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INVASION DAY

Basically, a policy of genocide has been followed. There were the shootings, massacres and poisonings by the colonial occupiers, the stolen lands, the forcing of the Indigenous people onto reserves when "protection" was the slogan of the times.

But the Aboriginal people did not die out as expected and so the policy of "protection" was replaced by "assimilation," the idea being that they could be absorbed into the white community and be eliminated that way.

Assimilation involved the destruction of Indigenous culture and the intended abandonment by them of any claims to their traditional lands. This policy did not work either, although it was accompanied by the destruction of many Aboriginal families and communities with the deliberate and conscious seizure of their children, the Stolen Generations.

All of these policies were based on the central idea that the Aboriginal people should be eliminated as a people. It was genocide. Has this objective changed? No, it has not! That is why nothing effective is being done to recognise land rights or alter the basic health and housing conditions of Indigenous people, or for education and jobs.

As well as guns and poisoned flour and the theft of children, the same objective underlies the deprivation caused by perpetual unemployment, lack of health services and housing, and racist mandatory sentencing laws.

As Indigenous leader Pat Dodson put it: "Ultimately, when we as a nation come to understand the fundamental story of how this land was in the possession of the Aboriginal people and became transferred to the British, then we can understand what 'Unfinished Business' is really about.

"It is about coming to terms with the rights and interests of the Aboriginal people, their lands and their seas, their right to be the people that they were before the British came, and to sustain their cultural and social values in the face of an ever changing, rapidly diversifying society.

"It's time for Australia to actually make that shift, to make the shift to enable the Indigenous people of this nation the freedom to be who they are, to be the Indigenous people of this country, and to move beyond simple symbolic matters to matters of recognising our presence through our art and various other contributions that we make, and to begin to seriously look at what needs to be done politically in order to enhance and support the aspirations of Aboriginal people for the recognition of their rights and responsibilities to their culture and their own heritage.

nothing effective is being done to recognise land rights or alter the basic health and housing conditions of Indigenous people, or for education and jobs

"That's a matter that has been a cause of division between us since the first colonisers' ships sailed in ... and took over the lands here from the people without their consent and sought then to subjugate people to a different way of life based on a different philosophy, different values, without a real basis of re-learning or adapting to this environment, to the people or to the values of this country."

Dodson said that "reconciling a nation is a very hard and long process, particularly if one side of the nation decides it wants to remain entrenched in its perception of what the truth of this country is about."

In describing that "other side" he referred to the "alternative point of view in a society that has become caught up with its own myopic view about itself.

"Hopefully ... many other Australians will participate in the people's movement towards reconciliation, will help to look more critically at the off-handed way that Indigenous people's rights and interests are discarded and will start to appreciate the importance ... of the number of sites in this part of the world, the richness of the cultural heritage, the heritage of the people from this part of that world. ...

"When we can do that with a sense of pride and a sense of respect then we would have laid not only the foundations of a reconciled Australia but would have moved beyond to where there is an equality that the Indigenous people have sought for so long, equality and respect of our traditions, of our culture, when our rights are on a par with those of others who are citizens of this country." ✪

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A map of suffering

The *Guardian* has a podcast
Search for "Communist *Guardian* Podcast" or use the QR code

Guardian

Issue 2129 20 January 2025

Make 2025 a year of struggle

It was the UN Secretary-General who famously said, "The world is burning. We need a renewables revolution." It is literally burning in California. Other parts of the US are frozen over. Climate records are being broken around the world – drought, famine, massive flooding, and wild fires. They are a stark warning of what lies ahead if governments do not act immediately and decisively to wind back fossil fuel production and use. There is no time to waste. Humanity is on the brink.

Western governments continue to pour billions upon billions of dollars into the deadly and toxic war machine. With conflicts raging in the Middle East and Europe, and the US and Australia preparing to launch a war against China, the potential for things to get out of control is significant, even for a nuclear war. With the unpredictable, ultra-reactionary Donald Trump, backed by neocons like Musk, the next four years could see the spread of conflict. Global security is under threat as never before. Fascists are on the ascendency in Europe and elsewhere. Social democracy which once offered some social advances is all but dead.

For the past 4 decades successive neoliberal governments have been on a privatisation and deregulation frenzy resulting in higher prices and a decline in services such as health and education. They have wound back wages, working conditions, social security payments and other aspects of the welfare state. Much of the workforce has been casualised and wage theft has become a way of doing business. Trade unions have lost many of their hard-won rights and their density decreased. In Australia the CFMEU has been taken over by a so-called social democrat government. Workers and social security recipients face a severe cost-of-living crisis with poverty on the rise. The right to protest is being reined in. Voters are increasingly rejecting the major parties who have failed them. Instead many are turning to the extreme right who tell them what they want to hear.

The two-party system has for some time been in its death throes. It has been kept alive with artificial respiration through laws biased against third parties, by protections sold to the public as "electoral reform," and by a mass media that backs it all the way along the two-party line.

In the coming months Australians will be voting on a new government. Labor has betrayed the working class. It has failed to condemn the genocide in Gaza or settlements in the West Bank. It has done nothing, not even withdrawn its embassy from Israel or expelled the Israeli ambassador. By equating opposition to Zionism and genocide with antisemitism the government has fuelled divisions and not only antisemitism but islamophobia. If the opinion polls are accurate, then the full-on attacks by the major parties and media have seen the Greens fail to gain significant traction. The success of the teals and independents may result in a hung parliament, but their positions vary from mostly progressive on the environment and social issues but swing more to the Coalition's position on industrial relations and the economy.

Our leaders and political institutions are failing the people. Bourgeois democracy is being undermined. In the few months left to the federal elections it is critical that the trade union movement unite with peace, environmental and women's movements, left parties, progressives in the Labor Party, Indigenous organisations, and others to build the widest possible militant movement to defeat neoliberalism and the ascendency of fascism. Where possible vote for left and progressive candidates. Progressive organisations should stand candidates offering the electorate a genuine alternative to the Lib/Lab alliance.

It is necessary to raise class consciousness. But that is not enough. The movement must be politicised if real change is to be achieved. Join the Communist Party of Australia which fights for the interests of working people. Which strongly opposes the genocide, supports climate action, public housing, the strengthening of Medicare, lifting social security recipients out of poverty, raising the minimum wage, and is for peace and against war.

Survival Day 2025

26 January is not a day to celebrate. It is a reminder of invasion, occupation, genocide, and the ongoing impact of colonisation that continues to destroy our lives, our lands, our waters. As the oldest living civilisation in the world, it is our right and responsibility as First Nations people to protect our country, our culture, our people. That is why we meet this day with protest and mourning.

GADIGAL LAND (SYDNEY)

When: 26 January, 10:00am – 7:00pm
Where: Victoria Park, Broadway, Gadigal Land
Invasion Day: Rally and March
When: 26 January 2025, 10:00am
Where: Belmore Park, Haymarket (Sydney), Gadigal Land
What: Organised by the Blak Caucus with guidance from Gadigal Elders, a space for truth-telling, resistance, mourning and solidarity. Join us to honour our survival, demand justice, and fight for the liberation of all First Nations.

NAARM (MELBOURNE)

Naarm Invasion Day Protest
When: 26 January, 10:00am
Where: Parliament House of Victoria, Spring St, Melbourne, Wurundjeri and Boon Warring Lands

MOOLOOBINBA (NEWCASTLE)

When: 25 January 2025, 7:00 – 9:00pm
Where: King Edward Park, Reserve Road
What: As the name captures, it will be a time for listening and quiet reflection through the sharing of stories, knowledge and culture. FEATURING: Jodan Perry as MC, Mari Mayi, Midnight Dreaming, Winanga-y Dreaming, Minimbah Dancers, Curious Legends illuminated puppets. A sea creatures lantern parade for the kids – collect your DIY kit from the lantern tent from 6:30pm. Cost: Free but please book a ticket in advance.

GUBI GUBI (SUNSHINE COAST)

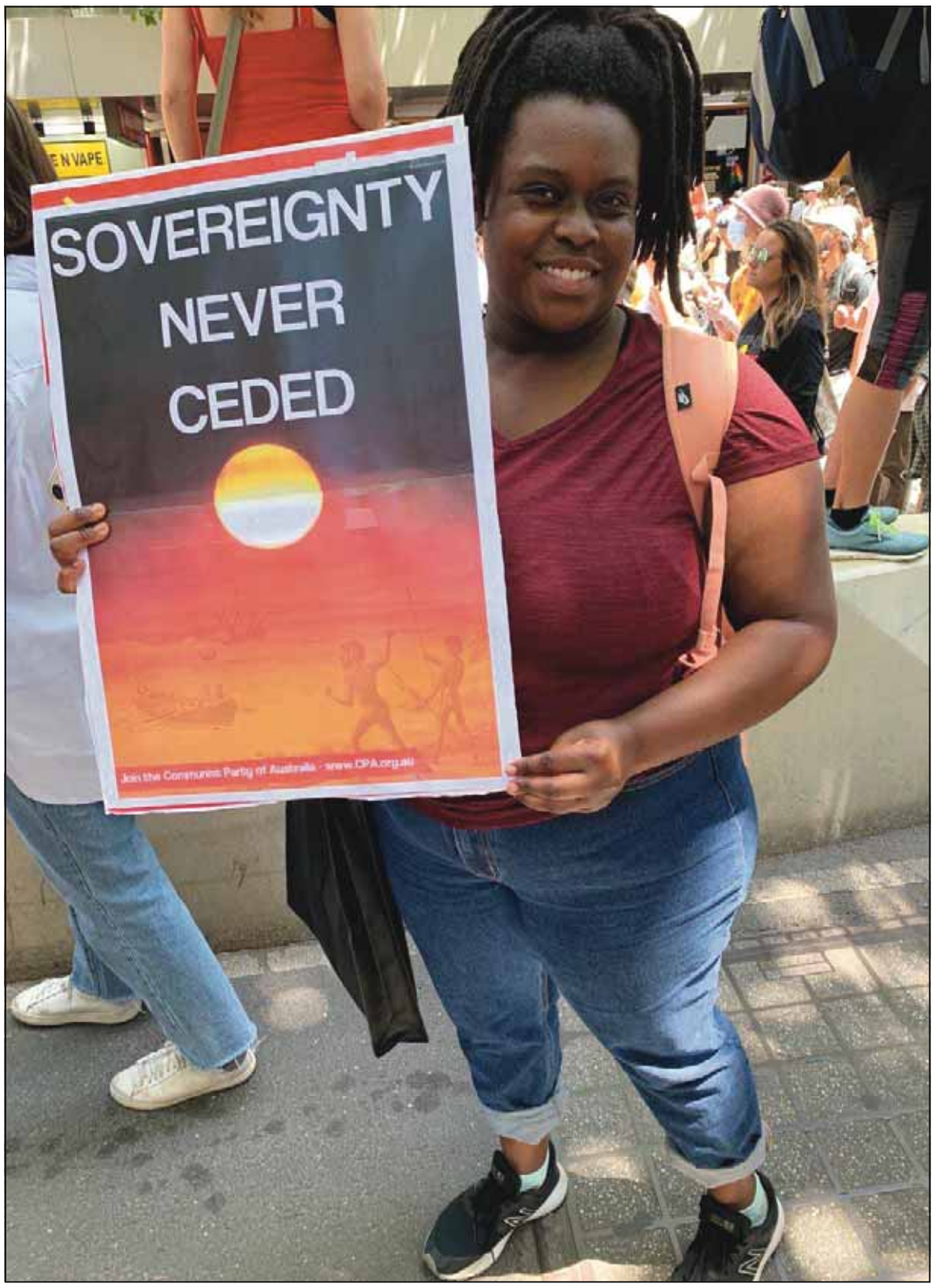
When: 26 January, 9:00am-1:00pm
Where: Sunshine Coast City Hall
Corner First Ave & South Sea Islander Way, Maroochydore
Commemorate and celebrate the true history of this country.
At 10:00am community will lead a 1.5km procession to Cotton Tree Park where we will gather

TARNTANYA (ADELAIDE)

Mourning in the Morning/Smoking Ceremony
When 26 January 7:30am-8:45am
When: Elder Park/Tarntanya Wama, King William St
Could a resurgence in First Nations languages help rewrite Australia's national story? Are open hearts and minds, courage, and conviction all that are needed to underpin it?

