we are seeing a significant increase in the number of people turning to charities for help. The reality is that our communities need more than just food; they need everyday essentials that contribute to a dignified life.

"It's not just the volume of need that's concerning, but the fact that 58 per cent of charities have reported a rise in people seeking help for the first time. We need to do more to ensure that all Australians, regardless of their circumstances, have access to the essentials. This includes items to support personal hygiene, for education, for living comfortably at home, and for play," said Covington.

Looking ahead, the research found that deteriorating economic conditions and the cost of living tops the list of charity concerns (89 per cent), followed by declining donations and fundraising challenges (65 per cent) and not having enough donated goods to support people in need (62 per cent). It also found that 89 per cent of charities surveyed think governments could be doing more to help people in need, while 85 per cent believe retailers and businesses could be doing more (e.g. by donating excess or unsold goods).

"The situation is becoming increasingly untenable for so many Australians," said Covington.

"Meanwhile we know that $2.5 billion of unsold essential household goods are unnecessarily wasted each year. There's so much more we can do to reduce both need and waste in our community, including by working with more retailers to donate more excess or unsold goods to people who need it most.

Pine Gap helps Israel

Many will tell you that Israel's war has nothing to do with this country. They're wrong. This paper has documented the money given to Elbit System, and the manufacture of F-35 fighter parts.

Now a recent report by *Declassified Australia* describes how American surveillance base, Pine Gap, in Australia, which gathers an enormous range of communications and electronic intelligence from the Israeli war on Gaza, stressing that this data is provided to the Israeli forces.

The website describes that two large US satellites operated from the Pine Gap base, sending an enormous amount of intelligence data from the Middle East, Europe, and Africa to the base. It also confirmed that after collecting and analysing communications and intelligence data for the US National Security Agency, the Pine Gap base is submitting the information to the Israeli army, amid its escalating brutal attack on the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

"Pine Gap facility is monitoring the Gaza Strip and surrounding areas with all its resources, and gathering intelligence assessed to be useful to Israel," a former Pine Gap employee has told *Declassified Australia*.

The website shows that this is not the first time that this base has assisted the Israeli army with intelligence information.

FK

Sydney Vigil

STOP USA BLOCKADE ON CUBA

4:15 pm to 5:00 pm Thursday 17 October

Outside the USA Consulate 50 Miller Street North Sydney

Support the *Guardian* by donating to Press Fund

‘You get what you pay for’ – WA government introduces exorbitant fee to lodge mining objections

The WA government has announced that they are imposing a large fee of $430 for West Australians to lodge objections to mining proposals, which has previously been free.

Only two other states, South Australia and Tasmania, charge people like this, and their respective fees of $18-46 and $49.82 are significantly lower than the new levy imposed on West Australians.

It comes as the West Australian government has spoken publicly of lobbying the federal government regarding reforms to federal nature laws currently being negotiated in federal Parliament.

Last week, WA Premier Roger Cook told a business breakfast that the federal government was walking back nature laws after a meeting with federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek at which he was accompanied by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry WA (CCIWA) and the Chamber of Minerals and Energy (CME).

The WA Premier told the business breakfast that with this lobbying effort the federal government “could feel WA coming en masse.”

On Monday WA Environment Minister Reece Whitby travelled to Canberra to continue the lobbying campaign on Minister Plibersek.

The West Australian government also recently introduced its own nature law reforms in WA Parliament that undermine the independence of the WA EPA by requiring the Minister to impose the government’s priorities on the EPA, and by introducing industry representatives on the EPA board.

Jess Beckerling, the Executive Director of the Conservation Council of WA, said today:

“Clearly this is designed to be a barrier to West Australians acting to protect farmland, forests and other places they value.

“It will significantly undermine the community’s right to engage in these decisions that can have profound impacts on their lives and livelihoods.

“Recently in WA we’ve seen multiple cases of mining exploration applications being made over highly productive south-west farms with landholders not even notified by the proponent. The law is already heavily skewed in favour of industry in WA, often leaving ordinary people reeling when mining applications cover their own land or places they deeply value.

“This is the latest in a series of WA government moves to make things easier for the resources sector, at the expense of ordinary West Australians.

“Regrettably, the WA government is using its current federal political influence to lobby for weaker nature protections on behalf of industry.

“West Australians have a deep love for nature and a strong legacy of defending the places we love. The WA government is profoundly out of step with the community on nature protection.”

Tom Price mine in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. Photo: Julian Cosson – flickr.com (CC BY-NC 2.0)

“This just goes to show that, for the WA government, it’s a case of “you get what you pay for” – a high price for most West Australians but a bargain for big business lobbyists.”

Jess Boyce, the Acting Director of the WA Forest Alliance, said:

“In 2022, the WA community used the mining warden’s court process to object to a mining exploration application by Rio Tinto covering over 100,000 hectares of the Northern Jarrah Forests. More than 150 people objected to the application, and Rio Tinto withdrew its application. This was democracy in action.”

“Objecting through the courts is an onerous and challenging process and people only do it when they feel they have to. It is abhorrent to be making it inaccessible to people with this excessive fee.

“Ordinary Western Australians are now left with few options to object to a new mine in their backyard.”

Big banks and insurers driving inflation

Big banks and insurers have priced-gouged their way to a whopping 46 per cent profit increase since 2021, according to recent ABS data.

And in further research that shocks no one, this profiteering by Australia’s biggest financial companies – at the expense of everyday Australians – is one of the leading contributors driving up inflation.

Big banks and insurers have priced-gouged their way to a whopping 46 per cent profit increase since 2021, according to recent ABS data.

As Australians face unprecedented cost-of-living pressures, the nation’s biggest banks and insurance companies continue to post record profits.

Just recently we saw the Commonwealth Bank post a staggering annual profit of $9.48 billion – and they’re hardly the only company cashing in during the cost-of-living crisis: Australia’s largest Insurance group, IAG, recorded a $1.42 billion profit, up 79.1 per cent compared to the previous financial year, Suncorp, another large insurer, reached $801 million dollars from its insurance arm (a 17 per cent increase) and QBE saw a nearly 100 per cent profit of $802 million for its half-yearly results alone.

According to the recent data from the ABS, this 46 per cent surge in profits for big banks and insurers since 2021 comes at a time when the cost of insurance and financial services has risen by an average of 6.4 per cent over the past 12 months.

This profiteering is no accident, and is largely driven by higher premiums and mortgage rates, resulting in the banks pocketing $212 billion from raising interest payments on households and businesses.

Earlier this year the ACTU-led Inquiry into Price Gouging and Unfair Pricing Practices, led by Professor Allan Fels AO, exposed the questionable tactics these companies use to boost their profits.

One such tactic is ‘confusion pricing,’ where companies intentionally create complex pricing structures that make it difficult for consumers to understand what they’re actually paying.

For example, a 2023 Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) report highlighted that 71 per cent of bonus interest accounts did not pay out the promised bonus rates, misleading customers.

Banks and insurance companies are having a lend of Australians. And it’s exactly the sort of behaviour that Peter Dutton and the Liberals enable and encourage.

Peter Dutton himself voted against the Banking Royal Commission 24 times, and tried to give the big banks a $17 billion dollar tax cut as well.

Union members are fighting back, calling on these financial giants to stop exploiting everyday Australians by raising prices unnecessarily.

It’s union members who have won the biggest changes to workers’ rights in Australia in generations – leading to higher wage growth and better conditions.

There’s more work to be done.

Unions Australia

Victoria: nurses vote yes to new EBA

With a greater than 99.5 per cent yes vote, the *Nurses and Midwives (Victorian Public Health Sector) Single Interest Employer Enterprise Agreement 2024-28* is now with the Fair Work Commission for approval. It will become operational and enforceable seven days after FWC approval.

All public sector employees are now guaranteed two pay rises per year over the next four years – totalling 28.4 per cent (compounded) – alongside almost 70 new or improved conditions and entitlements.

The total yes vote was 99.61 per cent. At Eastern Health, where the ballot was delayed because the employer missed the access period deadline for supplying all the relevant information, the total yes vote was 99.5 per cent.

Every single public sector workplace achieved a successful yes vote. More than 65 per cent of workplaces achieved a 100 per cent yes vote. Even the lowest yes result was still overwhelmingly in favour, at 97.44 per cent.

Less than one per cent of eligible employees who voted, voted no.

The total voter turnout participation rate was 61.66 per cent of eligible employees. More than 92 per cent of individual workplaces achieved a greater than 50 per cent voter turnout participation rate; over 60 per cent of workplaces achieved more than 60 per cent voter turnout.

Sunbury and Cobaw Community Health achieved a 100 per cent yes vote and 100 per cent voter turnout participation rate.

ANMF has congratulated all members on the vote. Members were willing to engage in protected industrial action that got this over the line – whether it was wearing the red ANMF campaign t-shirts at work; writing campaign messages on vehicles; refusing to be redeployed or to do paperwork or data entry; writing letters to those in power; or, for a few hours, closing beds.

Not all employers have agreed to backpay, however. Some employers have agreed to divide the backpay instalments as requested. Others have told the union they will instead pay the entire 2024 amount – the new rate, the backpay to June and the backpay to July – in one go. ANMF will further advise members as information from health services becomes available.

The Branch will also soon be making available resources to help members check that they have received the correct amount of backpay.

ANMF Victoria

Maritime workers ‘steadfast solidarity’ with International Longshoremen’s Association

On the first day of its National Council meetings in Sydney, which bring together representatives of Australian maritime workers from across Australia, the Maritime Union of Australia (the MUA) has resolved to back in the North American International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) all the way in their fight for a fair, just, and safe master contract with ocean carriers on the East Coast of the United States.

In what is the first ILA strike since 1977, 36 ports on the East Coast will be hit by industrial action as the ILA seeks wage justice through a pay deal that keeps pace with inflation, and protections against the automation of cargo handling, particularly concerning the use of automated cranes.

“The ILA’s fight is the MUA’s fight,” said Paddy Crumlin, ITF President and Dockers’ Section Chair, and MUA National Secretary, at the commencement of the MUA’s week-long National Council meetings in Sydney, Australia. “The MUA, including all Australian wharfies and seafarers, redoubles its commitment to our comrades in the ILA, as the dockers they represent stare down the United States Maritime Alliance (USMX), an industry association bargaining on behalf of American and global shipping and stevedoring companies that routinely rob and kill workers around the globe through abuse, neglect, and mistreatment,” Crumlin said.

“The same companies that make up the employer association United States Maritime Alliance (USMX) are named as members of bogus industry associations across the globe, including in Australia where they pass themselves off as ‘Shipping Australia Limited.’

“Just as we have seen off the attacks by SAL on Australian maritime workers, the ILA will see this mob off too and continue to deliver fulfilling, rewarding and safe jobs for American dockworkers for generations to come.”

On Monday night, USMX made a last-minute offer to the 85,000-member ILA. The offer was rejected.

As the ILA strike action began in the Port of Philadelphia shortly after midnight on Tuesday, workers chanted, “No work without a fair contract,” while ILA messages on the sides of trucks carried the message, “Automation Hurts Families: ILA Stands for Job Protection.”

“Our commitment to the ILA is absolute – and that will never change,” said ITF General Secretary, Stephen Cotton in a statement which coincided with the commencement of the ILA’s strike action. “Dockers worldwide face the same struggle: they want to be paid well for their hard work, they want to be safe at work, and they want to go home at the end of their shifts to the people who love them and know that there’s a secure job for them and the next generation doing this vital waterfront work.

“That is what the ILA is fighting for, and the ITF and its affiliated dockers’ unions all around the world back them in that fight the whole way,” Cotton said.

Amidst stalled negotiations between USMX and the ILA, which represents over 85,000 workers, ocean carriers in the United States are essentially taking employer-led industrial action against themselves and their own customers, after failing to negotiate in good faith towards a contract that recognises the value and contribution of dockers. The industrial action that flows from this pigheadedness is the intended outcome for USMX, which is gaming the American industrial relations system and seeking federal government intervention in the bosses’ favour.

“These tactics have been tried by a variety of multinational companies before, including in Australia most recently by DP World and Svitzer Tugs, but of course in the most outrageous fashion almost thirty years ago by Patricks Stevedores,” explained Paddy Crumlin.

“In every instance it’s been a failure, even when they have enjoyed the patronage of conservative governments willing to act against their own people on behalf of the company, and the brinksmanship and game playing by USMX will also fail,” Crumlin said.