ACT

Sovereignty Day Rally
When: From 9:00am
Where: Graema Place, Ngunnawal/Ngambri Land



Talisman Sabre, the drive to war

William Briggs

Talisman Sabre 2023. Photo: US Army / Specialist Charlie Duke – flickr.com (Public Domain)

The 11th Talisman Sabre military exercise will be held later this year. A lot has happened since the last gathering in 2023. While the exercises themselves will have a familiar ring to them and the images on our news screens will seem the same, the militarisation of the Australian state, society, and economy has quickened its pace.

The sound of exploding ordinance from the war games will still be restricted to central and northern Australia and to Shoalwater Bay in Queensland. But since 2023, the US military, with the active assistance of their Australian partners, have drawn Albury-Wodonga into the direct orbit of US military activity.

The Bandiana army base in northern Victoria has become what is euphemistically being labelled a US military "storage facility." Hundreds of US military vehicles and associated materiel have been moved into Bandiana.

An Australian army media statement sought to make this an almost appealing image, describing how "a splash of camouflage will come to Bandiana, Victoria over the coming months, as ADF trucks transport United States Army vehicles and equipment to their new home at Gaza Ridge North Barracks."

As the US military equipment was rolling in, Australian army Colonel Clare Kellaway did her best to promote the 'positive' nature of the action. She 'explained' that it was a plus for the US as it saved them time and money transporting the equipment for exercises and that the deal demonstrated the strong relationship between the two armies and states.

Kellaway tried to allay any fears that the local community might have, saying that people "might be interested as to why there's lots of different types of military equipment making its way to East Bandiana, so it's important to let them know that it's part of our ongoing defence cooperation with the US." Whether that rather ambiguous comment reassured anybody is another matter.

At the time that this was happening, an appalling video was produced by the *Wall Street Journal*. The video was all about the use of Australian territory by the USA for its potential war with China and that Australia was particularly useful because it was a more secure and "safer" place for American materiel. US bases closer to China were seen as "vulnerable" to attack but Australia, the "unsinkable aircraft carrier," was just the spot to launch nuclear-armed attacks against China in the event of war. The fact that Australia is well within missile range of China was ignored.

The amount of equipment, which the US military was shipping into Bandiana was not originally acknowledged, but is now on public record. They admit to having enough equipment to supply about three logistics companies, with as many as 500 or more soldiers. That, in the greater scheme of things may seem not all that significant and unworthy of a missile attack. That may well be so, but as military analysts have said, it's the kind of materiel that's needed for a future drill, a natural disaster, or in a war. Future use and deployment is another matter.

Significantly the *Wall Street Journal* video spoke of the use of Bandiana as a key component in US military strategy. This has potential ramifications far beyond the war games of Talisman Sabre 2025, as dangerous as they might be, and goes beyond the concept of a relatively simple storage facility. What is clear is that the US and Australia are actively making preparations for a potential war with China.

In a sad attempt to make the coming round of war games seem less lethal, if not benign, they have been dubbed the "Olympics of military exercises." Just how live fire exercises, amphibious landings, ground force manoeuvres, air combat, and maritime operations specifically designed to prepare troops for war can be likened to the peaceful, if nationalistic appeal of the Olympics, is a stretch. Invitations have been handed out to 19 nations to join the USA and Australia.

The PR machine that goes hand-in-hand with the military machine has been hard-pressed to make the whole toxic exercise seem palatable. There is talk of how local governments and land-owners are consulted and claims are made about the economic benefits that derive from such events.

The people are then advised that "large military vehicle convoys will be on public roads, including major highways and country roads and that there will be closures of waterways and airspace and that yachts, fishing vessels, and aircraft need to be take special care. In short, don't get in the way! People are also advised not to handle any munitions or weapons that they might find lying about.

"WAR-READY"

The stated purpose of Talisman Sabre is to make all participating armies "war-ready." This is about the only truth that is being told. The war that the US, and its ally Australia are readying themselves for is against China. The logic, if logic is possible, is clear enough and for the ruling class in the US, it is a compelling one.

What is clear is that the US and Australia are actively making preparations for a potential war with China.

US economic and political hegemony is seriously under threat. When threatened, empires have a habit of striking back and shooting first. For Australia and its ruling class, whose interests are so linked to a continuation of US regional and global domination, the logic is clear. Push China back at any cost. The cost might well mean destruction of the region and beyond.

That destruction will not be confined to the US strongholds and bases that are geographically much closer to China. Darwin and Alice Springs are already obvious targets. Huge fuel dumps have been constructed just minutes from the CBD of Darwin. Now the citizens of Albury and Wodonga are to become targets as well.

These centres are well and truly within the range of Chinese intercontinental missiles whose range is up to 15,000 km. It is 9,000 km from Albury to Beijing. Is it inconceivable that, should a war with China eventuate, then US bases in Australia would be targeted?

Is the Bandiana army-base a target or is it simply a convenient 'garage' for US military vehicles? According to the Australian military, it is no more serious than that. The US are saying that these 'vehicles' will be part of Talisman Sabre exercises.

How serious are these claims? If this materiel was to be used in those exercises, then they would be trundling along the highway for about 18-hours before getting to their destination. At the same time Kellaway's media release assures us that the US saw a great benefit in Bandiana because it "avoids extra time and money transporting the equipment for future exercises and operations, and it demonstrates the strong relationship between the two defence forces."

The Australian people are being taken for fools. Almost 2 years ago the 10th Talisman Sabre exercises concluded. In just a few months the 11th "Olympics of military exercises" will resume. War with China creeps ever closer. It is imminent but not inevitable.

The ruling class in the US cannot countenance a future without economic hegemony. The Australian ruling class marches in lockstep with their American allies. The working class in both countries are to be used to produce the machinery of war and to become the casualties of war.

As we move closer to Talisman Sabre, Bandiana has become another potential target. Should a war with China be fought, then containing it is unlikely. Winning such a war, for either the US or China, would ultimately be a pyrrhic victory. ✪

Qube Ports chooses industrial action

The blind ideology of Qube Ports' management is preventing ports throughout the Australian waterfront from returning to work, with the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) offering compromises during negotiations which have been rejected by Qube. The MUA's offer of compromise hinges upon non-cost outcomes around two final issues during negotiations with Qube.

Qube continue to reaffirm their intractable bargaining strategy as a tool to impose unfairness and have threatened the MUA with an intractable bargaining application at the Fair Work Commission yet again, in a clear sign of continued manipulation of the Australian industrial relations system.

The MUA stands by its offer to remove all industrial action immediately in all ports but Qube's ideological opposition to non-cost matters such as income protection insurance and discrimination against workers who took industrial action is holding their workforce and the community to ransom.

The MUA remains open to ongoing discussions with the company to achieve full and final settlement, but this is only possible if the company also comes to the bargaining table in good faith. "Qube have only sent a decision-maker in the last 3 of over 60 meetings. This is the example of manipulation of intractable bargaining the MUA was always concerned about," said Warren Smith, the Deputy National Secretary of the MUA.

The MUA's membership of over 1,000 workers at Qube Ports' many sites around Australia have voted overwhelmingly in favour of taking action against the stevedoring company. Through ballots undertaken of workers at each port ahead of protected industrial action, between 97 per cent and 100 per cent at all sites have supported and taken strike action in the face of an employer which has so far refused to take the negotiation process seriously. ✪

Woolworths strike concludes

Miles Fitzsimmons

On 21 November last year over 1,500 warehouse workers at 4 distribution centres for Woolworths in NSW and Victoria commenced an indefinite strike, seeking above inflation pay-rises and an end to a performance measuring and management system known as 'The Framework,' as we wrote about in our article on the topic last November. (See *Guardian* #2126 "Woolies' warehouse workers commence indefinite strike.")

That strike ended on 9 December, with workers returning under in principle agreements between Primary Connect (Woolworths' supply chain arm) and the United Workers Union (UWU).

Delegates address striking workers at Erskine Park DC in Western Sydney.

This 18-day strike was quite eventful and drew a lot of attention from media, the community, and government. The most significant developments during the course of the strike were the events at Melbourne South Regional Distribution Centre (MSRDC) in Dandenong South when Woolworths attempted to open the DC in the face of the workers' picket supported by community members. While Woolworths had stood down all workers, union or not, at the four DCs and ceased operations, the impact of the continuing strike led them to attempt to open MSRDC on 2 December as it was responsible for 40 per cent of the striking warehouses' workload.

In opposition to this attempted re-opening (shamefully supported by the 'union,' the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association), UWU organised a picket of the striking workers supported by hundreds of community members and other trade unionists to stop the attempted bussing of scab workers into the site. This impressive display of worker power successfully prevented the few dozen workers willing to scab from entering the site for 4 days.

Unfortunately, but not unexpectedly Woolworths applied for an injunction at the Fair Work Commission (FWC) in order to prevent picketing at MSRDC as well as at other operating warehouses where workers had picketed on one-off occasions. Entirely predictably, the FWC granted this injunction which gave Woolworths the green-light to crush the picket. This injunction and the increasing interest of the federal government in resolving the situation likely began to tip the balance in the strike back towards Woolworths, leading to the union reaching agreements rather than risk the strike running through Christmas.

The question is what are the terms of these agreements and how do they stack up to the workers' demands? There are some positives to be sure, in particular the fight against The Framework that was central to the workers' demands. As covered in last year's article and by other outlets, The Framework is a performance management system that sought to measure all actions taken by warehouse workers against a pre-determined 'goal-time' and discipline workers who did not maintain an average performance of 100 per cent compared to the goal-time. The strike was in part motivated by Woolworth's complete refusal to even discuss The Framework during bargaining but the strike was successfully able to bring the company to the table on the issue. Compared to Woolworths' position of no discussion or modification to The Framework, the workers had a position that there would be no discipline on the basis of not working to a pre-set rate or speed. Ultimately the new agreements reached contain a clause that states no worker would be subject to discipline or disadvantage for not meeting performance standards provided they are working to the best of their ability.

The compromise however is the company has some ability under this new clause to assert that a worker is not working to the best of their ability. This compromise position skews towards the workers' interests and as of yet The Framework has not been reimplemented at the 4 warehouses but it is likely the realm of 'best of ability' will be the new battleground between Woolworths and its workers.

The pay rises under these new agreements are average at best. Workers at the striking warehouses will receive pay rises of between 4 per cent and 3 per cent per year for the next 3 years which may be higher than official inflation statistics but fail to make up for several years of high inflation and cost-of-living pressures. While wages at these warehouses may have been decent in the grand scheme of things, it always remains difficult for workers to see wage growth that is made negligible by comparison to the growth in corporate profits.

There are two alarming setbacks that have emerged in the new agreements at Wodonga Regional Distribution Centre and MSRDC. These 4 warehouses were striking at the same time because the expiry dates of their individual agreements roughly lined up and allowed them to strike jointly. Three of the warehouses have obtained 3-year agreements and remain lined up but WoRDC has been forced to accept a 2-year agreement and is now not lined up with any warehouse in Woolworths network.

In addition to this the SDA has approximately 10 members at MSRDC but lacked any formal recognition on the Enterprise Agreement, but Woolworths made a new agreement conditional on recognition of the SDA which the workers have been forced to accept. This gives the sellout sham 'union' known as the SDA formal union rights at MSRDC which is sure to lead to the SDA and Woolworths working hand-in-hand to worsen conditions at MSRDC much as they do at the Woolworths stores.

Perhaps most disturbingly once the strike ended and the busy Christmas period began to wind down Woolworths began disciplinary investigations on the 27 December into delegates and members who had attended pickets at other warehouses during the strike. While major strikes usually end with some agreement to let sleeping dogs lie with the union and company leaving activities in the strike behind them, Woolworths either did not agree to this or has gone back on their word. These workers now face warnings or even termination simply for the 'crime' of standing up for themselves and fighting for better treatment.

Ultimately this strike was a mixed bag in terms of results. Certainly, many of the workers' demands were not met and there are a handful of areas where things have gone backwards, but there are also victories like the withdrawal of The Framework. There are also intangible benefits to the strike like the increased public discussion of performance monitoring and management. The decision to strike is never taken lightly and while the result is perhaps bitter for the workers involved, we should remember the words of British trade unionist Bob Crow: 'If you fight you won't always win. But if you don't fight you will always lose'.

The task now is to digest the lessons this strike can teach the Woolworths workers and workers at large in Australia. The fractured nature of the enterprise bargaining system and the difficulty it presents in organising campaigns involving multiple workplaces and the shackles our current boss-friendly industrial relations system places on workers are two major themes of this strike and also the hurdles that need to be addressed if want to further the cause of trade unions in this country.

Lastly, these warehouses workers must be saluted for their courage in striking against the corporate behemoth that is Woolworths and we should wish them all the best for the end of this strike is not the end of their struggle, but merely the setting of the stage for further battles and victories.

Dingo bytes

It could be tempting to treat Elon Musk's provocations as the attention-seeking of a petulant plutocrat who was born into the wealth of his father's mining business in apartheid South Africa. Then there is the line from the most craven US allies – Britain's laughable Foreign Secretary David Lammy and the EU's Ursula von der Leyen – in response to Donald Trump mulling the annexation of Greenland and the Panama Canal. It seems not to take him seriously.

That would be a catastrophic mistake. Musk is in effect co-president of the US, having spent US$100 million (AU$163 million) on Trump's election campaign.

He is in the company of other reactionary billionaires such as Peter Thiel, who has sculpted the nominal vice-president and faux blue-collar champion, JD Vance.

Trump may come across as a fruitloop but he is far from the clueless blow-in of liberal imagination. He represents US capital in its majority.

The centrist conceit 8 years ago was that Trump's ruling-class backing came from a kind of lumpen bourgeoisie living in the segregationist past and running outdated industries. That was contrasted to the thrusting cosmopolitan tech sector with its global workforce in Silicon Valley.

Amazon's Jeff Bezos, Meta's Mark Zuckerberg … one by one the tech oligarchs have come in behind Trump. They especially back his moves to curb China's tech industry and any European regulation they don't like.

Trump is acting for the US empire with a set of policies that are xenophobic and militarist, and in the end are nothing less than a threat to the existence of life on the planet.

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: is Israel: The number of Palestinians killed by the Israeli action in Gaza since October 2023 has been under-estimated by around 41 per cent, a new British study has found.

The estimates were published in the British medical journal the *Lancet* as the US House of Representatives voted to sanction the International Criminal Court (ICC) over its decision to issue arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former defence minister Yoav Gallant.

The *Lancet*'s estimates put the true number of deaths caused by Israeli attacks at around 64,260, far higher than the official toll of at least 42,000.

Its figures showed that 59.1 per cent of those killed were women, children and people over the age of 65. The study's figures represent 2.9 per cent of Gaza's pre-war population.

The US House of Representatives voted in favour of legislation against the ICC for issuing arrest warrants against Israel's criminal PM Netanyahu and his war minister Gallant.

Legislators passed the so-called Illegitimate Court Counteraction Act by 243 to 140. Some 45 Democrats joined 198 Republicans in backing the Bill. No Republicans voted against it.

The Bill proposes sanctions for any foreigner who helps the ICC in its attempts to investigate, detain or prosecute a US citizen or citizen of an allied country that does not recognise the authority of the court.

Neither the US nor Israel are parties to the Rome Statute, which established the ICC.

The sanctions would include the freezing of property assets, as well as the denial of visas to any foreigners who materially or financially contribute to the court's efforts.

Medea Benjamin, co-founder of female-led peace group Codepink, described the Bill as "a direct attack on international law and justice, isolating the US on the world stage.

"We must fight back against these shameful efforts to protect war criminals!"

The way forward

Marcus Browning

The federal government has shown itself to be a tool of the big banks and corporations. These huge institutions are no longer prepared to be restrained by the federal government or the Reserve Bank. The banks have always made their own laws – a fact that is now screamingly obvious. It's the same story in the United States, Britain and other "free market" capitalist countries. But the chickens are now coming home to roost.

RESTORE CONTROL

To restore some control by governments over the economic direction being followed it is essential that any further privatisation be stopped immediately and key industries and institutions be returned to public ownership. This must include telecommunications, transport, water, electricity supplies, main resources, education, universities, and hospitals.

A new public bank must be set up by the government in order to provide low-cost home loans. A massive injection of funds into public housing projects will provide jobs and affordable public rental housing and housing for private sale. These latter two mechanisms will force the private banking institutions and landlords to substantially lower their profit-gouging margins in order to compete in the market.

The tens of billions of dollars being spent on the military distorts the economy. The bulk of that money should be used to strengthen health, education and other vitally important services.

Public ownership would restore some power to regulate and control the economy, and plan the use of financial and other resources in the interests of the working people who comprise the overwhelming majority of the people in all developed countries.

The politicians and governments which continue to believe that capitalism is the best and only economic system are incapable of even considering the socialist alternative and, even if they did, they lack the courage and commitment to advocate and work for it.

As is reflected in the rhetoric in the current election campaigning by both major parties, rather than take serious measures to control the banks and corporations the response of governments has been to set up razor gangs to slash government programs. They will cut jobs and slash services while ploughing billions of dollars of taxpayers' money into corporate coffers.

NEOLIBERALISM

The road to crisis started in Australia in the early 1980s when the policies of Milton Friedman were adopted and first implemented by the Hawke/Keating government. These policies became known as "economic rationalist" in Australia or "neo-liberal."

It started with the floating of the Australian dollar against other currencies by Paul Keating when he was the Treasurer in the first Hawke government. This meant that the currency was pushed up or down according to the whim of the stock exchanges around the world with governments having no control over the outcome.

This was followed by the introduction of so-called "competition policy" which was really a cover under which publicly owned enterprises were privatised and incorporated into the capitalist system completely. Competition was never

Underlying all these measures goes the systematic intensification of the exploitation of labour.

enforced when it came to the corporations. This is evident in the oil industry and, quite recently, in the interest rate rises imposed by the banks. The very small differences in the rate increases imposed by all the major banks show that competition is just a joke. There are many other examples.

In a number of other major industries the process of mergers and take-overs has gone on apace until the market is dominated by one or two major enterprises which make cartel agreements controlling prices or by carving up the market between them.

In the rush to privatisation in Australia, telecommunications (Telstra) has been handed over, Qantas and the Commonwealth Bank were privatised, airports, port facilities, power, water, railways, and many other vital industries or services have been wholly or partly privatised. Some government services have been handed over to be run by the private sector – euphemistically called "outsourcing."

Underlying all these measures goes the systematic intensification of the exploitation of labour. This is behind the talk by governments and employers about increasing productivity – more production by fewer workers. The former Howard government followed the Labor governments' introduction of enterprise bargaining and the gutting of awards by savagely attacking workers' wages, conditions and rights.

The Albanese government is using the mantra of "fighting inflation" – not the inflation caused by banks putting up interest rates or the oil companies putting up petrol prices, instead claiming it is caused by trade unions and workers fighting for higher wages and the restoration of penalty rates, holiday pay and other conditions stolen by employers in recent years.

All these policies will be continued by a second term Albanese ALP government as has already been made clear by the empty platitudes and meaningless appeals made to the banks when the banks put up interest rates.

Beyond Catastrophic Situation in Gaza

The Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN) is horrified that the war waged by Israel since 8 October 2023 has been allowed to continue. This has devastated the lives of virtually the whole population of more than 2 million Palestinians in Gaza.

It is beyond the time for urgent action. *The UN Security Council must act immediately on the war in Gaza*, in light of Article 99 of the UN Charter being invoked by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on 7 December 2024.

On 12 December Australia voted with 157 other nations for a resolution in the General Assembly calling for an *immediate unconditional and permanent ceasefire* in Gaza.

However, in the weeks that have followed no ceasefire has been observed by Israel and there have been hundreds more civilian deaths, horrific wounds inflicted on children, and more homes and schools demolished.

Israel's pattern of deadly attacks on and near hospitals in Gaza has also continued unabated.

"It is clear that words and resolutions are not working," said IPAN Spokesperson Kathryn Kelly, "and direct intervention by the international community is required."

Urgent medical assistance needed for Gaza

War crimes must be stopped by the international community

"IPAN condemns these attacks which have resulted in the deaths of health workers, destruction of essential equipment, and pushed the healthcare system to the brink of total collapse. These are war crimes," stated Kelly.

"IPAN also deplores the fact that the Israeli government has not implemented the provisional measures it was ordered to take by the International Court of Justice, almost 12 months ago, to prevent any acts contrary to the 1948 Genocide Convention," stated Kelly.

IPAN also shares, with health professionals from across the globe, grave concerns about the safety of Dr Hussam Abu Safiya, the Director of one of the last partially functioning hospitals in northern Gaza whom the Israeli military arrested during their raid on Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Lahiya on Friday 29 December 2023. His current whereabouts are unknown.

IPAN calls on our government to:

- Recall the Israeli ambassador to Australia, to advise expulsion, in the absence of an immediate unconditional and permanent ceasefire and the release of Dr Hussam Abu Safia from detention
- Recall Australia's ambassador from Israel, in the absence of an immediate unconditional and permanent ceasefire and the release of Dr Hussam Abu Safia from detention
- Apply trade sanctions to the Israeli government
- End all bilateral military-technology trade with Israel
- Publicly state to abide by the rulings of the ICC to arrest Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Israeli Defence Minister Gallant, were they to attempt to enter Australia.

Indexation fails to meet needs

The federal government must urgently lift income support payments as cost of living pressures are expected to take centre stage in the next budget and 2025 federal election.

January's annual indexation of Youth Allowance and Austudy is grossly inadequate, leaving millions unable to afford basic essentials. Youth Allowance and Austudy for a single person living away from home are only going up by $1.70 a day. This lifts them to a mere $47 a day, which is 36 per cent of the minimum wage.

"Indexation alone is not enough. An extra $1.70 a day wouldn't even cover a loaf of bread. People on income support are being left further behind while costs of rent, food, and essentials are spiralling out of control and driving people on income support payments deeper into poverty," said ACOSS CEO Dr Cassandra Goldie.

"Parents are skipping meals to ensure their children can eat, people are forgoing essential medications, and many are losing hope. In a wealthy country like ours, this is a national shame.

"These indexation adjustments barely scratch the surface and the current rates are completely out of step with basic living costs."

ACOSS is also calling for Youth Allowance and Austudy to be indexed every six months, like JobSeeker, and pensions.

"A system that leaves students living in poverty is setting them up to fail before they even start."

Goldie said the rate of income support must be lifted to at least $82 a day, in line with the Age Pension.

"The way to end poverty is simple: raise the rate. Anything less is a choice to keep people hungry, sick, and struggling," she said.

Profits cause inflation

Jo Dunleavy

There is no shortage of news headlining big business and government warnings that a "wages breakout" will cause inflation: "Teachers' rise a risk to inflation," "ACTU wage claim would put jobs at risk," and other claims that wage rises will harm economic recovery. Every time a group of unions succeeds in winning a wage rise, the same claims are trotted out.

But when the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) announces another rise in interest rates, there were no headlines warning "Interest rate rise will cause inflation." When record corporate profits are announced, they are heralded as great news, with no warnings that the price hikes caused inflation.

There are no news headlines or hard government warnings such as: "Profit surge causes inflation" or "Price hikes threaten economic recovery."

When the RBA increases its official cash rate, the media simply reports: "RBA rates to rise 0.25 per cent". The banks then begin announcing increases in mortgage rates and interest rates on personal and business loans. Again, their actions are simply reported as: "Banks pass on RBA rise". No mention of what comes next and the impact it will have on living standards.