United States President Joe Biden refused to intervene in the dispute on behalf of USMX. The President urged USMX and its multinational ocean carrier members to come to the table with a fair offer to United States dockworkers and to respect the contribution made by essential workers not only to the companies’ significant and growing profits but to the security and reliability of supply chains during major crises like the pandemic and recent hurricanes.

Maritime Union of Australia

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“Around 80 per cent of Australia’s gas is exported overseas. Our research shows the gas corporations have paid ZERO royalties on over half (56 per cent) of all gas exports. In fact, the government collects more revenue from HECS than it does from the Petroleum Resource Rent Tax.”

The Australia Institute

(Someone should tell Victorian Energy Minister Lilly D’Ambrosio about this. She’s used an alleged shortage of gas to justify opening new gas fields near the Twelve Apostles against scientific advice.)

“‘Social cohesion’ is the new ‘national security’ – a meaningless catch-all phrase to justify any new method of brutalising people who object to genocide. It’s like the ‘gamble responsibly’ you hear mumbled at the end of ten consecutive ads for whichever heinous new gambling app has just signed a sponsorship deal with the NRL. Whenever you hear it, your bullshit detector overheats.”

Alex McKinnon everythingisfine.beehiiv.com

A word on the “drug trade.” The trade in illicit drugs is big business – very big business. It is carried on by a combination of organised crime, covert operations sections of certain governments (especially the US government), right-wing political forces and big business.

They are inextricably linked in almost all phases – production, distribution and laundering of profits.

When in 1980 the Fraser government launched a Royal Commission into the Victorian Painters and Dockers Union, the Commissioner at first pursued the drug trail aspect of the allegations with zeal. But when the trail began to lead to prominent right-wing public figures and big businessmen, the Royal Commission was abruptly shut down.

Clamping down on petty crimes is one thing; clamping down on the real criminals is quite another!

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: is “free trade.” Karl Marx exposed the real meaning of “free trade” at a public lecture in 1848.

“What is free trade under the present condition of society?” he asked. “It is freedom of capital. When you have overthrown the few national barriers which still restrict the progress of capital, you will merely have given it complete freedom of action.

“So long as you let the relation of wage labour to capital exist, it does not matter how favourable the conditions under which the exchange of commodities takes place, there will always be a class which will exploit and a class which will be exploited.

“It is really difficult to understand the claim of the free-traders who imagine that the more advantageous application of capital will abolish the antagonism between industrial capitalist and wage workers. On the contrary, the only result will be that the antagonism of these two classes will stand out still more clearly.

“Do not allow yourselves to be deluded by the abstract word ‘freedom.’ Whose freedom? It is not the freedom of one individual in relation to another, but the freedom of capital to crush the worker.

“All the destructive phenomena which unlimited competition gives rise to within one country are reproduced in more gigantic proportions on the world market.

“One other thing must never be forgotten, namely, that just as everything has become a monopoly, there are also some branches of industry which dominate all others, and secure to the nations which most largely cultivate them, the command of the world market ...

“Do not imagine ... that in criticising freedom of trade we have the least intention of defending the system of protection ...

“The protectionism system [e.g. tariffs] is nothing but a means of establishing large-scale industry in any given country, that is to say, of making it dependent upon the world market, and from the moment that dependence upon the world market is established, there is already more or less dependence upon free trade.

“In general the protective system of our day is conservative, while the free trade system is destructive. It breaks up old nationalities and pushes the antagonism of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the extreme point.”

Nature (not so) positive

ALP environmental bills are good for business

Anna Pha

Photo: rawpixel.com (CC0)

In 2022 Labor came to office with the promise of introducing a Nature Positive Plan that would be "Better for the Environment, Better for Business. We will develop national environmental standards, to improve protections and guide decision-making. And we will establish an Environment Protection Agency, to enforce the law and restore confidence."

Labor is currently negotiating a package of environmental bills with the cross-benchers and the Coalition to implement part of its plan. The bills have passed the Legislative Assembly, with the Senate then referring them to a committee on the environment which reported in August.

True to form, the Coalition opposes anything that mentions the words 'environment' or 'climate change.' The Greens are seeking genuine action, including the phasing out of fossil fuels.

NATURE POSITIVE

The Nature Positive bills seek to amend the Environment Protection and Biodiversity and Conservation Act (EPBC Act) and other environmental legislation. If passed there would be 2 new bodies – the Environment Protection Australia (EPA) and the Environment Information Australia (EIA).

The government's definition of nature positive is "an improvement in the diversity, abundance, resilience and integrity of ecosystems from a baseline." This falls far short of what is widely considered nature positive. It is vague and lacks measurable outcomes.

The promise of National Environmental Standards is left for another tranche of legislation – highly unlikely in this term of government, even less likely under the Coalition.

The Howard government's EPBC Act that has facilitated the rapid expansion of fossil fuel exports remains intact. Professor Graeme Samuel, who led an independent review into the EPBC Act, described the 1,000 pages of the Act and the 500 pages of regulations as "gobbledegook" that "need to be torn up and thrown into the bonfire."

EPA

"Environment Protection Australia (EPA) will administer Australia's environmental protection laws to better protect nature, while supporting sustainable development. This will include stronger powers to ensure effective compliance and enforcement," the government claims.

Sustainable? As Ketan Joshi has pointed out, this comes from a government that has overseen the export of more fossil fuel in its first 2 years than any other government, including the Morrison government.

The EPA will be a tough "cop on the beat" and independent according to Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek, and have responsibility for compliance with and enforcement of the legislation.

It would be able to issue Environment Protection Orders – or 'stop-work' orders – to anyone in contravention, or likely contravention, of the EPBC Act; use expanded powers to audit businesses to ensure they are compliant with EPBC environment approval conditions; and carry larger financial penalties.

That all sounds great. However, there is a catch. The minister will still be able to override the "independent" EPA's decisions. Politicians who receive political donations from fossil fuel companies will still have the final say. The EPA will be able to delegate responsibilities to fossil-fuel-beholden states and territories whose track record on fossil fuel projects is nothing short of appalling.

Disturbingly the CEO of the EPA is a one-person board who is appointed by and reports to the minister! The current bills fail to cover the promised National Environmental Standards which are a critical component of Nature Positive.

Overall the legislation is government by the fossil fuel sector, for the fossil fuel sector.

CLIMATE CHANGE

One of the most glaring omissions from the legislation is any mention of climate change and its impact on the environment, although one of the functions of the EPA is to support sustainable development.

"Our EPA bills are about protecting nature. They're not about emissions. Emissions are dealt with by the safeguard mechanism," Minister Plibersek said. She would like us to believe emissions do not have an impact on nature, including humans.

Independent Senator David Pocock said in a dissenting report to the Senate inquiry into the legislation: "The absence of any explicit consideration of climate change in our national environment laws is a fundamental flaw that must be addressed. Climate change is arguably the single greatest challenge facing the Australian environment, but remains absent from Australia's primary environmental legislation. Real reform would ensure that this glaring omission is addressed."

"Habitat destruction and climate change are two of the greatest threats to the survival of Australia's wildlife, yet our current environment laws do nothing to stop either of them. Instead, they facilitate native forest logging and climate damaging projects without assessment," the Greens said in their dissenting report.

Since the introduction of the EPBC Act by the Howard government in 2000, more than 740 fossil fuel projects have been approved – without any requirement to consider climate change impacts.

It is meaningless to talk about environmental protection without considering the impact of burning fossil fuels or other human activities such as land clearing and agriculture that drive climate change. Climate change is directly responsible for the destruction of habitat, flora and fauna that cannot survive in a warmer environment, increased acidity of oceans or polluted rivers and other impacts on the environment.

The world's climate scientists say that we are on track to reach 1.5°C of warming by 2032. This will have devastating consequences.

Environmental legislation *must* include a full assessment of the impacts of the climate harm likely to be caused by projects seeking approval.

The legislation also fails to include the promised inclusion of decision-making by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including their views, knowledge and their aspirations for their own land and sea. First Nations people are entitled to expect national protections of their cultural heritage.

government by the fossil fuel sector, for the fossil fuel sector

An Environment Information Australia (EIA) agency will be established to store and manage environmental data and information. The legislation falls short on details such as what data will be collected, from what sources and how it will be used.

RFAS REMAIN EXEMPT

Another glaring omission is the failure to close a loophole in the EPBC Act that exempts native forest logging. The Samuel Review and the government's Nature Positive Plan clearly state that the national environment laws should apply to Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs).

Habitat loss is one of the two most destructive forces harming biodiversity along with climate change. It threatens bird species, koalas, and many other mammals and other threatened species that are unique to Australia.

The loophole on Regional Forest Agreements *must* be closed.

The impacts on our wildlife of climate change are profound, alarming and well-documented. "In 2023, a record number of species were added to the national threatened species list – a total of 144. Yet under our current environment laws, more than seven million hectares of threatened species habitat has been destroyed. In 2023, global emissions hit record highs," Pocock said.

"Australia has lost more mammal species than any other continent. It has one of the highest rates of species decline in the developed world and is the only developed country that is a deforestation hot spot," Independent MP Dr Monique Ryan said in her second reading speech.

Minerals Council of Australia chief executive officer Tania Constable welcomed the government's plans. That says it all. Constable says that the minerals industry is committed to the protection of Australia's environment.

Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young summed the legislation up: "a toothless EPA law that green-lights coal, gas. and native forest logging."

Labor's "Nature Positive Plan: Better for the Environment, Better for Business" is certainly better for business.

Nature Positive?

Nature Positive is a global societal goal defined as 'Halt and Reverse Nature Loss by 2030 on a 2020 baseline, and achieve full recovery by 2050.' To put this more simply, it means ensuring more nature in the world in 2030 than in 2020 and continued recovery after that.

Nature positive is not a slogan – it is an ambitious goal and should not be used to imply something is green or nature-friendly. It refers to measurable outcomes that contribute to halting and reversing nature loss with significant benefits to society.

Three key categories of nature-positive contributions and outcomes are measured: retaining and restoring species, ecosystems, and natural processes at all scales (global, national and landscape level).

Indigenous Health

Modern challenges – Part Two

C Bartholomew

WOMAD, Adelaide, 2016. Photo: Michael Coghlan – flickr.com (CC BY-SA 2.0)

First Nations healthcare today is still fraught with discriminatory practices which have harmful impacts on communities. The gender pain gap – women are more likely to be met with suspicion by medical professionals, have their issues downplayed, and be denied pain relief – is matched by an Indigenous pain gap. Many Indigenous patients are either denied treatment and medications, or made to jump through extra hoops to get them.

For instance, some Indigenous cancer patients have reported being made to take alcohol tests before their doctor will agree to see them. Indigenous women may have to contend with both pain gaps at once: are they a hysterical woman, or a drug-seeking black?

Cultural awareness is also often sorely lacking. A lack of regard for the distinctions between men's and women's business, for example, can result in shame and discomfort for Indigenous patients, while language barriers can also lead to unfair treatment. Healthcare professionals are not receiving adequate support from governments to properly address these issues, while Indigenous communities are too often overlooked or ignored.

Among the many 'Close the Gap' targets, life expectancy has continued to lag. It isn't difficult to see why. After three women died of rheumatic heart disease (RHD) in the remote Queensland town of Doomadgee, a coroner's report was called, while campaigning by the women's families drew broader media attention to the issue. RHD, as well as its precursor acute rheumatic fever (ARF), are 100 per cent preventable and have been largely eliminated from the non-Indigenous population for over 30 years.

Meanwhile, the prevalence of these diseases in First Nations communities is on the rise. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples face some of the highest rates of these diseases in the world, with Queensland having the highest rates in Australia. By 2031, RHD is set to cost Australia's health system close to $350 million, while bringing continued loss and pain to First Nations communities.

These harms are entirely preventable, so their continued presence marks a political choice. Two of the women were repeatedly turned away at the front door of Doomadgee Hospital, or sent home with a paracetamol tablet. A six-year-old who died in 2017 faced similar experiences from a Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service. These deaths represent truly disgusting negligence. They represent a choice to deny responsibility, not just for the lives of individual patients, but for the racism that is widespread throughout our health systems. Communities such as Doomadgee have chosen to fight for better healthcare. When will governments and administrators do the same?

DEFICIT DISCOURSE

'Deficit' models of community health have consistently fallen short. Deficit discourse identifies issues within communities and attempts to prescribe solutions to those issues. This fixation on symptoms rather than causes far too often places the blame on First Nations peoples and cultures themselves.

These approaches are reactive, only stepping in when a problem has already developed, rather than taking proactive steps to address the factors that cause such problems in the first place. These approaches foster dependency, undermine community agency, and are ultimately unsustainable.

Modern deficit discourse in First Nations health is little more than a continuation of A O Neville's 'dying race' mythology, constituting a form of profound cultural violence against First Nations peoples themselves through learned hopelessness. Far too many Indigenous patients feel it is they who need to "be better," that they are being oversensitive, or that their experiences are isolated rather than part of a system-wide pattern of neglect.

LESSONS OF HISTORY

Coroner Wilson's report on RHD deaths advocates for a strength-based approach to community health in Doomadgee and Queensland. Building upon six years' worth of reports into similar health disparities in Queensland, the Coroner recommended, among other things, that Queensland Health build community trust by working with local communities to address environmental and infrastructural disadvantages that undermine health equality. Paternalistic 'consultation' is not enough. Queensland Health must take community recommendations as directives requiring action while also taking responsibility for their own institutional racism.

Given the brutality of Australian healthcare's treatment of Indigenous communities, Queensland Health and other institutions must learn the lessons of history, and work with communities to rebuild trust and dismantle systems of discrimination. The fact that inquiries, inquests, and the demands of First Nations communities continue to be ignored so often indicates that our healthcare system has, at its core, failed to move beyond the destructive practices of its past.

Palestine: UN experts urge action

Peter Farmer

"The world stands upon the edge of a knife: Either we travel collectively towards a future of just peace and lawfulness – or hurtle towards anarchy and dystopia, and a world where might makes right."

So ends a statement from Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts, and Working Groups of the Special Procedures of the UN's Human Rights Council. They've listed 14 steps UN states need to take in order to comply with the International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion that Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory is unlawful.

How does Australia measure up? Let's have a look.

States should:

"Immediately review all diplomatic, political, and economic interactions with Israel to ensure they do not support or provide aid or assistance to its unlawful presence in the occupied Palestinian territory."

That's a fail, although Labor seems to feel they've been very brave by referring to the occupied Palestinian territory as "occupied."

"Take all measures to ensure that the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory can fully exercise and realise their right to self-determination including by recognition of the State of Palestine."

(Another fail; despite being ALP policy, apart from Senator Fatima Payman who was punished by the Labor Party for voting with the Greens in favour of Labor policy)

"Impose a full arms embargo on Israel, halting all arms agreements, imports, exports and transfers, including of dual-use items that could be used against the Palestinian population under occupation."

(Parts for the F-35 jets which have been bombing Israel are made in Australia. There's also the $970 million contract with Israeli arms company Elbit Systems.)

"Ban goods and services emerging from both the colonisation of occupied Palestinian territory and other unlawful activities that may be detrimental to Palestinians' rights, from entering their territory and markets, and take measures to label and permit goods and services emerging from Palestinian individuals and entities in occupied territory."

(This has not been done.)

"Cancel or suspend economic relationships, trade agreements and academic relations with Israel that may contribute to its unlawful presence and apartheid regime in the occupied Palestinian territory."

(This has not been done.)

"Impose sanctions, ... on Israeli individuals, entities including businesses, corporations and financial institutions, involved in the unlawful occupation and apartheid regime as well as on any foreign or domestic entities and individuals subject to their jurisdiction that supply goods and services that may aid, assist or enable occupation and apartheid."

(this has not been done)

"Prevent all of their citizens who hold dual citizenship with Israel from serving in the Israeli military or other services that contribute to the occupation and apartheid regime or from buying or renting property anywhere in occupied Palestinian territory."

(It has been estimated that around 1000 Australians are fighting for the IDF.)

"Investigate and prosecute those subjects to their jurisdiction, who are involved in crimes in the occupied Palestinian territory, including dual citizens serving in Israel's military, including mercenaries or those involved in settler violence."

(Not happening)

"Disseminate the Court's findings widely, ensuring that the occupied status of the West Bank including east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, and the illegality of Israel's presence are reflected in public documents and education systems."

(Labor's attitude is more an 'ignore it and it'll go away' approach)

"Make submissions to the ICC so that it investigates international crimes included in the ICJ opinion.

(Albanese is certainly not doing this)

"Convene General Assemblies of States parties under the Rome Statute or the Fourth Geneva Convention, to ensure full compliance by all parties in Palestine and Israel with international humanitarian law and international criminal law."

(Not being done)

"Ensure full protection of Palestinians, especially women, children, persons with disabilities, and older persons by establishing a protective presence and ensuring safe and full access for independent experts and mechanisms charged with monitoring and investigating human rights violations and international crimes in the occupied Palestinian territory."

(Australia is not doing this)

"Acknowledging the "irresponsible inaction" of most states on the issue, the statement calls on civil society organisations and National Human Rights Institutions to mobilise and call on their states to comply with the ICJ's landmark Advisory Opinion."

As they say, the world stands upon the edge of a knife. Call on your representatives to comply with the Advisory Opinion, and get out there and protest to motivate them and support Palestine and Lebanon!

Party Statement

Communist Party of Australia
Central Committee
General Secretary: Andrew Irving
President: Vinnie Molina
74 Buckingham St
Surry Hills NSW 2010 Australia
Ph: +61 2 9699 8844
Fax: +61 2 9699 9833
Email: president@cpa.org.au
Web: www.cpa.org.au

CPA greeting to the 79th anniversary of the WPK

Kim Jong Un General Secretary Workers' Party of Korea
By Email: wpkint@star-co.net.kp

Dear comrade,

Fraternal greetings from the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). We convey Party to Party our warm greetings to the members and leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea on the 79th anniversary of its foundation on 10th of October.

The past 79 years of historical struggle has achieved much, from the early days of the struggle for independence against the Japanese imperialists, the great victory of the Fatherland Liberation War and the task of rebuilding a war-ravaged country, under the leadership of President Kim IL Sung led the Korean people with unbreakable people-army unity.

Today that unity is being further strengthened under your wise leadership of the Workers' Party of Korea with the simultaneous development of the economy and protected by its heroic armed forces as a deterrent that safeguards the Korean people and peace on the Korean Peninsula.

The Communist Party of Australia wishes the Workers' Party of Korea every success on the 79th anniversary of its foundation and we extend our congratulations to the party leadership, members and people of Korea on this great anniversary.

We are looking forward to strengthening the fraternal relation between the Communist Party of Australia and the Workers' Party of Korea based on international solidarity, the struggle for peace, social progress, and Socialism.

Long live the WPK!
Long live the DPRK!

In socialism,

Vinnie Molina
International Department
Communist Party of Australia

10th October 2024

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GREEN NOTES

Crossing the lines

Germany's Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research has launched a Planetary Health Check (PHC), a first-of-its-kind scientific report and tool for the health of the Earth's vital organs that serve as humanity's life support system. The PHC emphasises the need for a whole Earth approach to ensure humanity's future. The report identifies nine interconnected major processes essential to life on Earth such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, and ocean acidification. The PHC shows that these critical system functions are at risk, with 6 of 9 Planetary Boundaries (PBs) breached, the imminent breach of a seventh, and a clear trend towards further transgression. The 6 that have been breached are:

1. **Climate Change:** Atmospheric CO2 levels are at a 15-million-year-high and have accelerated since the late 20th century. Global mean temperatures are now higher than at any point since human civilisation emerged on Earth.

2. **Change in Biosphere Integrity:** The global loss of genetic diversity and biosphere integrity. Human activities significantly disrupt ecosystems through agriculture, grazing and forestry. Both are exceeding safe levels and accelerating, particularly in regions experiencing intensive land use. The vast decrease in biosphere integrity raises concerns that the Earth's biosphere is losing resilience, adaptability, and its capacity to mitigate various pressures, including those from transgressing other PBs.

3. **Land System Change:** As a result of land use and increasingly due to climate change, global and regional forests have been steadily declining over the last few decades. Most regions are already beyond their safe boundaries.

4. **Freshwater Change:** The increasing variability and instability of global freshwater and terrestrial water systems raise growing concerns for water resource management and environmental stability.

5. **Modification of Biogeochemical Flows:** the use of phosphorus and nitrogen in agriculture has exceeded safe boundary levels, driving significant ecological change. Breaching this boundary has led to severe environmental impacts such as harmful algal blooms, and "dead zones" in fresh water and marine ecosystems, in particular in industrialised countries.

6. **Introduction of Novel Entities:** This refers to the introduction of synthetic chemicals, plastics, and genetically modified organisms and their impact – an area in which exact figures are uncertain. Novel entities can disrupt critical Earth system processes, harm ecosystems, (for example pesticides have caused significant decline in insect and pollinator populations), and lead to long-term, possibly irreversible changes in the environment, including the contamination of soil and water bodies and the alteration of natural habitats.

The 3 PB processes still within the Safe Operating Space are:

1. **Ocean Acidification:** Ocean acidification is approaching a critical threshold. It poses an increasing threat to marine ecosystems, especially those reliant on calcium carbonate for shell formation.

2. **Atmospheric Aerosol Loading:** Aerosols reflect sunlight back into space and alter cloud formation. This impacts climate systems, including temperature regulation, precipitation patterns, and the distribution of solar energy. Managing aerosol levels is crucial for maintaining the stability of the earth's climate system and preventing shifts that could disrupt weather patterns and ecosystems systems.

3. **Stratospheric Ozone Depletion:** The stratospheric ozone layer plays a vital role in shielding the Earth from excessive ultraviolet radiation (UV). This protection is essential for maintaining the integrity of the Earth's biological systems, as UV radiation can harm phytoplankton, disrupt marine ecosystems, and alter terrestrial plant growth – elements that are foundational to the global food web and carbon cycle.

Earth's ability to sustain life is on the brink, and as Julian Cribb has written, "All the water used, the fossil fuels burned, the land cleared, the minerals mined, the forests felled, the oceans emptied, the air polluted, the animals exterminated is down to our unique vice: uncontrolled consumption."

In other words, capitalism and its blind pursuit of maximum profits, no matter what the cost.

People's China at 75

Keith Bennett

Photo: Asian Development Bank – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Although China was the world's biggest economy for most of the last two millennia, since Britain launched the first Opium War in 1839, the country was reduced to a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society. Not for nothing is the ensuing period known by the Chinese as the "century of humiliation," marked by unequal treaties, foreign aggression, civil wars and ultimately a victorious revolution.

When the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, China was one of the poorest societies on Earth. Illiteracy was as high as life expectancy was low.

The subsequent political trajectory of the People's Republic essentially falls into two distinct phases, the second commencing with the launch of the policy known as "reform and opening up" from the end of 1978.

The first period is often described as following the Soviet model.

There is some truth to this, but it is far from the whole story.

For example, even in its most radical phases, the Chinese revolution never completely rejected a role for the national bourgeoisie.

This in turn meant that rather than a single party system, as in the Soviet Union, China retained, and retains, a multi-party, consultative system, based on acknowledging and upholding the leading role of the Communist Party.

Significantly, the peasantry (with some deviation during the period known as the Great Leap Forward, 1958-62), was not taken as a source of what might be termed "socialist primitive accumulation" to benefit the cities and the promotion of heavy industry.

Rather, policies tended to reflect the fact that the peasantry constituted the majority of the population and, even more that, they were the bedrock of the revolution.

The achievements of the Mao era should not be underestimated or denigrated. They were among the most stupendous in human history.

Despite the terrible years of 1958-62, and the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, life expectancy in China grew by one year for every year that Mao was in power.

From being practically the poorest country on Earth, Mao's China solved the basic problems of feeding, clothing, housing, and educating almost a quarter of the world's population, provided basic medical care to the whole population, brought literacy to the overwhelming majority, and massively improved the social position and role of women.

Why then was it necessary to make such a radical turn in 1978?

For all its progress, China remained a very poor country at the time of Mao's death in 1976, although the basic necessities of life were more or less guaranteed.

Whilst famine had been eliminated, food was still strictly rationed. Xi Jinping, when recalling his young days working with farmers in an old revolutionary base area, has often said that his dream was that one day the villagers would be able to eat meat and eat it often.

Although disparities and inequalities remained, China under Mao may be considered to have been one of the most equal societies on Earth, but to a considerable extent, it was a "socialism of shared poverty."

Moreover, huge changes were underway globally. Countries and regions around China were developing rapidly, albeit inequitably.

However, this capitalist development in the region was skillfully turned into a positive factor by China as its principal source of investment in the first stage of reform and opening up.

The eagerness of investors to enter the Chinese market had a number of causes – from patriotism on the part of much of the overseas Chinese bourgeoisie, to awareness of the size and potential of the Chinese market, from the American defeat in Indochina and partial retreat from Asia, to a cynical desire to exacerbate the Sino-Soviet split.