It's not long before prices of goods and services are increased. The private sector not only passes on the interest rate rise (which may not affect them immediately) but by a whole lot more so as to boost profits. These price rises drive up the Consumer Price Index (CPI) – a measure of price inflation – and boost the profits of banks and big business. They are the cause of inflation.

In free market theory, raising interest rates and hence the cost of home and other loans (which flows on to rent) leaves people with less money to spend on goods and services. This reduces demand and so companies do not increase prices, and may even reduce prices.

But the days of free markets with supply and demand dictating prices are long gone. They have been replaced by the domination of large monopolies and cartels operating across industries. When demand declines (people have less money to buy what is produced), they may decide it is more profitable to raise the price and sell fewer products at a higher price.

When trade unions seek wage rises to cover the additional burden placed on workers and their families by the higher interest rates and price rises, the media, business sector and government, as one, come out strongly against their demands, warning that a "wages breakout would cause inflation."

They don't oppose the interest rate rise, they don't oppose the price rises. Apparently they are good for the economy, and governments shouldn't "interfere."

Workers' wages did not cause the RBA increase, they did not cause the rise in home loan repayments and rental increases, nor did they cause the rise in the price of petrol, electricity, transport, medicines, health services, education, and other goods and services.

These price rises are directly related to private profit gouging. The banks were forced to lower their interest rates during the financial crisis and economic recession. The big banks and RBA openly admit their aim is to restore them to their "historical average."

Many workers saw their incomes fall as they lost their jobs or had their hours and wages reduced. Trade unions in some instances negotiated shorter hours, non-work days and lower wages to assist businesses through the economic crisis. But when they ask for a wage rise of 12 or 15 per cent over three years, they are portrayed as greedy, irresponsible, causing inflation, and threatening jobs and the prosperity of the nation.

But how do their claims stack up against the actions of big business and the RBA? A closer examination reveals that the wage demands are extremely moderate, in fact quite low and certainly not inflationary.

Take the RBA's interest rates. A rise of 0.25 per cent does not sound very big, certainly nothing like the four to five per cent a year sought by workers. Then the RBA increased the official cash rate in increments of 0.25 per cent from three per cent to 4.25 per cent.

A leap from 3 to 4.25 per cent in interest payments is huge. Take for example a loan of $100,000 at three per cent. The annual interest repayment would be $3,000. At the new rate of 4.25 per cent it becomes $4,250. That is hike in interest payments of $1,250.

In percentage terms, this increase from $3,000 to $4,250 in interest repayments is 41.7 per cent!! A far cry from the amount being sought by trade unions.

In reality, the interest rates charged by banks and other financial institutions are far higher than the official RBA cash rate – two, three, four or more times higher – and banks on some occasions pass on larger increases than those determined by the RBA. The banks are raking it in, big business is pushing up prices at every opportunity and workers seeking to catch up are blamed for inflation, unemployment, and every other blight of the capitalist system.

Graphic: pxhere.com (CC0 Public Domain)

... the days of free markets with supply and demand dictating prices are long gone.

The combination of rising prices and higher interest rates means workers, pensioners and the unemployed can buy less with their income. This reduction in demand is what leads to industry operating below capacity and sacking workers. Not workers' wage rises.

In pure economic terms raising wages and pensions stimulates demand, results in job growth and assists economic recovery. But more importantly, wage and pension increases are necessary to restore and improve living standards of the people. That should be the prime objective of the economic system – serving the needs and interests of the people, not private profits.

As the teachers, building, maritime, nurses, teachers, and other workers have found in their recent union campaigns for wage rises, they do not come without a huge struggle. Part of that struggle is to expose the myth that wage rises cause inflation for what it is – an ideologically-based lie used to suppress the struggle for workers' rights.

Who defends the national interests?

Prime Minister Albanese and his Ministers consistently claim that their policies are in Australia's "national interest." We are told that wars of aggression are in the national interest. The subsequent "terror laws" and keeping refugees out of Australia are claimed to be in the national interest. The expenditure of an extra $450 billion on military hardware is in the national interest.

Free trade agreements with the United States and the US alliance are also promoted, making the same assertion.

The policies of both major parties are actually in the interests of only a tiny minority of people. In what way has the participation in wars helped the Australian people? How does the expenditure of huge amounts of taxpayers' money on weapons of mass destruction help to make Australia secure when absolutely no country threatens Australia?

How will war against China or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea help the Australian people? How will free trade agreements help the working people of Australia when many will lose their jobs and some industries will be wiped out as a result of a flood of US imports?

The real national interest of the Australian people was expressed in the Australia-wide demonstrations that opposed Australian involvement in the war in Iraq and now oppose the scandalous expenditure of $368 billion on nuclear submarines while Medicare and public education are starved of funds.

The real national interest is to be found in the policies of those who campaign for the strengthening of public education and public health and the elimination of university fees. All of this could be easily funded were it not for the huge expenditures now being wasted on military hardware and the preparation for wars.

The wars against Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq, to mention only a few, were all about power and the pursuit of the profit interests of the big corporations out to control the supply of oil and win military contracts.

While actually betraying Australia's independence and sovereignty, the Australian corporate ruling class and the media that they control talk about everything Australian being the "best in the world".

Karl Marx quoted, as a footnote to his monumental work *Capital*, the reality of capitalist greed and immorality: "Capital eschews no profit, or very small profit, just as Nature was formerly said to abhor a vacuum. With adequate profit, capital is very bold. A certain 10 per cent will ensure its employment anywhere; 20 per cent certain will produce eagerness; 50 per cent, positive audacity; 100 per cent will make it ready to trample on all human laws; 300 per cent, and there is not a crime at which it will scruple, nor a risk it will not run, even to the chance of its owner being hanged.

"If turbulence and strife will bring a profit, it will freely encourage both. Smuggling and the slave-trade have amply proved all that is here stated." (Marx-Engels *Collected Works* Vol 35 p748).

The cry about "national interests" coming from Albanese & Co is a fraud, and the promotion of nationalism is a crime that divides the Australian people from the people of other countries. It breeds another crime – racism – that feeds on the idea of national superiority by one country over another.

The Communist Party stands for the interests of the working people of Australia – the overwhelming majority – and it is their interests that are truly national. Along with this goes belief in the common interests of all working people of all countries.

The policies of both major parties are actually in the interests of only a tiny minority of people

LA fires a warning of things to come

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

Global Climate Scientists have confirmed 2024 was the world's hottest since records began, eclipsing the previous record set in 2023 and raising the alarm that burning fossil fuels have left the planet 'teetering on the brink' of breaking the 1.5°C barrier set by the Paris Agreement.

With wildfires continuing to rage in California, the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) says urgent action is needed to phase out fossil fuels globally.

Coordinated modelling and analysis produced by experts at NASA, European climate service Copernicus, the US weather service NOAA, the UK Met Office, Berkeley Earth and the World Meteorological Organisation *find every year in the past decade has been one of the hottest ten on record.*

The burning of coal, oil and gas is driving rising temperatures. For the first time in 2024 global average temperature was 1.6°C above the pre-industrial average, breaching the 1.5°C limit identified by scientists as necessary to maintain a safe and liveable climate long-term.

Climate Councillor, Professor David Karoly said: "These are not the records any climate scientist wants to see broken. When it comes to rising temperatures, rising sea levels and rising damage bills from unnatural disasters, every fraction of a degree matters.

"Australia's Black Summer, the severe wildfires in 2021 and 2022 across Europe, and now LA's horrific fires in the middle of winter. Climate change is driving a cascading series of unnatural disasters all around the globe," Annika Reynolds (they/them), ACF's national climate policy advisor said.

Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and intense. The warmer atmosphere supercharges rain events, like the flooding in Spain that saw cars swept through the streets and, closer to home the flooding from ex-tropical cyclone Kirrily that became a statewide disaster event in Queensland last January.

The agencies and scientists behind the latest findings remind us that 'the future is in our hands,' slashing climate pollution this decade is critical.

According to the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology's State of the Climate 2024 Report, if a global temperature rise of 1.5°C is maintained for 10-20 years, Australia will experience devastating consequences. The continental land masses, like Australia, heat up faster than the oceans, and therefore heat up more than the global average.

We will experience a constant cycle of flooding rains, heatwaves, drought and fierce bush fires that will only intensify, creating more disruption, dislocation, devastation, and death.

Climate Council CEO Amanda McKenzie said: "People world-wide have suffered through ten years of record-breaking temperatures, driving deadly heatwaves, ferocious fires and record breaking flooding. 2025 must be game on for climate action in Australia.

"When the alarm bells are ringing, you act immediately. Slashing climate pollution this decade is critical to safeguard our children's future. This is the challenge for our political leaders this election year.

"Australia is fuelling this crisis with its reckless fossil fuel exports and approvals. In 2024, Climate Analytics found that Australia was the second largest exporter of climate pollution in the world."

"These complex, compounding and devastating climate disasters will only become more frequent and severe across the world unless we phase out the burning and export of fossil fuels.

"LA's fires have started during an abnormally dry winter, just as our own Black Summer fires did five years ago, in what went on to become Australia's most catastrophic fire season. The similarity between smoke-enveloped downtown LA right now, and east coast cities across Australia five years ago, is an alarming reminder for those that lived through the Black Summer."

We have started to make real progress: our grid is more renewable than ever, new EVs hit the market at record rates, and we've just had a bumper year for big clean energy and storage projects. We can clean up our energy system by the 2030s.

Global climate experts and the wild fires of Los Angeles have just shown us exactly what's at stake: lives, livelihoods, community safety and our way of life. We need to act before our kids' futures go up in smoke.

It's time to draw a line in the sand and say 'no more fossil-fuelled temperature records.' Australia has everything we need for this to be the year we set records for all the right reasons: from climate ambition to renewable power, nature restoration to clean transport. So let's get on with it!

We need to act before our kids' futures go up in smoke.

GREEN NOTES

Working together for the environment

In many parts of the nation, First Nations working with non-Aboriginal Australians has emerged as a sustainable way of dealing with the environmental challenges posed by climate change, especially more intense and more frequent bush fires and floods as well the vegetation loss. Fire stick farming as a significant aspect of TEK (Traditional Ecological Knowledge), stands out as just one of numerous alternative approaches to managing the natural environment, as part of practices developed over millennia in Aboriginal Australia. A respectful and cooperative atmosphere is a vital part of the transference process.

Tarntanya/Adelaide has a local group who have embraced this philosophy with the long-term aim of preserving Aboriginal culture to the benefit of the wider Australian community at the same time. This group, known as the Warringga Committee, in its short life has so far made such great strides to achieve wide community recognition.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community leaders and educators have joined with Aboriginal elders to work in various ways to develop Indigenous understanding in activities important to the local area and with impact on a wider scale. The South Australian Chapter of OMEP (the World Organisation of Early Childhood Education) has not only recognised the committee through a Children's Week Award but also noted their appreciation of the Committee's projects that focus on educating Aboriginal teachers on how to research and be confident in presenting their culture.

Starting in 2023 with the TEK Program, the Committee has become an influential force. As a tragic consequence of colonisation, many young Aboriginal people who have achieved success in gaining a sound general education, have been denied access to traditional learning, especially in the case of urban communities. Operating through Tauondi Aboriginal Community College, and in conjunction with Aboriginal Elders, a course was initiated for Aboriginal instructors, counsellors and potential tour leaders or tourist guides which helped forge their "connection to country" and their ability to promote TEK.

In summarising their achievements, the Chair of Warringga Committee, Misty Taylor, of Kaurna heritage, declared: "The Warringga Committee's vision is for the local community to establish a number of areas (a trail, track or garden) that can boost local biodiversity and provide valuable education opportunities for local community members. To offer experiences with Aboriginal educators in an ongoing and developmental way whereby participants get the opportunity to get to know Aboriginal people and Kaurna Language and to experience Traditional Ecological Knowledge in a hands-on manner (connection to country).