For China, such investment was crucial.

It provided what the country desperately needed – a faster pace of industrialisation and employment for those leaving the countryside to begin urban life, guaranteed export markets, skills and technology transfer, capital, technical and vocational training; and advanced scientific management.

None of this would have been possible – at least not on the same scale, to the same extent and at such a rapid pace – without the foundations laid by Mao.

Without a basically educated, literate and trained workforce. Without housing and medical care. Without a transportation network and paved roads linking the whole country.

This is a major reason why Xi Jinping, from practically his first remarks when he was elected general secretary of the party in 2012, has consistently stressed that the two phases of China's socialist development should not be counterposed to one another, but rather be seen as two parts of a single revolutionary whole, one resting on the foundations laid by the other.

In the last four-and-a-half decades, from a marginal position, China has become the world's second largest economy. It is the biggest manufacturer, largest exporter, and the major trading partner for two thirds of the world's nations. It has rocketed up the value chain, increasingly leading the world in innovation and R&D. In just a few years, the whole country has been covered in a network of high-speed rail, accounting for some 70 per cent of the world's total. Now Xi Jinping is emphasising the development of new, high quality productive forces, essentially conforming to the fifth industrial revolution.

Of course, no change as rapid and radical, and on so vast a canvas, as the process of reform and opening in China could possibly unfold without some negative features.

Whilst almost everyone has, over time, become much better off, what was once probably the world's most equal society has become highly unequal.

Massive damage was done to the environment and ideological and political work weakened.

This is essentially what Xi Jinping has been working tirelessly to correct since assuming the leadership, inaugurating what the Chinese now call a new era, meaning a new stage in the long march towards developed socialism.

Among the key features of this new era are:

A merciless and ceaseless campaign against corruption.

A rectification of the party's ranks, decisively returning to the concept of serving the people.

A massive, targeted campaign resulting in the historically unprecedented elimination of extreme poverty across the whole country, with careful follow-up to ensure that people do not slip back and that their lives continue to improve.

Tackling pollution, preserving the environment, safeguarding biodiversity, leading the world in renewable energy, building an ecological civilisation at home, and leading the global fight against climate catastrophe.

Rolling out by far the world's largest programme of medical care and insurance, and old age pensions, albeit ones that remain in many respects rudimentary and with great scope for improvement. However, unlike the situation in other countries, the process is going in the right direction.

Ensuring that all sectors of the economy work in the overall interests of socialism. In the private sector, relevant measures include greater regulation and supervision of the technology, industry, and property, and real estate, including a major new drive to promote social housing; the taking of "golden shares," partial ownership, or seats on the board of major private companies by the party and state; the organisation of party committees to exercise a supervisory role in private firms; greater unionisation of the workforce, including in new economic sectors; and the revival of a system of workers' congresses in medium sized enterprises upwards.

A reaffirmation of the central and guiding role of Marxism.

An increasingly proactive foreign policy, with the strategic goal of building a community of shared future for humanity and featuring increased support for the other socialist countries and a more dynamic engagement with the international communist movement.

Whilst China remains, in its own words, in the primary stage of socialism, the overall goal is now to build a modern socialist country in all respects by 2049, when the People's Republic will celebrate its 100th anniversary.

This is truly something that will change the world.

Morning Star

unprecedented elimination of extreme poverty

China's 75 years of socialist development threatens nobody

William Briggs

Background image: pxhere.com (CC0)

China has recently celebrated the 75th anniversary of its Revolution. The achievements have been spectacular, but just one statistic is enough. China is home to 1.4 billion people. Poverty has been eradicated. In 1949, China was one of the poorest nations on the planet. Only 10 countries had a national GDP lower than China's. Today it is a modern and modernising socialist nation.

When Mao said "the Chinese people have stood up" he was talking of the humiliations and depredations inflicted on China by imperialism. He was making it clear that a new future was beginning. The century leading up to 1949 saw 100 million Chinese die through wars of foreign intervention, civil wars, and famine; all crimes of imperialism. The Chinese people 'stood up,' chose a socialist path and have now developed an economy that directly rivals the strongest the world has seen. As a result, it is increasingly being described as a 'threat.'

Each development of China's economy is seen as a bigger and more direct threat to the USA. The words used to 'prove' the reality of this 'threat' are increasingly couched in the language of Cold War rhetoric. The name China, when uttered by politicians and the media almost inevitably includes the word 'communist' or has reference to the Communist Party.

China is certainly a rival to the economic hegemony of the USA. Its economy is set to become the most powerful on earth. If this equals 'threat' then China is guilty as charged. The economic rise of China would be tolerated, even welcomed by the West, were it not for the fact that the Chinese economy and the modernisation that accompanies it benefits the people. It is not what capitalist economies are doing anywhere else.

The level of anti-China rhetoric is extraordinary. In 1949 the country was incredibly poor. Even as the Cold War was getting under way, imperialism seemed little concerned about China. The USSR was the target. Noises were made by the USA and echoed by their allies but there was no real concern. When China came to the aid of the DPRK during the Korean War, the anti-China drums beat a little louder. A 'communist threat' served a limited purpose for a time. After the war, China receded as a threat in the eyes of imperialism. It didn't get in the way of global profitability.

When global capitalism hit the economic wall in the 1970s and the rate of profit slumped, China was seen as a saviour. China was beginning its 'opening up' policy. Capital saw this as an opportunity, not a threat. The West mistakenly believed that China was ripe for exploitation; a workshop for the world and a source of cheap labour to revive the fortunes and profit rates.

China's subsequent rise and its continued moves to build a successful socialist state and economy made it, suddenly, a threat. China became an ideological foe that had to be fought, and contained. The propaganda war became such that people began to believe the big lie that China was expansionist, aggressive, militarist. It was a lie, a big lie, a successful lie, but a lie none-the-less.

The problem for the West should not be that China is developing socialism. Socialist development in China has always been a Chinese affair. Nor should it be a problem that its economy is growing. The USA didn't seek to destroy or contain post-war Japanese capitalism, or hinder India's rise. The ludicrous fear of Chinese socialism has no validity. There is no 'red menace.' China is not 'exporting' Marxism, it is not fomenting revolutions.

The movement for socialism, class struggle and revolutionary upsurge grows within local soil. Conditions in each country differ and ripen at different speeds. At the same time, the global capitalist economic system is riven by crisis and contradiction. This acts to develop the local conditions from which socialist movements grow.

China is seeking to develop 'win-win' relationships with the world and is succeeding in this. Many countries see an alternative way of interacting. This threatens US economic power.

The 'battle of ideas' between China and the USA is real, but is not centred solely on the superiority of socialism, which is being shown on a daily basis. It is not about promoting or combating Marxist ideology. The USA demands that states adhere to its 'rules-based-order' which simply means "play by our rules or else face the consequences." This is a polar opposite to how China views international relations. This is the problem. This is why the USA demonises China. The USA lives according to the law of the jungle, the law of imperialism.

A recent *Global Times* article reminded its readers that 'China has always adhered to the principle of non-interference in other countries' internal affairs and has never attempted to export its ideology to other countries.' The 'proof of the pudding,' is there for all to see.

More and more countries and particularly those of the Global South are engaging more fully with China. They are doing so as equal partners. Political differences, ideological differences or social structures are not issues. China is not seeking to promote socialism to its partners but is delivering results that are unimaginable for the forces of imperialism.

On the one hand is win-win and on the other coercion. The Chinese people stood up and now offer hope for a world increasingly crushed by despair and exploitation.

East meets West at 2024 Beijing Music Festival

Xu Liuliu

In 2013, Pulitzer-Prize winning composer Zhou Long created *Jiu Ge*, or *Nine Odes*, a whole evening symphonic epic based on the poems called *Nine Songs* by ancient Chinese poet Qu Yuan. This marked the first time that a full, large-scale symphony interpretation of the entire 11 chapters of Qu's poem had been attempted. This year, a new version of the 2013 epic commissioned by the Beijing Music Festival (BMF) and composed by Zhou will be performed alongside the concerto *Immortal Love* by composer Richard Dubugnon during a concert at Beijing's Poly Theater on Tuesday night.

Yu Long, chairman of the Beijing Music Festival Arts Foundation, recalled that the BMF raised the idea of the Chinese Concept in 2002, after which it has launched a number of Chinese music pieces and the careers of Chinese musicians.

"I hope the BMF is not just about music performances, but also brings Chinese concepts and Chinese culture to the world through fine works," said Yu, who convinced Zhou to recreate the new version of *Jiu Ge*.

According to Zhou, the new version uses the 11 chapters of the ancient epic as a framework for erhu, a traditional Chinese musical instrument, focused composition. It replaces the lyrics of the original song with modern, elegant and poetic rhythm. Across the various chapters, Western instruments are introduced to build characters and imagery to boost the storytelling.

"In this new work, erhu is not just an instrument, but also a narrator traveling through time and space, telling the story in the *Nine Songs* with its unique timbre and expressiveness," he said.

The concert also features conductor Huang Yi, cellist Gautier Capucon, and pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet as well as musicians from the Guangzhou Symphony.

Both Gautier Capucon and Jean-Yves Thibaudet said it was a "great pleasure to be back on the stage of the BMF to perform *Immortal Love*.

"It's a piece which is very dear to us [Jean-Yves Thibaudet and himself], the first piece written for us for piano and cello. And we have been great friends since 2000, so 24 years, that's a great friendship. And it's always an immense pleasure to be on stage," said Capucon.

Global Times

China's unswerving opening-up

Mohan, a small town in the southernmost part of southwest China's Yunnan Province, reached a trade milestone last month, with over 10 million tonnes of freight, including fresh fruits, coffee, air conditioners, and new-energy vehicles, transported on the China-Laos Railway over the previous three years.

Since the launch of the 1,035 km rail line in December 2021, Mohan has become an important transport hub with significant highway and railway ports. Also, it's the only national-level land port linking China and Laos, with new development opportunities mushrooming.

The story of Mohan is a telling example of China's unwavering high-level opening-up. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China 75 years ago, China has achieved leapfrog development in opening wider to the world.

Confident that opening-up is the right path, China has been implementing proactive strategies, including spurring trade growth, attracting foreign investment and expanding institutional opening-up, to accelerate cultivating new international competitive advantages and achieving mutual benefits with other countries.

BOLSTERING FOREIGN TRADE, INVESTMENT

In 1950, China's foreign trade in goods was only 1.1 billion US dollars, accounting for 0.9 per cent of the world's total. By 2023, China's total goods trade had reached 5.9 trillion US dollars, accounting for 12.4 per cent of the global share, and has consistently ranked first in the world for seven consecutive years.

Service trade has also undergone tremendous expansion. When the People's Republic of China was founded, the country's service trade was almost zero. In 2023, China's total service trade import and export volume had reached 933.1 billion US dollars, ranking fourth in the world.

Global Times (edited for space)

Letters to the Editor
The Guardian
74 Buckingham Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010

email: editor@cpa.org.au

Lessons of Feminist History: stronger together

Dear Comrade Editor,
I want to commend Comrade Amelia's brilliant latest contribution to 'Half the Sky' (*Guardian* 07-10-2024 #2119) titled 'Gender and the Broken Society'. In the tradition of that column's poignancy, 'Gender and the Broken Society' spoke to the pervasiveness of sexism and gender violence within capitalist social relations, while making an excellent point regarding the cannibalism of our society. Call it a Gender War or a Culture War, the capitalist would much rather we fight each other than work together with empathy and solidarity to build a shared future which does not prioritise bourgeois class interests.

This infighting is visible throughout much of our current day political discourse, though it is not anything new. Take the example of the TERFs (Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists, a term I dislike because these groups are not particularly radical or feminist), a gang predicated on the escalation of oppression against one group to the supposed benefit of another. Blinded by bigotry, these groups happily work alongside all manner of religious fundamentalist, conservative, and even fascist elements to advance their agenda. The goals of feminism are secondary to the eradication of so-called 'gender ideology,' which often simply means the eradication of trans people altogether.

This issue is sadly part of a tradition of certain elements of feminist movements. From the US to New Zealand and here in Australia, women of colour had to fight to be recognised in feminist movements. They had to fight for the movements to recognise systemic racism as a feminist issue. They had to fight for non-white ideas of what womanhood means to be recognised as equal. The same is true for queer women. Lesbians and trans women were at the forefront of feminist political action, yet too often went unrecognised. It is clear these issues continue today.

Comrade Amelia is correct when she identifies the economic base as the core issue in need of transformation. Feminist movements, and indeed any liberatory movement, are at their strongest when they recognise the role of capitalist social and productive relations in not only their own oppression, but all forms of oppression. In the words of Dr Martin Luther King, "no one is free until we are all free." We are stronger together.