In partnership, Uncle Frank Wanganeen, Kaurna and Narungga Elder, and Paul Herzich, a multi-award-winning Landscape Architect of Ngarrindjeri and Kaurna heritage and principal of Mantirri Design, worked together on a project that used the culturally significant story of the Parafield Vernal Pools and the Dingo, Bukkibukki, to create artwork for the iconic Salisbury Clock Tower. The artworks are Kaurna cultural markers of 2 ancient stories within the local Salisbury area, which the group hope to do more of in the City of Salisbury.

In cooperation with environmental group Friends of Cobbler Creek, an urban recreational park incorporated a culturally sensitive "yarning circle" into its picnic and playground area, along with planting and nurturing of local native vegetation as part of caring for country.

Combining with schools, universities, council and environmental groups, even kindergartens, the Committee as undertaken numerous projects with culture and country at the forefront such as the establishment of bush food gardens and the planting of native species. In doing so, they have facilitated *Cultural Guide* workshops on TEK, hosted a community workshop with South Australian Native Plant expert Neville Bonney, whose book *Knowing, growing and eating edible wild native plants for southern Australia*, has become a classic environmental resource.

To fulfil its destiny as a tolerant and environmentally educated nation, Australia needs to embrace First Nations' insights and respect for nature.

ALWAYS WAS ALWAYS WILL BE ALWAYS

Communist Party of Australia

SOVEREIGNTY

NEVER

ALWAYS WAS ALWAYS WILL BE
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Capitalist climate change

The incendiary cataclysms in Los Angeles, California remind us that the root cause of the climate crisis exacerbating the fires spreading throughout that city and surrounding areas is fossil fuel production, emblematic of runaway capitalism fuelled by white "supremacy" ideology, patriarchy, and colonisation.

And while it's easy to focus solely on the fires, it's important to note that the associated smoke will be the main culprit in the loss of life due to environmental racism that has assaulted the public health of Black, Brown, Indigenous and all poor and working class people in Los Angeles and throughout the country.

As revealed during the height of the COVID pandemic, Black and Indigenous peoples suffered a higher morbidity rate due to decades of exposure to poisoned air and the intentional siting of pollutive industries and operations in our communities from Los Angeles to the Bronx, and Cancer Alley in Louisiana.

These communities remain at high risk because what's happening in Los Angeles, won't stay in Los Angeles – the smoke generated from these fires will traverse our communities as it travels eastward, and exacerbates existing public health emergencies that are consistently overlooked and ignored by lawmakers representing both the corporate Democrat and Republican political parties and their wealthy acolytes.

To this end, while we sympathise with those who have lost their homes in affluent communities like the Pacific Palisades, Malibu, and the Hollywood Hills. We empathise with communities that will suffer long-term public health impacts, including, but not limited to, respiratory and other illnesses due to years of being treated as energy and economic sacrifice zones.

Will President Biden, the incoming Trump administration, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) – an agency whose racism, classism and contempt for the poor is well documented – consider environmental justice communities across the country being choked out by smoke they had no hand in creating while billions of dollars are doled out to primarily accommodate wealthy people?

It should be noted that many of these wealthy people benefit from and advocate for the capitalist system that fuels and maintains these crises. These are the kinds of questions Black Alliance for Peace (BAP) must perpetually ask as a principled and radical Black formation; and that we must ask as a people, who understand confronting and dismantling the climate crisis requires confronting and dismantling racialised and classist capitalism – hence why we refer to climate change as the racial/class capitalocene*.

Finally, it is not lost upon BAP that, very recently, many of the people enlisted to fight California wildfires were incarcerated people, some of whose prison sentences were extended by soon to be former Vice President, Kamala Harris when she served as Attorney General of California.

This was an effort to generate cheap labour from lives she and far too many others deem expendable and disposable. There is an axiomatic nexus between how these inmates/political prisoners are treated and how Black, Brown, Indigenous and poor communities are treated in the context of the climate crisis.

This nexus extends to the treatment of Palestinian people who continue to be dehumanised and exterminated while also being displaced from their homelands due to an inferno of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and militarism. Such is the pathology of settler colonialism, which too many still refuse to connect with environmental degradation and the climate crisis in the United States.

We must and will continue making these requisite connections and intersections as we develop a multi racial/multi ethnic poor and working class response to this latest episode of the racial/class capitalocene's atlas of destruction.

No Compromise
No Retreat

Black Alliance for Peace

*Capitalocene is a term that locates climate change within the history of capitalism and colonialism.

Find out more about the
Communist Party of Australia
web **www.cpa.org.au**
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Australian flag and national day

The Australian "flag" as such is merely derived from an ensign, having another nation's flag in the top left-hand quadrant, namely the Union Jack, the flag of the United Kingdom. This could indicate Australia's subservience to another government which should be anathema to all patriotic Australians. This is particularly so to the Aboriginal people, the original owners of this continent.

For Aboriginal Australians this whole situation is particularly insulting as British government has brought so much injustice and subjugation along with the loss of country and culture. Devastation has been inflicted on First Nations peoples through disease, loss of identity, deliberate dispersal if not destruction of Aboriginal families and communities.

Currently, the national emblem represents not one nation, but promotes division caused by a mercilessly inhumane colonial conquest. For many colonial Australians, too, the presence of the Union Jack is an ever-present insult, just as the celebration of Invasion Day continues to insult Aboriginal People, who still feel enchained as many of their ancestors were physically chained up in earlier times.

Canada, a comparable nation, no longer embraces the Union Jack in the same way. Rather, Canadians show great pride in their Maple Leaf flag and heartily sing *O, Canada*, their stirring national anthem.

Why should Australians who sing *Advance Australia Fair* so proudly, not be able to salute with equal pride their own "Australian made" national flag?

Dr Kevin O'Loughlin OAM President
Ron Hall Secretary
Aboriginal Advancement League SA Inc

Shame on Labor

Foreign Minister Penny Wong is off to the US as a guest of president-elect Trump to cozy up with some of his government members. This is a president with a government of loyal supporters, and an election funded by Musk who is now at the helm.

This is the multi-billionaire whose X platform (formerly Twitter) deliberately spreads misinformation and attempts to interfere in politics globally. Witness his attack on the British PM Keir Starmer.

Labor Attorney General Mark Dreyfus is off to Israel to cozy up to war criminals and in complete contradiction to Australia's claim to support the rule of law.

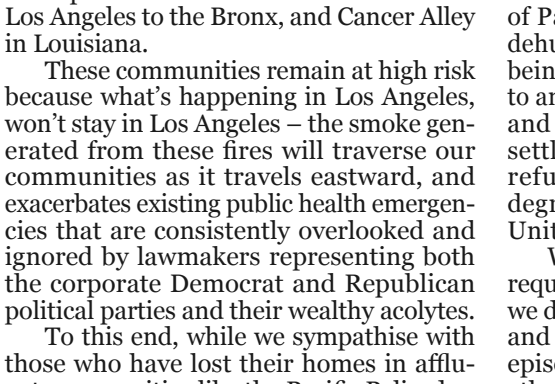
This is the man who holds one of the most responsible legal positions in Australia off to cozy up with war criminals, two of whom are subject to arrest warrants from the International Criminal Court. In other words condoning genocide!

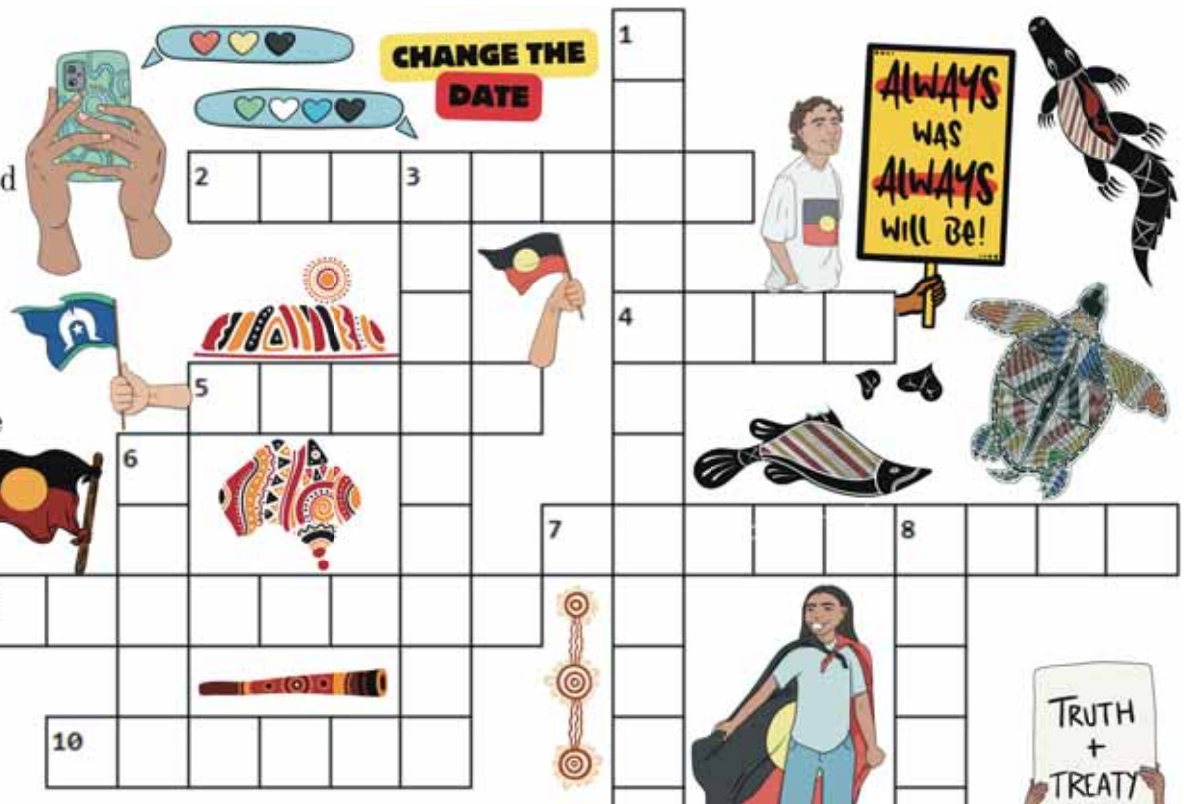
Hang your heads in shame!

M Santos

Down;

1. The series of massacres committed by Europeans against Indigenous Australians (8-4)
3. Early European settlers who illegally occupied land belonging to Indigenous Australians (9)
6. The name of a set of policies that made Australia an apartheid state until 1973 (5)
8. One of the 3 demands from the Uluru Statement highlighting to preserve, understand, & acknowledge the histories & stories of First Nations people (5)





Across;

2. Name of the Captain, who first lit the spark of European involvement in Australia (8)
4. What the Aboriginal Embassy consists of (4)
5. The first Aboriginal flag had this on it instead of a sun (5)
7. The spiritual beliefs & creation stories of Indigenous Australians, suppressed during colonisation (5-4)
9. What indigenous families were robbed of during much of the 20th century (8)
10. What Indigenous people were excluded from until 1971 (6)

Written and designed by: Che Janzow

Book Review

A Long March

by Kim Carr

William Briggs

Kim Carr's *A Long March*, is not simply the autobiography of a life-long stalwart of the ALP. It traces a political path and unwittingly chronicles the disintegration of social democracy in this country. It is a 'long march' – but to where?

Carr has been with the ALP for 49 years and was a Senator for 29 years. His story begins in 1975, when a young university student from a left-wing trade union background joins the ALP. Carr describes how he looked at the Maoist CPA-ML, the then Socialist Party of Australia and briefly flirted with the old CPA, before hitching his wagon to the ALP star. The young man was seeking answers and a political vehicle that would offer answers and that might effect change.

The ALP that he joined, or more accurately, the faction of the ALP that he became engaged with, still claimed to be a Party of social democracy, a reforming party and one that was committed to the interests of the working class. The Socialist Left faction that he became part of still exists within the Victorian branch of the ALP, although it too has engaged on a 'long march' from anything resembling socialist ideals.