C Bartholomew

Something to say?

Write to the Editor!

editor@cpa.org.au

Book Review

Black History for Every Day of the Year

David, Yinka, and Kemi Olusoga

Jenny Woodley

For decades, black history in the UK has been siloed from the mainstream, as if incidental to the nation's history. Black History Month in October is dedicated to celebrating black heritage, but the rest of the year, it feels largely neglected and ignored. Public historian and broadcaster David Olusoga is at the forefront of efforts to integrate black history into our national story.

His latest book, *Black History for Every Day of the Year*, co-created with two of his siblings, Yinka, and Kemi, is another contribution to that work. This attractive and substantial book has an entry for each calendar day detailing an event, person, place, or theme associated with black history.

There are biographies of artists, musicians, activists, politicians, filmmakers, writers, and scientists. We learn about legal cases, such as Brown v Board of Education, when racial segregation in US schools was ruled unconstitutional, and the Mansfield Judgement, a 1772 British ruling which decided the fate of enslaved African James Somerset, and was used by abolitionists in their campaign to end slavery.

We get to see important objects, like the Benin Bronzes, a collection of sculptures created by skilled artisans in the Kingdom of Benin – now part of Nigeria – which were looted by British forces in 1897. They were then given to institutions like the British Museum, where some are still on display.

The book narrates histories of violence and injustice, from centuries of enslavement and brutal colonial rule, to South Africa's Sharpeville massacre when, in March 1960, 69 people protesting against apartheid laws were killed by the police.

The tragedy of the 1981 New Cross fire in south London, where 14 young black people were killed in a suspected arson attack on a house party, is recounted as is the racist murder of teenager Stephen Lawrence, also in south London in 1993.

It tells stories of resistance and resilience, such as the uprising of enslaved people in Jamaica in 1760, known as Tacky's revolt, and the 1961 Freedom Rides, when black and white students challenged racial segregation on American buses and were met with violence.

In Britain it examines the Bristol bus boycott of 1963, a four-month-long protest against the bus company's refusal to hire black or Asian drivers. Many of the events and names will be familiar to some readers but there is likely to be plenty that is new and novel.

It is not a book which invites intensive reading, but rather the joy is to dip in and out, finding connections between entries, dates and themes. The popularity of social media "On This Day" posts suggests many readers will enjoy connecting past with present.

At the end of the volume, as well as a glossary of terms, are 12 timelines which place some of the entries into a more cohesive – though potentially more limiting – narrative.

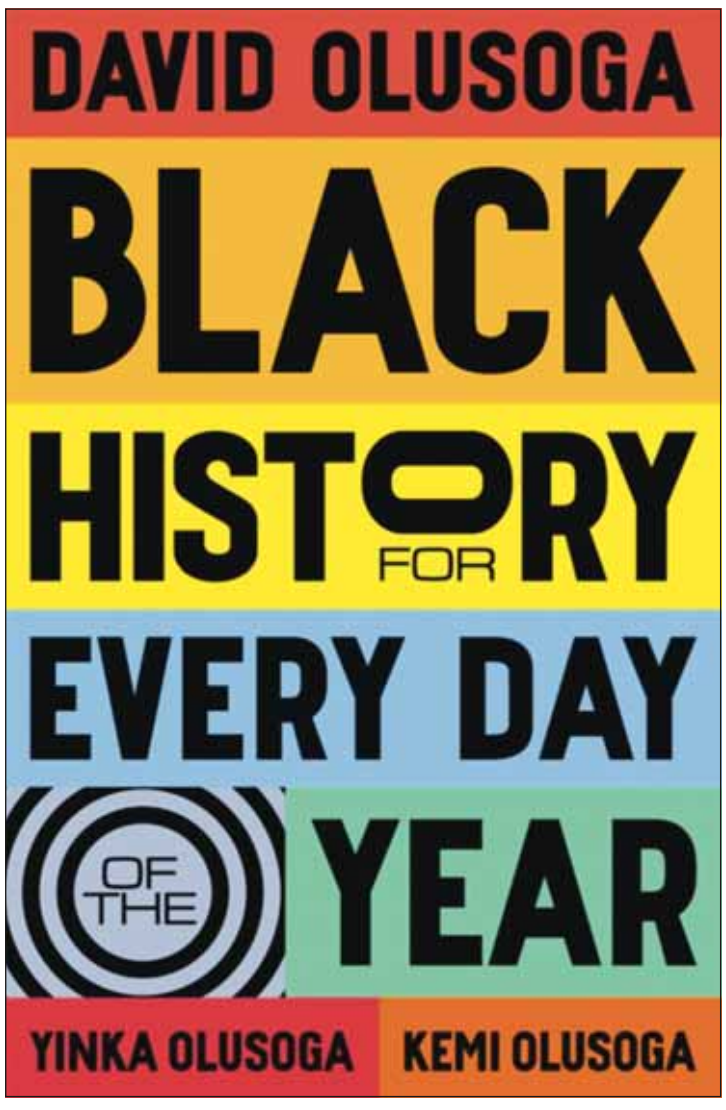
For example, they outline black resistance to slavery, abolitionist movements, and histories of imperialism and colonialism. Both here and throughout the book readers are pointed to connections between the entries. The text is enhanced by beautiful illustrations at the beginning of each month, which explore objects, places and themes associated with the entries, and the timelines are likewise creatively illustrated.

Black History for Every Day is educational and informative, but it is written with a deft touch and its format, along with the illustrations and inclusion of photographs, mean it is also engaging and accessible.

The scope of the histories included is global and many are transnational, showing the connections between the struggles and stories of people of African descent across the world. However, the majority of entries are associated with British and US history. This is not surprising given the authors' research interests and the likely market for the book.

While it is apparent that an attempt has been made to be geographically and chronologically diverse, around a third of the 366 entries deal with US history, suggesting that our understanding of Black History is still often dominated by its American iterations.

The book is not attempting to break new ground. The timeline of the US civil rights movement, for example, begins with the Supreme Court ruling to desegregate education in 1954 and includes the acts of non-violent direct action which have dominated the widely accepted "master narrative" of the era.



However, the book does at least go slightly beyond the usual cut-off point to include the Black Panther Party's breakfast program, which addressed poverty and hunger in the black community between 1969 and 1980, and the murder of Black Panther deputy chairman Fred Hampton, who was killed in 1969 at the age of 21.

The entry for Martin Luther King Jr claims he organised the Montgomery bus boycott, ignoring the contributions of black women who were the driving force behind the movement. This is somewhat modified by the entry for activist Rosa Parks, which acknowledges the work of the Women's Political Council in Montgomery.

The book's purpose is not to be comprehensive; it cannot be, given its breadth. Rather, each entry is intended to serve as an introduction. The authors explain they hope people will be inspired to find out more after reading it.

Taken together, the daily entries narrate centuries of discrimination, violence and injustice against people of African descent. But they also tell stories of black resilience, innovation, talent and achievement. The Olusogas' book is published in time for Black History Month in the UK, but it makes the case for engaging with black history beyond a single month every year.

The Conversation, via *Morning Star*.

Answers to crossword
Guardian 7 October, #2119

Across

3 **Land Reform** (Redistribution of estates from the landlords)

5 **Peasant** (The primary working class in China during the revolution)

7 **Manchuria** (Chinese region, invaded by Japan, liberated by the USSR)

9 **LongMarch** (Famous military retreat)

Down

1 **UnitedStates** (provided financial and military aid to fascists during the conflict)

2 **RedBook** (collection of quotations)

4 **Mao** (Revolutionary, Writer, Chairman)

5 **Puyi** (Last emperor of China, fascist collaborator, later became a communist)

6 **Yanan** (City in Shaanxi province that served as a base and birthplace of the revolution)

8 **CPC** (Official acronym of the Communist Party in China)

Cuba sanctions: background and update

Graham Holton

On 28 May 2024, the US Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) amended the Cuban Assets Control Regulations, removing some economic sanctions on the Republic of Cuba. It allowed Cuban private entrepreneurs and businesses to open US bank accounts and access online banking, while the US avoided any financial assistance to the Cuban government. The changes were made because since 2021 more than 500,000 migrants, 5 per cent of the population, have left Cuba. They joined with the caravan of economic refugees demanding access to the USA, crossing into the US along the Mexican border.

Cuban Foreign Minister, Bruno Rodriguez said that these measures were "limited" and did "not reverse the cruel impact and economic strangulation imposed on Cuban families by the genocidal blockade and inclusion in the list of state sponsors of terrorism." The economic embargo is still in place, along with legislative sanctions. Although the US no longer considers Cuba as one of the "Not Fully Cooperating Countries" (NFCC) which do not assist US 'counterterrorism,' Cuba still remains on the US State Sponsors of Terrorism (SST) list.

Some background. After the Cuban Revolution in January 1959, and the proclamation of the Agrarian Reform which nationalised foreign properties, the US government reduced Cuba's sugar quota, banned US investments and eliminated all economic aid to Cuba. In 1960, US oil companies Texaco, Esso, Standard Oil, and the Royal Dutch Shell Company ceased oil supplies to Cuba, paralysing the national economy. In January 1961, the US broke all diplomatic and consular relations.

On 3 February 1962 President John F Kennedy decreed Executive Order 3447 placing an embargo on Cuba (days later, Kennedy ordered 1,200 Cuban cigars for himself).

After more than 60 years the embargo against Cuba is still enforced through: the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1917 (which prohibits trade with countries considered enemies); the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961; the Cuban Assets Control Regulations of 1963; the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992; the Helms–Burton Act of 1996; and the Trade Sanction Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000. Those who violate the embargo can spend 10 years in prison. In 2008 the US held US$6 billion in financial claims against Cuba. The Cuban government estimates *el bloqueo* (the blockade) has cost the national economy over US$150 billion in lost revenue.

Cuba has always given political asylum to those fighting the US government. The Cuban government had formal ties with the Black Panther Party in the 1960s, and gave political asylum to American political fugitives such as members of the Black Power Movement, the Puerto Rico Independence movement, and defecting CIA agents, such as Philip Agee, author of *Inside the Company*.

On 1 March 1982 Cuba was added to the SST list, because it supported revolutionary movements in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa. The SST designation was lifted in 2015 by the Obama administration. Cuba was put on the list again by President Donald Trump, a week before he left office in January 2021, because Cuba provided advice, safe haven, communications, training, and financial support to what the US considered guerrilla groups and terrorists. Cuba refused to extradite to Colombia members of the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) responsible for the bombing of the Bogotá police academy in 2019, killing 22 people and injuring 87 others. When Colombia suspended the arrest warrants, in August 2022, against the ELN members it made extradition no longer relevant.

32nd Solidarity Brigade from Australia and New Zealand to Cuba, 2014 – 2015.

After law enforcement cooperation resumed between the US and Cuba in 2023, the State Department removed Cuba from the NFCC list in May 2024. The Cuban Foreign Minister, Bruno Rodríguez, welcomed Cuba's removal from the list, but said it has not stopped the embargo.

Every year since 1992, Cuba has presented to the UN General Assembly a motion condemning the sanctions. Human Rights Watch and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights are critical of the US embargo. The Amnesty International report *Cuba: The US embargo against Cuba* (2009) found the embargo adversely affected human rights, and the "economic, social and cultural rights" of Cuba. The South Centre, an intergovernmental organisation of developing nations with headquarters in Geneva Switzerland, maintains that there is no evidence of state-sponsored terrorism by Cuba. Recently 187 countries at the UN supported the removal of US sanctions against Cuba.

In July the Russian State Duma called for the immediate removal of Cuba from the SST list. Chairman Vyacheslav Volodin said the US should pay Cuba US$160 billion in compensation for the "damage caused" by the embargo.

Despite the embargo Cuba continues to trade internationally, joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995. Today the European Union (EU) is Cuba's largest trading partner. The US is the fifth-largest exporter to Cuba, supplying 6.6 per cent of imports. All US food imports must be paid for in cash. In 2018 Cuba's GDP was US$100 billion. To assist the economy, in 2021 the Cuban government legalised setting up 11,000 private businesses, from tourism to car repairs. These now account for a third of all employment. The embargo continues to ensure that the Cuban economy struggles to meet the needs of its people.

The US State Department continues to see Cuba as a threat, despite the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) being small in size and armed with mainly Soviet weapons. Although removed from the NFCC list, Cuba still remains on the SST list, because it grants safe harbour to those seeking political asylum. Despite calls from the United Nations in November 2023 and politicians within Congress, the embargo remains.

According to Karen DeYoung of the *Washington Post*, the US eased sanctions hoping to deter Cuba from reaching out to Russia and China for economic and other assistance. This has not worked. In July Russian warships visited Havana, showing the deepening ties between both countries. In August President Xi Jinping of China pledged to support Cuba's defence of its national sovereignty.

Cuba's independent people have survived 65 years of US embargoes, but the ongoing suffering is immense. The US embargo against Cuba must end.

Netanyahu – Holocaust denier

Graham Holton

In his long political history Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu has been accused of being a murderer, war criminal, Holocaust denier, corrupt, incompetent, and a liar.

Netanyahu has a long history of illegal activities. In 1997, Netanyahu authorised a Mossad operation to assassinate Hamas leader Khaled Mashal in Jordan, three years after the two countries had signed a peace treaty. As finance minister, Netanyahu began economic liberalisation, selling the government's shares in banks and major state-owned corporations. That year Netanyahu was indicted on corruption charges for influence-peddling. He was accused of appointing an attorney general who would reduce the charges, but prosecutors ruled that there was insufficient evidence for it to go to trial.

In 1999, Netanyahu faced another scandal when the Israel police recommended that he be tried for corruption for US$100,000 in free services from a government contractor. Israel's attorney general failed to prosecute, citing difficulties with the evidence.

In 2009 Netanyahu maintained Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and agreed to Israeli settler demands to approve more settlements in the West Bank, illegal under international law. In 2014's Operation Brother's Keeper, Netanyahu ordered IDF troops to attack hundreds of Hamas activists in the West Bank and then attack the Gaza Strip. Hundreds of Palestinians suffered.

At the World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem in 2015, Netanyahu claimed the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin al-Husseini had persuaded the Nazis to carry out the Holocaust, the *Shoah* in Hebrew. Netanyahu said Adolf Hitler had only wanted to expel Jews from Europe, but Husseini told him, "Burn them." The Secretary General of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), Saeb Erekat, lamented: "It is a sad day in history when the leader of the Israeli government hates his neighbour so much that he is willing to absolve the most notorious war criminal in history, Adolf Hitler, of the murder of six million Jews." Netanyahu was called a "Holocaust Denier" by critics.

In 2019, Netanyahu was indicted on charges of breach of trust, bribery and fraud. Accusations against him continue, but so far he has not been tried for his crimes. He is a man who will do anything to remain in power, unrestrained in his contempt for the Palestinian people, and uninterested in the long-term welfare of Israelis.

Benjamin Netanyahu, 2021. Photo: DoD US Air Force Sgt. Jack Sanders (CC0)

Lebanese Communist Party: ‘a long and harsh battle’

Excerpts from a recent interview with Omar Deeb, Head of Foreign Relations of the Lebanese Communist Party, on *Sawt l-Shaab Radio*.

Rally for Palestine and Lebanon, Boorloo/Perth on 5 October 2024. Photo: Vinnie Molina.

ON THE US PROJECT AND THE NEW MIDDLE EAST

The Zionist enemy’s current ambition is to achieve a “Greater Israel” in a political, security, and economic sense, not necessarily geographically. Israel seeks an imperial regional role, aiming to expand its control, normalise relations with neighbouring countries, and integrate economically, which aligns with the American project for the region.

For decades, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, America has sought to weaken and dismantle nation states in our region – sovereign states with administrations, governments, and armies. Regardless of our stance on any specific regime, the US has succeeded in several places within our region. Weakening these states makes them easier for America to control and divides them along sectarian, ethnic, and national lines.

This division facilitates both American dominance and Zionist influence, driving more countries toward normalisation. Unfortunately, we have seen many Arab regimes and governments following this path. Though the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation put a stop to these governments’ drift, the enemy is now trying to regain the initiative by attacking resistance movements and the region’s peoples to advance its project.

The Palestinian people have resisted for decades, and our people in Gaza have faced genocidal war for a year. We are also in for a long confrontation with this enemy, and our victory will come through our resilience and refusal to submit, even if we suffer significant military and civilian losses. The key in this battle is not to surrender to the political conditions imposed on Lebanon – its government, political forces, and people.

ON THE ROLE OF OTHER COUNTRIES

There are major global shifts, with new states and powers rising to challenge US dominance, but this change is slow. Many of these countries have their priorities within their own regions. While we view their opposition to aggression and efforts to find political solutions, such as ceasefire proposals, positively, we must also acknowledge that these countries are currently limited and incapable of decisive action.

Many Lebanese and Palestinians feel they are left alone in this confrontation. There is also a sense of helplessness and inadequacy from the major powers. We are witnessing open genocide against several peoples in the region, and if Israel, backed by the US, wins this battle, it will shift the balance of power in the region and the world for a long time. These countries must take a stand – they don’t need to intervene militarily but could act politically and diplomatically. They are capable of threatening Israel with sanctions, cutting off relations, halting trade, and taking the initiative to organise international conferences. They have the ability to act but are currently doing the bare minimum.

ON THE GOVERNANCE CRISIS IN LEBANON

We believe that a president should have been elected from the very first day of the vacancy, if not even a month before, to ensure the continuity of the state and its institutions. The collapse of the state leads to further disintegration and decline. However, the internal conflicts cannot be blamed on one group. We are well aware of the makeup of Parliament. The strongest parties are the ones blocking these elections. But in this moment of confrontation, we believe that internal conflicts must be set aside. The focus should be on national unity among the Lebanese people and political forces. Everyone knows we have political differences with the ruling forces, but for now, these disputes should be postponed.

We are in an existential battle that threatens our country’s fate, and this will be a long and extremely harsh battle – a new Gaza-like scenario. Just as we have called on the Palestinian people and factions to unite, we now call for Lebanese national unity based on a national project to confront this aggression. All internal political disputes can remain unresolved, but addressing them must be postponed.

Of course, we urge all efforts to ensure the continuity of the state, including electing a president, even in times of war, and rejecting budgets that seek more taxes and cuts. Ensuring minimum living standards and wages for workers, employees, and public and private sector staff is also important. These forces should be striving for these goals.

However, political conflicts between us and other forces, and between those forces themselves, should be put on hold. The primary focus today must be Lebanese national unity, based on a national project to confront the aggression, because this phase is decisive and difficult.

BRICS to work on North-South Corridor

BRICS business circles will seek to accelerate the development of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and other inter-regional projects during the BRICS Business Forum in Moscow from 17-18 October, President of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) Sergey Katyrin told *Sputnik* .

“Our focus is on creating a seamless transport infrastructure: together with our partners, we are working on the accelerated development of the North-South Transcontinental Corridor. We are planning that the working group on transport and logistics within the BRICS Business Council will be engaged in the establishment of new inter-regional projects,” Katyrin told Sputnik.

The projects in the pipeline cover financial services, investment, industrial, and energy development, trade and international cooperation sectors, the chamber’s head said.

“The BRICS Business Council has noted that in recent years, Russian entrepreneurs have been increasingly interested in trade and economic cooperation within the association’s framework,” Katyrin said.

The INSTC is a 4,500-mile multimodal transport route that will ensure the movement of passengers and cargo from Asia to Europe via Russia, offering an alternative to the sea route connecting Europe, the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean countries via the Suez Canal. The INSTC will connect Russia, Azerbaijan, Iran, and India.

The BRICS Business Forum will take place in the World Trade Center in Moscow from 17-18 October and will be dedicated to strengthening cooperation aimed at sustainable economic development and global trade partnerships.

Sputnik

‘Humanitarian catastrophe’ unfolding in Lebanon, Australia for UNHCR warns

Australia for UNHCR is urgently calling for increased support as the humanitarian crisis in Lebanon continues to grow.

Lebanese government officials estimate that one million people are affected in Lebanon. UNHCR is ramping up its efforts to deliver critical aid to refugees and displaced people.

The most pressing needs include access to safe shelters, emergency supplies such as blankets and mattresses, healthcare, food, cash, and protection services.

Trudi Mitchell, CEO of Australia for UNHCR, said Australians have already shown strong support for those affected, but increased funding is urgently needed to meet the fast-growing humanitarian crisis.

“A humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding in Lebanon right now. The streets of Beirut are filled with people struggling to find shelters for their families, and we are hearing reports of newly displaced Syrians and Lebanese having to sleep in the open,” said Mitchell.

“I would like to extend my deepest thanks to Australians for their support over the past week.

“UNHCR’s life-saving work on the ground right now is only possible through the generosity of donors. But more help is urgently needed to support those who have lost so much.”

UNHCR’s teams are working tirelessly to provide critical support and relief to those affected. The response has been significantly scaled up since 23 September.

Prior to the latest escalation of hostilities, UNHCR has been operating in Lebanon for 60 years, responding to the humanitarian needs of displaced people and refugees around the country.

Lebanon hosts an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees and over 11,000 refugees from other countries, making it one of the largest refugee-hosting nations per capita in the world.

Australia for UNHCR (donations can be made via unrefugees.org.au)

USA: Amazon organising

Philadelphia solidarity with Starbucks, Amazon and all workers organising!
Photo: Joe Piette – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The Teamsters union is spinning off momentum from recent organising fights to new battle fronts across Amazon's logistics chain.

A group of 100 warehouse workers at DCK6, an Amazon delivery station in San Francisco, marched on company managers 2 October demanding voluntary recognition rather than filing for a National Labor Relations Board-supervised election.

In the Teamsters' strategy to organise the logistics behemoth by a thousand cuts, this is the first time that warehouse workers – rather than delivery drivers nominally employed by a subcontractor – have demanded recognition.

"I think that they suspected that something was up, because we were gathering in the parking lot, and one of the regional managers came out to suss us out and then went back inside," said Dori Goldberg, who sorts packages and loads them onto trucks from 3:20 am to 12 pm.

"So I went inside, and he was trying to make small talk with me as I was leading him into the break room, where we had all assembled. When he came in, his face – he was shocked to see so many of our co-workers standing shoulder to shoulder.

"I could sense that he was scared. And it felt great to, for once, have our voices be heard by management and take that power back."

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos has described the company's strategy as a "flywheel," meaning that momentum in each area of the business spurs fresh momentum in others, accelerating the whole machine. It exploits its power in one business market after another – for example, retail – to consolidate its overall monopoly in logistics and make inroads against competitors like UPS, FedEx, and the Postal Service.

Teamsters are engaged in a similar strategy to challenge Amazon's power – building momentum by organising in various areas along its logistics chain.

SICK AND TIRED OF BEING SICK AND TIRED

Goldberg said he and his co-workers were inspired by reports of other Amazon workers organising in Skokie, Illinois; Queens, New York; and at the air hub KSBD in San Bernardino, California, where workers marched on the boss in September and won paid time off because of dangerous wildfire smoke.

"Amazon is hoarding billions of dollars in profits that they're making off our backs, and we think that it's time we stand up for ourselves and demand that we get our fair share," Goldberg said.

Working at Amazon for over a year has taken a toll. "I often go home with pinched nerves," he said. "Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night with a sore back. And when I get home from work, I have no energy to do anything else.

"I used to be a healthy person before I started working here," he said. "I don't know if it's the stress of working at this facility, with all the particles in the air and the bad air quality in there, or having a weakened immune system from working these crazy hours that we do for Amazon. But I get sick all the time now.

"And I'm sick and tired of that – literally sick and tired of being sick and tired all the time. I'm motivated to organise because I want to be able to live my life outside of work and have a good-quality job where I am not overextended."

"We spend more time there than we do with our families, and most of the people that work have two jobs," said one worker. "Make that make sense, when we work for the richest sucker in the world!"

Labor Today International

See article page 16

Global Briefs

SYRIA: Bashar Al-Assad, Syria's head of state and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi met in Damascus last week to discuss the current situation in the region and address defence matters. During the meeting Bashar Al-assad stressed the importance of the partnership in addressing the challenges and dangers that threaten the region and its people, especially the continuing Israeli occupation of Arab lands and crimes committed against civilians in Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria. The Syrian president also pointed out that "resistance against all forms of occupation, aggression and mass killing is a legitimate right." The Iranian Foreign Minister expressed the view that the bilateral cooperation was of great importance, and also highlighted the need to coordinate with all countries supporting efforts to stop the aggression. Both sides agreed to coordinate and provide aid to the Lebanese people, specially to refugees and displaced by Israeli incursions, and stressed the importance of cooperation between the Syrian and Iranian Red Crescent Societies.