Carr recalls how the socialist left swung behind Paul Keating's bid for ALP leadership – a toss-up between Hawke and Keating! Bourgeois politics has often been described as the 'art of the possible' and practising that art in such a party as the ALP leaves no room for principles.

The driving political moments of the day when the young Kim Carr first entered the fray were around the aftermath of Whitlam's dismissal and the attacks on the reforms of the Whitlam period. Carr writes of "answering a call to action: to argue for and, wherever necessary, defend social democracy and the Labor Party." (p. 9)

His defence of social democracy has been the labour of a life-time. He does not go into any detail of what he means by the term. His earliest moments of 'defence' were around attacks on the living standards of the people. It evolved, but he seems unaware of the evolution.

The Hawke government's Accord, for example, is described as reflecting "the best aspects of social democracy, bringing together disparate elements of the union movement – and the society – for the purpose of the redistribution of political and economic power." (p. 53)

This warrior of the left seems to wonder how "a number of Left unionists were not convinced that suppressing unions from pursuing their claims for better wages and conditions for their members would be in the long-term interests of the movement." (p. 53)

The book is a valuable political insight. It follows the disintegration of the ALP and of the continuing disintegration, if that be possible, of social democracy as an ideological thread.

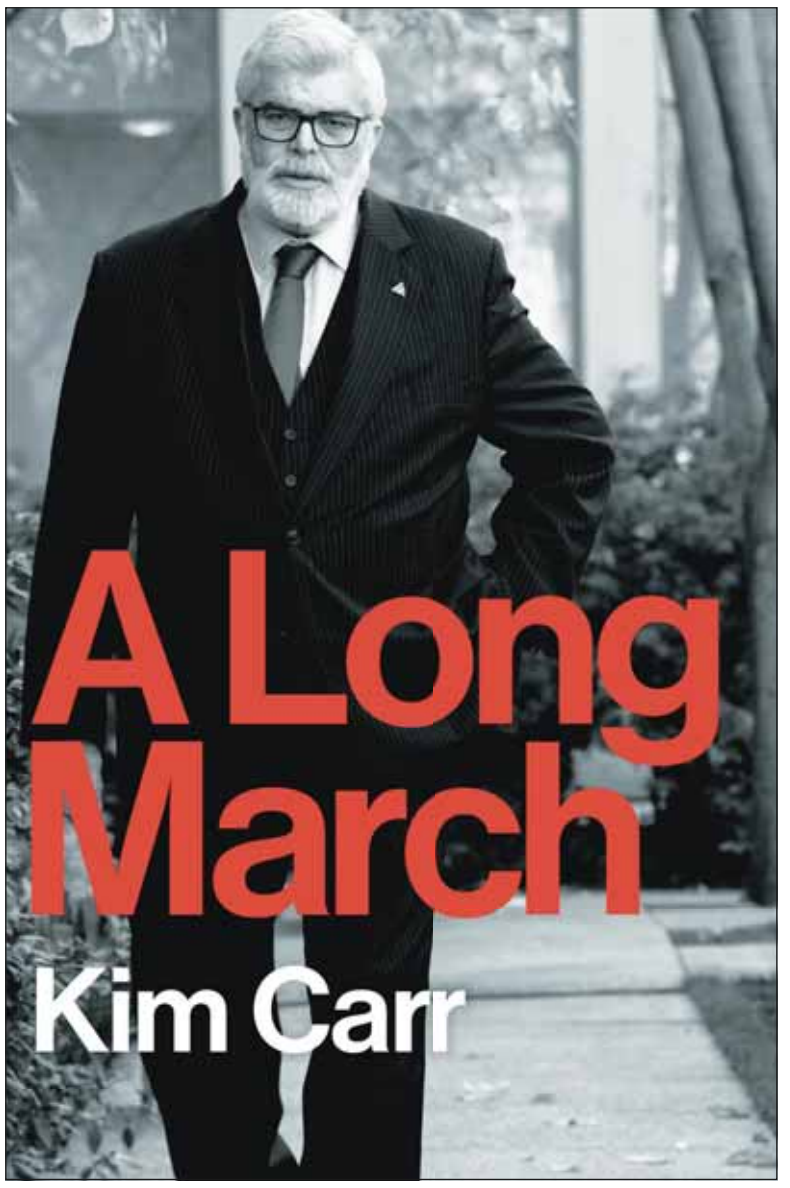
In his early life, Kim Carr had been attracted to the policies of the old CPA and its adaptation to the reformist and deeply opportunist politics of Eurocommunism. In a rather telling moment, he comments that the Accord was "as close as Australia has ever got to emulating a Western Eurocommunist social democracy model of government." (p 212)

The fact that left-social democracy and Eurocommunism's ideological fusion is so happily acknowledged is unwittingly the greatest service that Carr's autobiography offers. The political opportunism of social democracy that forced a split in Marxism more than a century ago is alive and well.

Kim Carr remains a 'true-believer.' After a half century of commitment to his cause, he still maintains that "the Labor Party exists – and has always existed – to overcome entrenched privilege ... We always have to make a case for change ... We have to be animated by a bigger set of ideas. We are measured by different standards ... the Labor Party has always been regarded by those with money, power and influence as different, as lacking legitimacy. That is why leadership is important." (pp 232-233) The 'leadership' of the ALP, over decades, has well-proven its legitimate credentials to those with power and influence; the ruling class – and are trusted by that class.

The Long March is one man's tribute to an ideal. It is more dream than reality, more shadow than substance. While his commitment to that dream cannot be doubted, there is a sadness about it all. It has been a long march, but to where?

Monash University Publishing, 2024



Book Review

Robodebt and government extortion: *Mean Streak*

by Rick Morton

C Bartholomew

The British drama series *Mr Bates vs The Post Office* is a brilliant and thrilling account of the 20-year fight of the titular Mr Bates and other UK postmasters against widespread false accusations (and even convictions) of theft and fraud arising from defective IT systems.

One of the most gripping, anger-inspiring parts of the series, and of the real events, is the extent to which the Post Office and Fujitsu knowingly and intentionally sacrificed the lives and livelihoods of thousands of ordinary people to protect their own profits and reputations.

For Australian viewers, this story ought to be ringing some bells. While the almost 5-year nightmare of the Robodebt scheme may not have its own ITV drama series, Rick Morton's *Mean Streak* rises to the occasion. Tragic, funny, and infuriating all at once, Morton's account of the Robodebt plot also contains important lessons for all Australians about the integrity of Australia's civic systems.

The core of the Robodebt scheme is maths. Intentionally bad maths. The trick emerges from a simple distinction. Tax office data is collected annually, while Centrelink operates on a fortnightly basis.

Robodebt worked off of a simple algorithm which took yearly income data from the tax office and averaged it across a fortnightly schedule. Wherever the income declared to Centrelink for a particular fortnight did not match the average, Robodebt claimed fraud.

For instance, someone who only worked for the last 4 months of the year and collected a Centrelink payment for the preceding 8 months would suddenly be declared by Robodebt to have actually been earning income for those 8 months, thanks to the averages, and thereby accused of fraud.

Through dodgy allegations such as these the government intimidated thousands of Australians into handing over money they never owed.

Morton's account of Robodebt – from its operations to the behind-the-scenes machinations of figures including Scott Morrison and Kathryn Campbell (then Secretary of the Department of Human Services) and to the scheme's devastating impact on thousands of the most vulnerable Australians – speaks with outrage, empathy, and extensive research.

He calls the scheme what it was: "extortion." Widespread "administrative contempt" for poor and working-class Australians was weaponised as the entire might of government bureaucracy was brought down upon the innocent to loot them for all they're worth.

Morton calls attention to internal documents and communications proving that officials knew the mathematical basis for Robodebt was wrong, knew the scheme would never hold up under court scrutiny, and knew what harms it would inflict, yet unleashed it anyway.

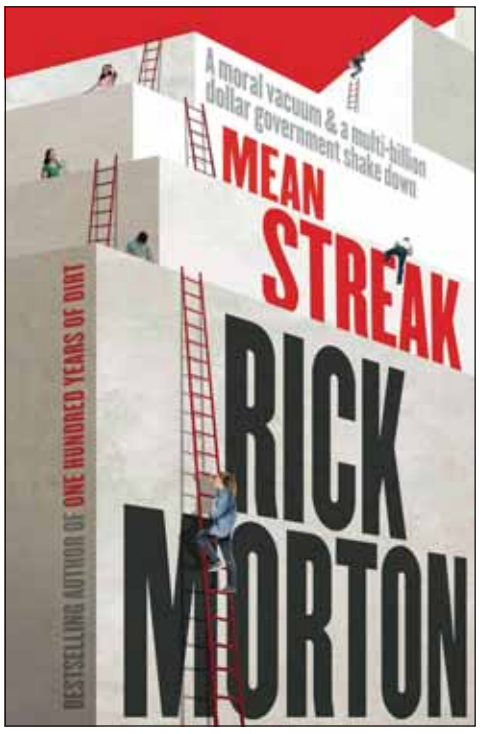
Credit needs to be given to Morton's excellent writing style. There's a natural charisma to his account which provides some much-needed humour and compassion to a story that is both heartbreaking and enraging.

Rick Morton also brings some refreshing honesty, both in regard to the evil of the Robodebt scheme and its architects, as well as his own feelings of guilt over not realising the true horror of the Robodebt weapon from the beginning. Overall, the writing style makes for a story that is as endearing as it is gripping.

Morton accurately describes Robodebt as a system of weaponised bureaucracy meant to harvest money from the vulnerable through intimidation tactics built upon intentionally faulty mathematics, all hiding behind belief in government integrity and conservative hatred for the poor.

A Marxist might extend the critique to consider the broader role of capitalism, ideas such as the reserve army of labour, and an understanding that such greed and brutality demonstrates the true purposes of the capitalist state.

Regardless, Morton's *Mean Streak* is as compelling a story as it is an important one. It has truly earned its praise and ought to be read by anyone wanting a glimpse behind the curtain of Australian government.



10th anniversary of China-Australia Comprehensive Partnership

CG Long*

The year 2024 marks the 10th anniversary of Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to Australia and the establishment of comprehensive strategic relationship between China and Australia.

Eleven years ago, President Xi Jinping paid a historic state visit to Australia, which led to the elevation of China-Australia relations to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

"Comprehensive" signifies that the China-Australia relations are not limited to economic and trade cooperation but extends to collaboration in any potential field and at all levels.

"Strategic" underscores that the significance of the bilateral relation transcends its bilateral nature, bearing regional and even global importance.

"Partnership" indicates that China and Australia are friends, not adversaries; partners, not rivals.

Over the past decade, China-Australia relations have maintained vitality and resilience on the whole, but also experienced ups and downs, causing losses to the interests of the two peoples.

Since 2022, President Xi has met thrice with Prime Minister Albanese, providing important strategic guidance for the continuous improvement and development of bilateral relations.

Prime Minister Albanese paid a successful visit to China last November and Chinese Premier Li Qiang visited Australia in June, and they held another constructive meeting on the sidelines of this year's East Asia Summit.

Bilateral dialogue in various fields has resumed and trade concerns gradually resolved, with deepening mutual trust and improving cooperation dominating our bilateral relations.

Over the past decade, our economic and trade cooperation has reached a new level, bringing tangible benefits to the two peoples. Bilateral trade in goods has grown by 67.4 percent. China has been Australia's largest trading partner for 15 consecutive years since 2009.

Australia's goods trade surplus with China has increased from US $8.58 billion (AU$13.9b) in 2015 to US $62.7 billion (AU$102b) in 2023, which is close to 75 percent of Australia's goods trade surplus with the world, and the average annual growth rate has reached 70 percent.

In the 2022-2023 fiscal year, trade with China enabled Australian households to save 4.2 percent of the cost of living and create nearly 600,000 jobs for Australia.

In the first 9 months of 2024, China imported bottled wine worth US$335.5 million (AU$545.8m) from Australia, representing a 613-fold increase compared to the same period last year.

A record high of more than 250 Australian companies participated in 2024 China International Import Expo, which is a vote of confidence by Australian companies in China's economy and cooperation between the two countries.

A recent poll shows that 61% of Australian citizens believe closer ties should be established with China, and 62% see the benefits of the Australia-China relationship. These figures are encouraging and indicate significant potential for further improvement in cultural and people-to-people exchanges between the two countries.

China-WA relations are an important part of China-Australia relations, and the sound and stable China-Australia relations serve as the solid foundation for China-WA exchanges and cooperation.

In June 2024, Chinese Premier Li Qiang successfully visited Western Australia, marking the first visit by a Chinese Premier to the state in 18 years, further highlighting Western Australia's important position.

For many years, China has been WA's largest trading partner, largest export destination and largest source of imports, with exports to China accounting for more than half of Western Australia's total exports of goods. Trade with China in 2023 increased WA's average household disposable income by 14.2% and created more than 220,000 jobs in WA. Lobsters from WA will soon return to the tables of Chinese consumers.

Exchanges and cooperation between China and WA are close across various fields. WA has established two investment and trade offices in Shanghai and Hangzhou. It has a sister-state relationship with Zhejiang Province, while Perth is a sister city to Nanjing and Chengdu. Additionally, there are over 20 other sister-city relationships.

Universities in WA work closely with Chinese universities. Science and technology cooperation between China and WA has made steady progress. Professor Barry Marshall won China International Science and Technology Cooperation Award 2023. Professor Kadambot Siddique and 2 other Western Australians have won Chinese government Friendship Awards.

On 28 November 2024, direct flights between Perth and Guangzhou resumed, and seasonal flights between Perth and Shanghai will also be relaunched. Starting from 30 November 2024, China's visa-free stay for Australians increases from 15 days to 30 days, further facilitating exchanges and cooperation between China and Western Australia.

Chinese Consul General Long Dingbin and Vinnie Molina.

The productive exchanges and cooperation between China and WA have injected momentum into the stable development of China-Australia relations. As Premier Cook pointed out, WA has got a very close relationship with China, mutual prosperity is based upon this great trade and economic relationship.

Currently, China's economy remains stable and is progressing steadily. Incremental economic policies are injecting new momentum into China's development, new quality productive forces are steadily emerging, and high-quality development is advancing robustly. In the first three quarters of 2024, China's GDP grew by 4.8% year-on-year, ranking among the top of major economies.

Despite facing certain challenges, China's economy continues to maintain healthy and sustainable growth. History has proven – and will continue to prove – that China is a stable driving force for global economic growth. China's high-quality development presents a significant strategic opportunity for the world, including Australia.

As Chinese President Xi Jinping pointed out, there is no fundamental conflict of interests between China and Australia. As long as the two sides adhere to mutual respect, treat each other as equals and seek common ground while shelving differences, China-Australia relations will surely develop well.

Prime Minister Albanese told US president-elect Donald Trump in a latest phone call that "it's in Australia's interest to engage with China as our major source of trade."

China and Australia are both Asia-Pacific countries and important members of the G20, with no historical grievances or fundamental conflicts of interest, but every reason to be partners of mutual trust and mutual achievement. The two sides need to keep to the right direction of bilateral relations amid the profound changes in the world, injecting more stability and certainty into the region and the world.

As the Chinese Consul General in Perth, it is my sincere hope that WA friends from all walks of life could seize the historic opportunity of the development of our bilateral relations, send out more favourable and positive voices on our bilateral relations, and inject more energy to the solid and sustained progress of our bilateral relations to build a more mature, stable and fruitful China-Australia comprehensive strategic partnership.

*Chinese Consul General WA

The Ukrainian connection with Islamist HTS militants in Syria

Graham Holton

The military sophistication and speed with which the coalition of Jihadist Hayat Tahrir al Sham (HTS), a designated terrorist group, and other militants overran the Syrian army led to the ousting of Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad.

Their success surprised military analysts. It soon became clear that Turkey, the US, and Israel played a major role in toppling of Assad. To a lesser extent Ukraine also played a role. The *New York Times* writes that Ukrainian specialists had coordinated with HTS to counter "Russian misinformation and providing medical assistance." Ukraine's connection in Syria goes back years.

A vicious civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, which pushed the Ba'ath Party politically closer to the Russian Federation. Russia's military involvement in Syria dates from 2015. On 24 February 2022 Russian forces attacked Ukraine, and on 29 June the Syrian government recognised the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, Ukraine severed relations with Syria on 20 July.

In May 2023, the head of Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate (HUR), Kyrylo Budanov, said Ukraine was targeting Russian war criminals internationally. Ukrainian special forces were actively pursuing pro-Kremlin Wagner PMC mercenaries in Sudan.

An article in the *Kyiv Post* on 3 June 2024 sites the Defense Intelligence Directorate (GUR) of Ukraine's Ministry of Defense, that Syrian rebels: "supported by Ukrainian operatives, have inflicted numerous strikes on Russian military facilities represented in the region." This operation was conducted by a special unit known as "Khimik" within GUR, "in collaboration with the Syrian opposition."

The *Kyiv Post* released videos that showed Ukrainian special forces fighting alongside Syrian rebels against Russian mercenaries and Assad's forces. The Syrian newspaper *Al-Watan* reported in September 2024 that Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, said Ukrainian intelligence emissaries in Idlib, were conducting "new dirty operations" and recruiting rebel fighters there.

In November Russia's Syrian special representative, Alexander Lavrentyev, told the *TASS* news agency: "Ukrainian specialists from the Main Intelligence Directorate of Ukraine are on the territory of Idlib" arming "terrorists." According to the *Washington Post* Ukraine had supplied 150 drones and 20 drone operators to HTS.

The *Kyiv Post* revealed that since the beginning of the year, HUR's allied forces had launched numerous attacks on Russian military installations. These targeted checkpoints, strongholds, foot patrols, and military convoys, employing rocket-propelled grenades, improvised mortars, and IEDs.

The collapse of the Assad regime jeopardised Russia's important Hmeimim air base and the Tartus naval base and ship repair facility. From there it conducted operations in the Mediterranean, Africa, and acted as a counter to NATO's southern flank.

The Khmeimim Air Base was a recruitment centre for Syrian mercenaries, operating under the "Center for the Reconciliation of Opposing Sides and Refugee Movement Control." The redeployment of Russian troops and equipment from Syria to Ukraine left its positions vulnerable to Israeli assaults.

On 15-16 December Israeli airstrikes destroyed the Russian Tartus naval base. Israeli troops moved into the buffer zone on the Syrian side of the dividing line with the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. Israel then conducted hundreds of air strikes destroying caches of weapons and military equipment in Syria.

On 19 December Russian president, Vladimir Putin, said: "Russia condemns the seizure of any Syrian territories," and that Israeli troops will not end their occupation of the Golan Heights, "but they are going to reinforce there."

While US intelligence says that Ukrainian military aid played only a modest role in overthrowing Assad, Turkish observers see Ukraine as having a significant role. It is still too early to determine how major a role Ukrainian forces, military equipment and intelligence actually played in supporting HTS.

One thing that is clear is that Ukraine's aim was to defeat Russian forces in Syria, placing political pressure on Russia before President Donald Trump begins peace negotiations in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

China: World's first carbon fibre metro train

Photo: China Xinhua News.

The world's first carbon fibre metro train has begun passenger service on the Metro Line 1 in Qingdao, East China's Shandong Province, according to a report by China Central Television (CCTV). Named "CETROVO 1.0 Carbon Star Express," the train was independently developed in China.

It marks groundbreaking progress in China's metro train lightweight technology and greener transformation, observers said. It's a significant upgrade for the load-bearing structure, as carbon fibre is *much* lighter than traditional metals like steel and aluminium, according to a statement on the website of CRRC Qingdao Sifang Co, the train's developer.

The company noted that it will play a vital role in driving the green and low-carbon transformation of China's urban rail transit and will help the urban rail industry in achieving its "dual carbon" goals.

Compared with traditional metal metro vehicles, the carbon fibre train is approximately 11 per cent lighter, with operational energy consumption reduced by 7 per cent, the CCTV report noted. Each train can reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 130 tons annually, which is equivalent to afforestation of 101 of 6.7 hectares, according to a report by *Xinhua News Agency*.

As well as being lighter and more energy-efficient, carbon fibre also offers higher strength, better environmental adaptability, and lower operation and maintenance costs throughout its life cycle. It is also corrosion-resistant.

The strength of carbon fibre is more than five times that of steel, while its weight is less than a quarter of steel, making it an excellent material for lightweight rail vehicles, according to the statement from CRRC Qingdao Sifang Co.

The material not only enhances the strength of the car body, providing greater impact resistance and extending the structural lifespan, but also improves vibration reduction and isolation, resulting in smoother operation, reduced noise, and a more comfortable ride, the CCTV report noted.

The Qingdao Metro Line 1 spans approximately 60 kilometres and has 41 stations. It serves as a major north-south backbone line in Qingdao, according to the report.

The development of the carbon fibre metro train began in 2021, according to local media reports. From July to December 2024, it underwent a 6-month on-site line test on Qingdao Metro Line 1, during which 20 routine vehicle tests and 36 type tests were conducted, along with comprehensive system-to-vehicle testing to fully validate the train's performance.

In December 2024, it passed the expert review for passenger trial operation on the line, and on 5 January it received third-party independent safety assessment approval, the report noted.

Global Times

Pfizergate: What is EC Chief Von Der Leyen accused of?

Oleg Burunov

The *New York Times* described the European Commission President's COVID vaccine deal with the Pfizer CEO as "a striking alignment of political survival and corporate hustle."

A court in Liege, Belgium, is due to consider whether European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has legal immunity against corruption charges related to her murky involvement in the purchase of coronavirus vaccines.

What is the scandal all about? *Sputnik* explores.

In 2022, US media reported that von der Leyen had communicated with Albert Bourla, chief executive of the US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, about clinching a long-term contract to purchase 1.8 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines worth €35 billion (AU$58.6 billion), even before they passed clinical trials.

Negotiations on the deal were conducted informally in late 2020 via SMS messages and without prior consent of EU member states.

The European Commission President also texted her husband, Heiko von der Leyen, who serves as the medical director at Orgenesis, a company that collaborates with Pfizer. All the messages were then accidentally deleted, Ursula von der Leyen claimed.

As a result, she has been accused of "usurpation of functions and title," destruction of public documents, and high-level corruption charges that were initiated by Belgian lobbyist Frederic Baldan.

The first hearing on his complaint was held on 17 May 2024, when the Liege court confirmed that the so-called Pfizegate case is in line with its jurisdiction and should not be handed to the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), created on the initiative of von der Leyen herself, due to an obvious conflict of interests.

The second hearing slated for 5 December was actually disrupted due to a demarche by the EPPO, which sent a counter-request to the court for von der Leyen's immunity. The EPPO argues that von der Leyen has immunity from prosecution for corruption.

European Commission spokesperson Stefan de Keersmaecker said on 5 January that von der Leyen had canceled all "external engagements" in the coming days after contracting "severe pneumonia."

Telesur

Global Briefs

VENEZUELA: The International Anti-fascist World Festival took place in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela. The 2,000 delegates from 125 countries called for consolidation of international anti-fascist action. The festival agreed to a resolution that included creating branches of the International in other countries, the launch of a popular, anti-fascist feminist international, launching a think-tank to support the work of the organisation, to convene a world anti-fascist congress of the Indigenous peoples from all the continents. Joao Pedro Stedile of the Landless Workers' Movement of Brazil said that "at this crucial moment of the world class struggle it is vital to establish trenches in each of the countries. ... It is not enough to be in solidarity with Venezuela, Cuba, and Palestine. It is necessary to fight in our lands." He concluded with the slogan from the historic fight against fascism in Spain: "They shall not pass!"