RUSSIA: The Biden administration froze over $7 billion in Afghan assets in August 2021 as Kabul fell and the NATO puppet government crumbled, with another $2 billion stuck in Europe and UAE. Afghanistan has been in an extremely difficult economic and humanitarian situation since then. Last week Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov hosted the Moscow Format Consultation on Afghanistan meeting with the Taliban acting foreign minister and senior representatives from other countries. It was announced at the meeting that Moscow was preparing to remove the Taliban from its list of terrorist groups. Russia is one of the countries looking for pragmatic diplomatic and economic ties with Afghanistan with others including China, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan interested in cooperation ranging from joint infrastructure and investment to trade and regional security.

NATO: Jens Stoltenberg has stepped down as NATO's secretary-general. Former Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte is the new NATO head. There would not be any change in NATO's policies and its eastwards expansion plans. Rutte said his priorities would be to continue NATO's support for Ukraine in its war with Russia, increasing defence spending and strengthening partnerships with other countries around the world, notably in Asia and the Middle East.

YEMEN: Houthi government has claimed that they shot down another United States-made MQReaper drone over Yemen. If confirmed, it would be the 8th Reaper brought down by the Houthis. On 24 September Houthis managed to hit a US Navy supply ship for the first time. According to Reuters, the Houthis are negotiating with Russia about the transfer of long-range anti-ship P-800 Onix missiles. If the deal comes through, the Houthis will be able to sink US aircraft carriers using these missiles. According to Jacov Kedmi, an Israeli military analyst, the P-800 missiles will be programmed by Russian officers, just as American officers program US-made Atacmc missiles for strikes on Russian targets.

IOC: The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has lost one of its major sponsors. Toyota is officially ending its Olympic sponsorship following the Paris Games. According to chairman Akio Toyoda, this summer Olympics showed that the event has become "increasingly political". Toyota's Olympic Partner contract was signed in 2015 and was worth $835 million, the IOC's largest sponsorship deal at the time. It was to cover four Olympic games and could be renewed upon expiry in 2025. Toyota chairman has become disillusioned with the event which no longer puts athletes first. As he pointed out "the Olympics should simply be about watching athletes from all walks of life, with all types of challenges, achieve the impossible."

UAE: Major UAE airline Emirates has banned pagers and walkie-talkies on board of its passenger aircraft following device explosions in Lebanon. "All passengers travelling on flights to, from or via Dubai are prohibited from transporting pagers and walkie-talkies in checked or cabin baggage. Such items found in passengers' hand luggage or checked baggage will be confiscated by Dubai Police," the air carrier said. The move came after a series of explosions in Lebanon which killed over 40 people and injured and maimed nearly 3,500 others in September.

‘As if a nuclear bomb has gone off’

Climate terrorism in South America

Graham Holton

The Amazon basin, with an area greater than Australia, has been receiving less rainfall than usual, over the period June to November. In 2023 water levels in many of its tributaries fell to record lows. The extreme drought is affecting 60 per cent of Brazil.

El Niño has helped create the most severe drought in more than 45 years. Throughout August and September this year, NASA’s EPIC satellite has captured images of intense billowing swaths of smoke and fire burning across South America. A record 346,112 fires were burning across South America this year, surpassing the 2007 record of 345,322 fires. Fires are now burning twice the area they did 20 years ago.

Since August this year more than 120,000 fires have broken out in the Amazon, the majority deliberately lit. “It’s as if a nuclear bomb has gone off. There’s no forest. There’s nothing. Everything’s burned. It’s chaos,” said Lt. Col. Victor Paulo Rodrigues de Souza after seeing the devastation. The lack of rain associated with El Niño, and searing temperatures during the world’s hottest year on record, have overwhelmed firefighters.

One of Brazil’s leading climatologists, Carlos Nobre, suspects the burnings in the Amazon, the Pantanal wetlands, and the Cerrado tropical savanna were deliberately lit; an attack on the government of Left-wing President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who is cracking down on deforestation and illegal mining. Lula’s policies are in sharp contrast to the previous president, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, who had taken a strong anti-environmental stand. In an interview with the British newspaper, *The Guardian*, Nobre said “It’s war – they want to bring these governments down.” Brazil’s environment minister, Marina Silva, accused those responsible of committing “climate terrorism.” Over the past 50 years, nearly 20 per cent of the Amazon rainforest has been lost, mainly to agriculture and cattle.

The severe drought has hit the international trade that uses the region’s major waterways, impacting global agricultural prices. So far in September nearly 5 million tonnes of cane were destroyed by forest fires in Brazil, forcing global sugar prices to surge by 15 per cent. Speculators quickly used the poor harvests in Centre South Brazil to profit from the shortage.

The other major river systems in South America have also been hit with record lows hindering navigation along the waterways of the Amazon. The Paraguay-Parana system. Fires have burned a record area this year, the worst since 2005.

In Argentina grain ships have been loading less cargo than usual in the massive grain carriers docking at Rosario, a major inland river port, due to the second lowest water level in the Parana River since 1970. This means more ships will be required to load the grain, placing further pressure on the struggling economy of the right-wing government of Javier Gerardo Milei. Argentina is the world’s top exporter of processed soy oil and meal and the river carries 80 per cent of Argentina’s grains and oilseeds for export.

In neighbouring Paraguay, the world’s third largest soybean exporter, 80 per cent of grain travels along waterways to seaports down-river. More than 100 forest fires have devastated large areas and caused significant environmental damage. Paraguay’s Department of Meteorology and Hydrology reported that the Paraguay River’s water levels had dropped 89 centimetres below the benchmark at the port of Asunción, the capital, the lowest in 120 years.

According to Global Forest Watch, in 2023 Bolivia ranked third for tropical primary forest destruction, after Brazil and the Democratic Republic of Congo. This year Bolivia has lost 3,860 square kilometres of forests in the Santa Cruz department. The 7,700 fires are a record number for the period January to July. The fires were started as slash-and-burn clearing by farmers. Vice Minister of Civil Defense, Juan Carlos Calvimontes, told the press that ranchers and farmers should be more careful lighting fires during these dry conditions.

It’s war – they want to bring these governments down

According to non-profit Fundación Amigos de la Naturaleza (‘Friends of Nature’), climate change is causing the dry season (July to October) to start earlier. Shifting rain patterns, high winds and the drought have caused fires to spread faster and last longer. An indigenous demonstration in La Paz demanded stronger government action against the fires. Protesters carried signs reading “Bolivia cannot breathe.”

Fires in Bolivia reached critical levels in August 2024, the worst since 2003. Many countries have sent assistance to the landlocked country. Despite its own problems, Venezuela sent 61 firefighters and forest fire experts to help fight the fires. Uruguay contributed a helicopter and other equipment. Peru sent state-of-the-art firefighting equipment to drop water over the burning areas, 15,000-liter water tank trucks, and water purification tablets to provide drinking water to the people of the departments of Santa Cruz, Beni, and Pando. Brazil and Chile also sent assistance.

Peruvian President Dina Boluarte declared a state of emergency in early September, after 15 people died in fires that destroyed 3,000 hectares of cultivated land and forests, killing 334 head of livestock. Prime Minister Gustavo Adrianzén told the press that the fires had been started by human activity: agricultural clearances and land trafficking. Peru’s National Forest and Wildlife Service, SERFOR, said climate change had created the conditions that intensified the forest fires.

For Australians the fire season is a reminder of the 2019-2020 bushfire season here, as well as a vision of things to come if our government continues with its own brand of climate terrorism. ✪

Venezuela stands against Middle East genocide

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and the Lebanese Ambassador to Caracas, Elias Lebbos, have agreed to form a global movement to confront Israeli aggression against Palestine and Lebanon.

“We will organise a large humanitarian support brigade. We will call on the Arab and Lebanese community to mobilise, and we will form a global movement against this aggression like never before seen or led,” the Bolivarian leader said on 3 October.

“A strong rejection of the Israeli regime’s extermination policy against the Palestinian and Lebanese people. They are executing a project of domination and colonisation of the Arab Muslim world and the Middle East,” he added.

During the meeting at the Miraflores Palace, which was also attended by First Lady Cilia Flores and Foreign Minister Yvan Gil, Ambassador Lebbos thanked Venezuela for its solidarity and support for his people in the face of the genocide Israel is perpetrating in the Middle East.

“I arrived last night from Lebanon. Thanks to President Nicolas Maduro’s meeting … one can feel all that love, affection, and support,” the Lebanese diplomat said.

“We have firmly condemned this extermination policy by Israel. We discussed the humanitarian situation, and we have offered Venezuela’s support,” the Bolivarian Foreign Minister Gil said, referring to the US and Western powers support the genocide in Gaza.

“There is a global condemnation from most governments and people around the world. We condemn this genocide, but there are powerful countries like the US and the European Union that support this terrorist regime, which operates with impunity in that region. But we are convinced that sooner or later, it will be stopped with the growing global denunciation and condemnation,” he said.

Telesur ✪

Ireland and Palestine: Rhetoric and reality

When Ireland formally recognised the state of Palestine in May, Taoiseach Simon Harris urged countries to “use every lever at their disposal” to bring about a ceasefire. More recently, Ireland has been called out. Irish trade with Israel is booming. Between 7 October and 23 May 2024, the department of Enterprise cleared dual-use export licences with a value of €52 million (around AU$85 million) bound for end users in Israel. Ireland has state investments in companies operating in illegal Israeli settlements on occupied territories. The state has signed multiple weapons and weapons maintenance contracts with Israeli arms companies in recent years and is likely to purchase 14 surveillance drones from an Israeli arms manufacturer in the coming months.

Back in March, UN Rapporteur Francesca Albanese said “there’s this tendency to be very supportive with rhetoric, as Ireland has, but when it comes to taking concrete actions, there is zero. Not a little. Zero.”

It is no longer a question of rhetoric vs inaction – but rhetoric vs complicity. The Irish government trades with entities up to their neck in the genocide, allows arms to the genocide through our airspace, and offers Shannon as a NATO airbase. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Article III (e) states “Complicity in genocide shall be punishable”. Irish paper *Socialist Voice* says it’s “time to stop listening to what the government says, and hold them accountable for what they do.”

On 30 August Tánaiste (deputy PM), and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence Micheál Martin said that Ireland would cease purchases of Israeli military equipment and ongoing contracts are to be put under review, so the government is obviously feeling the pressure.

(material from the *Socialist Voice*) ✪

US dock workers suspend strike until January

The union representing 45,000 striking US dockworkers at east and Gulf coast ports reached a deal on 3 October to suspend a three-day strike until 15 January to provide time to negotiate a new contract.

The union, the International Longshoremen's Association, agreed for their members to resume working immediately.

The temporary end to the strike came after the union and the US Maritime Alliance, which represents ports and shipping companies, reached a tentative agreement on wages, the union and employers said in a joint statement.

A person briefed on the agreement said that the ports sweetened their wage offer from about 50 per cent over six years to 62 per cent.

Any wage increase would have to be approved by union members as part of the ratification of a final contract.

Dockers had gone on strike after their contract expired in a dispute over pay and the automation of tasks at 36 ports stretching from Maine to Texas which handle about half of all cargo from ships coming into and out of the US.

The walkout raised the risk of shortages if it lasted more than a few weeks.

"With the grace of God, and the goodwill of neighbours, it's gonna hold," President Joe Biden told reporters after the agreement was announced.

The union had been demanding a 77 per cent raise over six years, plus a complete ban on the use of automation at the ports, which members see as a threat to their jobs.

The deal came after US acting labour secretary Julie Su met with foreign-owned shipping companies on a pre-dawn Zoom call.

She told them that she could get the union to the bargaining table to extend the contract if the carriers made a higher wage offer.

By midday, the Maritime Alliance members agreed to a large increase, bringing about the agreement, according to a source familiar with the events.

Morning Star

Berlin: Tens of thousands march for peace

Tens of thousands of protesters marched through the streets of Berlin on 3 October to demand an end to the wars in Lebanon, Palestine, and Ukraine.

The annual demonstration, held under the slogan "No to war, yes to peace and international solidarity," commemorates the day when the former German Democratic Republic was annexed by the Western-allied Federal Republic of Germany.

A rally in Tiergarten Park heard calls from peace campaigners, left politicians and trade unionists for a ceasefire in the conflicts that threaten world peace.

Among the speakers were Bundestag members Sahra Wagenknecht, who leads her own party, and Ralf Stegner of the ruling Social Democrats (SPD).

Though Stegner is a dissenting voice within the SPD, some boos could be heard from the audience as he spoke.

Wagenknecht welcomed the broad base of the demonstration and called for opposition to the continuing US military build-up in Germany.

Peace activist Andreas Grunwald told the rally: "We come from many parts of Germany and we are united by the will to win peace."

Socialist German Workers Youth federal chairwoman Andrea Hornung warned: "A major war is currently being planned, which is directed primarily against Russia and China."

Iris Hefets of the Jewish Voice for Just Peace in the Middle East slammed German complicity in Israel's Gaza genocide, as did many of the participants.

Speaking from the rally, Communist Party of Britain international secretary Kevan Nelson told the *Morning Star*: "It is encouraging to witness such a groundswell of support in NATO's largest European member state for a peaceful resolution of current wars in the Middle East and Ukraine.

"German workers are bearing the brunt of short-sighted EU/US-imposed sanctions on trade with Russia."

Morning Star

Japan: Call to review US forces agreement after suspended sentence

The Yokohama District Court Yokosuka Branch on 26 September sentenced a US soldier stationed at the *US Yokosuka* Naval Base to 28 months in prison with hard labor, suspended for four years, for physically assaulting and injuring four people.

The 31-year-old US soldier, Daniel Krieger, had been accused of randomly attacking four passersby, resulting in injuries, on a road in Kanagawa's Zushi City in July 2022.

At a rally held after the ruling, a 60-year-old woman, one of the four victims, criticised the soldier for not offering an apology to the victims.

Lawyer Goto Masahiko, a member of the victims' counsel, said that it is totally disappointing that the court handed down a suspended sentence despite the fact that the defendant made no apology to the victims. He demanded that the soldier offer a sincere apology to the victims without delay and compensate them for damages. He also demanded that Japanese criminal procedure rules be strictly applied to US military personnel as is done to Japanese citizens, and that the Japan-US Status of Forces Agreement be revised.

Japan Press Weekly

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Editorial Office
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Ph: 02 9699 8844 Fax: 02 9699 9833
Email: guardian@cpa.org.au

Editor:
Floyd Kermode

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Concerned

Thanks to Grant Schapps, former UK Foreign Secretary, we learn you can be concerned about something when you want the direct opposite of that thing. The UK has long controlled the Chagos Islands, going to great lengths to deport all the people who lived there and keep them off so that a UK-US military base could operate. New(ish) British PM Kier Starmer has made a deal with Maritius to share control of the islands. Schapps has claimed that he blocked a similar deal because he was "so concerned about the sovereignty of the Chagos Islands." Being so concerned about sovereignty that you don't want the Chagos Islanders to have any is a new level of weaseliness, but it's always possible Schapps got excited and meant to say 'ownership.'

Consequences (unintended)

The Minerals Council of Australia doesn't want the government to rush into environmental legislation in case it runs into unintended consequences. It's weaselly language because what the MCA wants is to not have any *intended* consequences like actual environmental protection. Instead they'd prefer Albanese to take his time and either do nothing, or let the Mineral Council of Australia take the weight of designing the legislation off the government's hands.

Mandate for change

British PM Kier Starmer has written a piece in the Murdoch newspaper *The Sun*, explaining why he's putting about $46 billion Australian into Carbon Storage. He's delivering on a "mandate for change." As in Australia, mandates are always pretty weaselly – you're in government, so you get to do all the things governments can legally do (also a lot of stuff they can't legally do), boasting about a mandate or complaining the government doesn't have one is beside the point.

British voters certainly voted for change, by throwing out a phenomenally corrupt and incompetent Tory government, but their ballot forms didn't have a box to tick for giving 23 billion pounds to a fraudulent scheme designed to prolong fossil fuel extraction.

For good weaselly measure, Starmer described the money he's about to chuck into that particular black hole as "investing" in the country's future.

Futureability (clean)

No, we're not kidding. 'Clean Futureability' is the title of a pdf Unilever has made, showing that their carbon recycling scheme will be terrific. The pdf depicts a magical carbon rainbow as part of an effort to persuade us that Unilever is moving towards a 'saving the planet' approach. The carbon rainbow isn't being farted by a unicorn, but judging from the reaction of climate activists to Unilver's Clean Futureability, it might as well be.

The Chandler-Mather group

This sounds like a folk trio from the 1970s, or possibly an alternative universe version of the Bader-Meinhof Gang. The reality is way less interesting – it's just Minister for the Environment and Water, Tanya Plibersek, attempting to demonise Greens MP Max Chandler-Mather during an interview (calling the Greens "the Greens Political Party" doesn't seem to be working). Chandler-Mather is far too left wing for Plibersek, although to be honest there's a lot of room to the left of Tanya Plibersek, so if his group is a big one, they can all fit in comfortably.

Talking about

One of many weaselly expressions that amount to noisy procrastination, Tanya Plibersek has said "We'll be talking about progress," describing something she'll be doing at a Global Nature Positive Summit, like a teenager talking about cleaning their (still filthy) room. We apologise to any teenage readers who have clean rooms, also all teenagers who'd rather not be compared to Australian Labor and its non-efforts on Climate Change.

Gulf War to Ukraine – Three decades of Depleted Uranium

Graham Holton

The US Department of Defense (DOD) has manufactured Depleted Uranium (DU) munitions since the 1970s. DU's high density helps it pierce tank armour. The shell does not explode, but bursts through the armour plate, vaporising into a heated gas that ignites the ammunition within the tank. Footage of the Iraq War shows the turrets of Iraqi tanks being blown off such an internal explosion. DU is used in tank shells, bullets and mortar rounds.

The US Department of Energy (DOE) operates nuclear facilities in which U-235 provides the fuel to produce nuclear power and in nuclear weapons. These facilities produce depleted uranium hexafluoride as a waste byproduct, thereby making it plentiful and inexpensive. The United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence (MoD) says that under Article 36 of the First Protocol of 1977 Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, depleted uranium shells are used "lawfully in international armed conflict."

DU munitions were used in the Gulf War in 1991, Kosovo in 1999, and the Iraq War in 2003. The US is now sending 120 mm DU shells to Ukraine's armed forces, to be used with M1 Abrams tanks. The UK is also supplying DU shells to Ukraine to be used with their Challenger 2 tanks, enabling Ukrainian tanks to fire on enemy targets from greater distances. Russia has condemned the US and the UK for sending DU weapons to Ukraine. President Vladimir Putin said they contain a "nuclear component," and that Russia would be "forced to react" to their usage.

There are continuing health and environmental concerns over the use of DU munitions in battle. The DoD says the cumulative exposure to crew members on board tanks is within radiation level guidelines. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) says that DU emits alpha particle radiation which is not intense enough to go through human skin. It is therefore not considered a serious health hazard. However, once inside the body, DU can damage kidneys and other organs due to its chemical makeup.

The International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) says DU has a "chemical and radioactive toxicity" and is a risk to people handling DU shell debris. Dr Marina Miron, Kings College London, said that the remnants of DU shells "may contaminate the soil." The UN General Assembly ordered a review into the health effects of DU weapons in 2007. A study published in the journal *Environmental Pollution* has found a possible causal link between DU and birth defects in Nasiriyah, Iraq. A 2022 UN Environment Programme (UNEP) report warned that the DU used in Ukraine may cause "skin irritation, kidney failure, and increase the risks of cancer." The DoD maintains that cancers in humans are not related to DU exposure. This is not reassuring.

Evidence from Iraq shows the enduring toxic legacy of DU on people and the environment. The Middle East Research and Information Project shows that data collected by medical staff at the Falluja Hospital show a high rate of birth defect cases and a large number of congenital anomalies. These include hydrocephaly, cleft palates, tumours, elongated heads, unusual limb formation, malformed ears, noses, and spines, and a large number of stillborn births. Most children with deformities survive less than five years. Studies show that 15 per cent of all births have congenital malformations, high cancer rates, high infant mortality, and an unusual ratio of males to females in children under the age of five.

Depleted Uranium shielding. Photo: Nuclear Regulatory Commission – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Samira Alaani, a paediatrician at the Falluja General Hospital, said in an interview with the BBC in 2013 that "144 babies are born with a deformity for every 1000 live births. We believe it has to be related to contamination caused by the fighting in our city, even now, nearly ten years later. It is not unique to Falluja; hospitals throughout the Anbar Governorate and many other regions of Iraq are recording spiralling increases."

DU chemical pollution in the Anbar province is shown in malformed or tumorous growth in plant crops and livestock. The World Health Organization (WHO) report, *Potential Impact of Conflict on Health in Iraq*, suggested that DU may be related to increased cancers, birth defects, reproductive health problems and renal diseases in the Iraqi population.

Actor Charlton Heston, well known for his pro-gun, right wing stand and support of the US military, narrated *The Secrets of War – The Gulf War* (2000). Heston strongly attacked the DoD, arguing that the residuals from spent DU shells were a danger to the health of US soldiers. The internalisation of DU can occur from inhalation, ingestion, or from embedded shrapnel. It has long-term health concerns, as internalised DU can affect the kidney, brain, liver, heart, and other organs.

International humanitarian law activists question the legality of deploying DU munitions as the effects may breach the principle of distinction between civilians and military personnel in war. The International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons wants DU ammunition to be made illegal, because of their long-term health impact.

The world must ban DU munitions. ✪

Japan: New PM calls for 'Asian NATO'

William Briggs

Japan's new prime minister, Ishiba Shigeru has called for the creation of an 'Asian NATO.' It can only heighten tension in the region. What the world does not need is another military alliance and especially one that specifically targets China and the DPRK.

While many commentators are seeking to downplay the idea, it has long hung in the air as a future possibility. NATO itself has hinted at a greater "engagement" in the region and the US has been successfully urging Japan carry more of the load in its war-drive policies.

The right-wing Abe government earlier did the groundwork. Abe re-worked or 'interpreted' Japan's constitutional limitations on the military. Ishiba was a fierce critic of Abe for not proceeding more quickly along the path to militarisation. As PM, Ishiba has promised to double the military budget by 2027.

The right-wing pro-war lobby group, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) is rather excited by the prospect. A recent article by Ryosoku Hanada, in ASPI's *The Strategist*, commented that the proposal could "warn" China.

There was a degree of coyness in Tokyo and Washington. New Japanese foreign minister, Takeshi Iwaya said that the new NATO idea is not "imminent." He commented that "it's difficult to immediately set up a mechanism that would impose mutual defence obligations in Asia, so it's more of a vision for the future."

Daniel Kritenbrink, the US assistant secretary of state for East Asia and the Pacific, fobbed off reporters with the line that it was too early for such talk.

Even while going through the motions of claiming that the PM's plan is for some undefined time in the 'future' the Japanese foreign minister felt it necessary to assure a sceptical world that it would not be aimed at targeting 'any specific country.' Only the terminally naïve cannot join the dots. An Asian NATO would be targeting China. The DPRK would also be very much a focus for such a grouping, as would Russia.

The elevation of Ishiba to the role of prime minister is, of itself, significant. He has a long history of being 'hawkish' and is very much a right-wing figure in the conservative Japanese LDP. He has long been a critic of the constraints imposed upon Japan by its constitution, which at least formally prevents the country from going to war. His plan for an Asian NATO with Japan at its centre is in keeping with this desired shift in policy.

Ishiba, has called a snap election for the end of October. The former defence minister and now prime minister has promised to "put a smile back on the faces" of the people. He is promising better times for the low paid and is clearly seeking to use a rise in militarism as a means of winning popular support. Confecting a China threat and a threat from the DPRK allows him to pursue an openly militaristic line. ✪

Communist Party of Australia

www.cpa.org.au cpa@cpa.org.au

Head Office (Sydney)
74 Buckingham St,
Surry Hills, NSW 2010
phone: 02 9699 8844
email: info@cpa.org.au

General Secretary
Andrew Irving
andrew@cpa.org.au

Party President
Vinnie Molina
president@cpa.org.au

Media guardian@cpa.org.au
amr@cpa.org.au

Canberra	act@cpa.org.au PO Box 35 Dickson ACT 2602
Darwin	Vinnie Molina darwin@cpa.org.au 0419 812 872
Melbourne	Andrew Irving cpavic@cpa.org.au Box 3 Trades Hall, Lygon St, Carlton Sth, Vic 3053
NSW State Comm	Christian Goopy nsw@cpa.org.au 02 9699 8844 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010
Perth	Elly Hulm perth@cpa.org.au 0421 113 343 PO Box 98, North Perth, WA 6906
Qld State Comm	0499 476 540 qld@cpa.org.au
SA State Comm	sa@cpa.org.au 0411 805 356 PO Box 56, Royal Park, SA 5014
Tasmania	Andrew Irving tas@cpa.org.au 03 9639 1550