BRITAIN: A London hospital has advertised for "corridor care" nurses because so many patients are being cared for while waiting for beds or treatment. The 12-hour shifts were advertised by Whittington hospital in north London. The Royal College of Emergency Medicine said the advertisement indicated the "normalising" of patients being treated in the corridors of hospital A&E departments. Retired paediatrician Dr John Puntis, co-chair of campaign group Keep Our NHS [National Health Service] Public, said: "There can be no bleaker illustration of the current state of the NHS than 'care' provided in corridors". Dr Adrian Boyle, president of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, said corridor care is "degrading, dehumanising and dangerous." "Let me be clear, it is not possible to provide truly safe patient care in environments such as corridors and cupboards," he said.

INDONESIA: Indonesia officially became a full member of BRICS bloc of developing countries, its first Southeast Asian member. Indonesia's membership reflects a growing Southeast Asian interest in BRICS which is seen as an alternative to global institutions dominated by the US and other Western nations. Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam were among the nations that became partner countries of BRICS, which also included Algeria, Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Uganda.

SUDAN: Sudan's military has recaptured a strategic city of Wad Medani from the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The bloody conflict in Sudan started in April 2023 when tensions between the leaders of the military and the RSF escalated and turned into open savage hostilities. The conflict has killed more than 28,000 people and forced the world's largest displacement crisis. About 30 per cent of the population was driven from their homes – either to different parts of Sudan or to neighbouring countries. "A humanitarian crisis of astonishing proportions," according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid.

GHANA: John Mahama was sworn as president for the third time. Mahama won a presidential election late last year after pledging to tackle Ghana's economic crisis, corruption, and unemployment.

A tale of two disasters

A Carruthers

1: China, the Xizang earthquake

A catastrophic earthquake Magnitude 7.1 has hit Xizang. The scenes that have emerged from the earthquake are nothing short of extraordinary. The entire Party, army, people and state have been mobilised. Prefabricated homes have been flown in to 224 relocation sites to house 47,500 people, food is being cooked *en masse*, and even kids' education continues in tents.

Staggering numbers are emerging – hundreds of thousands are receiving basic needs immediately, with resources flown in from other provinces, from bedding to heating, milk powder, diapers, medicine, and even psychological counselling.

The reason the response has been so swift is the CPC's concern for the wellbeing of the people. It also knows that moments like these are make-or-break for the socialist system. Moments like these can break peoples' faith in communism. If the Party doesn't step up when the people most need it, this can be fatal for their system of democracy and government responsibility to help and provide in moments of crisis. It is a matter of pride and belief in the socialist system.

It is also a demonstration of the new and emerging social relations of socialist society. The way children are helping their disabled classmates, and the unity between ethnic groups, is astonishing. As one local resident noted, the 56 ethnic groups of China are now united as seeds of a pomegranate.

Scenes like these cannot be made up. The disaster is showing the birthmarks of the socialist society, the unbreakable unity of Party and people, the people and the workers' state.

2: USA, the LA wildfires

Tragedy is unfolding in the United States. Wildfires is tearing through Southern California. Thousands of homes are destroyed and the death toll is mounting.

Fire services are fighting valiantly to do what they can with available resources, since water tanks have run out due to slow repair operations on the Santa Ynez Reservoir. This means many residents throughout the area are without access to clean water, while state and local officials are denying it is their fault, and saying there's nothing they can do about it.

Celebrities' homes have been destroyed, so celebrities have turned on the government. But the saddest story to emerge is widespread looting. Dozens of arrests have been made due to looting, and curfews put in place between 6am and 6pm. But reports are emerging that the National Guard has even been deployed to deliberately burn some areas to provide protection against looting.

This is a sad situation. The very notion of deliberate burning to avoid looting is beyond belief. This is the horror of putting private property before humanity and human life and safety.

The social relations of capitalism are showing forth in the darkest and ugliest ways. Private drones to capture footage of the fires are getting in the way of the operation – there are reports of drones colliding with firefighting aircraft.

The response is disunited because people know the resources are scarce. Without a people-centred government that relies on the people and serves the people, people start to blame each other, turn on each other, prey on each other, and politicise the response.

Rescuers work in Xizang. Photo: Tentsen Shinden/for chinadaily.com.cn

Mayor Karen Bass is also coming under fire for cutting US$17.6 million (AU$28.6m) from the annual fire department budget. Governor Gavin Newsom cited "hurricane-force winds of mis- and disinformation" about the fires.

Capitalism is catastrophe. US capitalism is the very opposite of what we have come to know as socialism with Chinese characteristics, China's people-first system.

Capitalism cannot provide because it is not democratic. It is not based on democratic accountability, service, community, love for the people. It is based on private interest, austerity, small government, corporate takeover.

In times of escalating climate crisis, socialism, communism and Marxism are emerging as a necessity – no longer can socialism be laughed off or dismissed as a probable alternative – it is the *only* system that can provide an answer to human need in times of crisis.

This is a tale of two disasters, but also a tale of two systems, one which is close to the people, which loves the people, and prides itself on being the peoples' steward, the other which has lost its way, embraced chaos, and puts private interest and greed above humanity and civility.

India

Statement from the CITU on the corporate push for a 90-hour working week

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) vehemently condemns the statement of the Chairman of Larsen & Toubro (L&T) urging for the extension of the working week to 90 hours. A similar statement was made earlier by the Infosys Head NR Narayan Murthy, calling for the working week to be increased to 70 hours through statutory measures.

It seems that there is a rampant competition among corporate champions to demand the blood and sweat of Indian workers, in active connivance and collaboration with the government's corporate-communal regime headed by the Modi-led NDA (National Democratic Alliance).

Indian workers, even the permanent ones in the formal sector, are deployed in far more hours of work compared to more productive countries like China, Europe, and even the US.

The stretching of working hours has a disastrous impact upon the health and social wellbeing of Indian workers. Despite that, these sorts of evil practices are being done by the corporate class, who aim to further minimise employment as well as labour costs with brutal working conditions, all to facilitate more intense exploitation of the workers for profit in the guise of efficiency and productivity.

These conditions have led to 11,486 suicides in 2022 as per records of the Crime Bureau. The extent of the severity of inhuman extraction from labour can be seen from the share of wages in net value going down sharply to 15.94 per cent in 2022-23 from 27.64 per cent in 1990-9, while net profits have jumped from 19.06 per cent to 51.92 per cent during the same period, as per Annual Survey of Industries report. Aggravating joblessness has been another key consequence.

Such desperate and filthy competitive bids to increase working hours made by leading corporations, one after another, are being done in conspiratorial connivance with their obedient government at the centre; the Labour Codes already contain provisions for the extension of working hours through executive decisions thanks to relevant governments.

Although the Labour Codes could not yet be implemented owing to resistance by the trade union movement, we have seen numerous attempts/moves by the BJP-ruled state governments and some non-BJP state governments to increase working hours to 12 hours a day. These moves are also being resisted by the united trade union movement in many states.

CITU calls upon all sections of the working class to rise in rage and united condemnation against such ugly competitive arrogations by the capitalist class. CITU calls workers to prepare for united countrywide resistance and combative actions both at the workplace and on the national level in the days to come against conspiratorial onslaughts on their basic labour rights and social lives.

These filthy offensives by the employer class have to be met with a counter-offensive demanding and fighting for less working hours a day and fewer working days a week, as per the World Federation of Trade Unions' (WFTU) demand of 7 hours work a day and 35 hours work a week.

Tapan Sen
General Secretary

Trump's 51st

US president-elect Donald Trump has gone to his social media platform Truth Social to share two maps showing Canada as part of America.

Outgoing Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party swiftly responded by posting on X an image of the map of Canada (in red) and America (in grey), with the inscriptions "Not the United States" and "the United States," respectively. "For anyone who may be confused," the post read.

This came after Trump renewed his proposal to make Canada the 51st state of America and promised to use "economic force" to absorb Canada into the US.

The US president-elect earlier used Trudeau's announcement of his plan to step down as PM and Liberal Party leader to reiterate his stance that Canada should become the 51st state of America.

"[...] The United States can no longer suffer the massive trade deficits and subsidies that Canada needs to stay afloat. Justin Trudeau knew this, and resigned," Trump wrote on Truth Social.

Sputnik

The on-going pain of Syria

William Briggs

The tragedy that is Syria has been before our eyes for too long. It is unlikely to go away any time soon. The cheers and the obvious jubilation of the people on the streets of Damascus when Assad fled was real but the euphoria is proving to be short-lived. The people were cheering because they believed that a regime that had little legitimacy had come to an end. They believed that a better day was dawning. Refugees were shown to be returning from exile. Some may already be regretting such a swift decision.

The speed with which the Assad regime collapsed is telling. The government had survived, for good or ill over the past decade, because of the military support afforded it by Russia. That support was, by the end of 2024, limited. The war in Ukraine has clearly weakened the capacity of Putin to maintain the Assad regime in power.

The Assad family had ruled Syria since 1971. While the Ba'ath Party, which had been in power since 1961 remained the ruling party, its earlier socialist orientation dissipated after Hafez al-Assad's coup brought him to power. Power became a more arbitrary thing and less an expression of the will of the working people. When Bashar al-Assad assumed power, Syria was considered a stable regime and crucial to the fortunes of many states in the Middle East and beyond.

That critical geopolitical positioning meant that imperialism was always closely monitoring things with an eye to maintaining domination of the region. The Arab Spring movement of 2011 offered a chance for regime change and an even more compliant region. There was a rising in Syria which was abruptly and forcefully put down. A deteriorating and critical situation was manipulated by all outside players and the protracted and bloody civil war ensued.

Assad survived, largely due to support from Russia. That support was hardly altruistic. The port of Latakia and its naval base at Tarus were central to Russian interests.

The war in Ukraine undoubtedly placed limitations on Russia's capacity to engage in any serious new military campaign. This became evident when the December rising in Syria saw the Assad forces capitulate and Russia withdraw much of its materiel.

The rapid coming to power of the jihadist, now proclaimed enemy of ISIS, Ahmed al-Sharaa surprised many. The West rapidly began jostling with each other to sort out a range of 'deals' with the new regime. Whether peace and stability are achieved in any lasting form is far from certain. What has become evident is that imperialism is busy.

Both the French and German foreign ministers were quick to visit and meet with the new leader. They immediately called for sanctions to be withdrawn. Business opportunities are on the horizon. Ahmed al-Sharaa had been regarded as a dangerous terrorist with a US$10 million bounty on his head. That has been removed. German foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, cynically declared that "despite all our scepticism, we must not let the opportunity to support the people of Syria at this important crossroads slip away." Support for the people, or support for business?

While governments jostle with one another for valuable reconstruction contracts, more traditional carve-up tactics are very much in evidence.

Russia has already succeeded in keeping its naval base and ongoing access to the Mediterranean port. Türkiye and Israel have staked their claims. The USA has become interested and engaged. The future looks bleak.

Türkiye's deep hostility to Kurdish aspirations for an independent state come into immediate play. The Erdogan regime is adamant that they shall control the region of Syria that is a stronghold of the Kurds. This becomes a potential conflict zone with 100,000 Kurdish fighters struggling for a homeland in North-Eastern Syria.

The Kurdish cause is being cynically promoted by Israel as a means of maintaining its existing control of the Golan and to ensure that Türkiye is not about to strengthen its hand in the region. The Kurds are also and even more cynically being supported by the USA but for even more venal reasons. This region has significant oil reserves. The US has made no bones about its desire to control these oil-fields.

There has been speculation that an armed conflict between Israel and Türkiye is possible. Israeli sources have said that 'tensions' could escalate. This is in reference to what they describe as 'Syrian factions' aligning more closely with Türkiye.

The Israeli I24 news channel has reported that Israel is considering an 'international conference' to divide Syria into cantons. The proposal was discussed by the Israeli cabinet. While it may sound an extraordinary and ridiculous idea, imperialism has a history of 'redrawing borders' to suit its needs. There is already an almost *de facto* carve up underway.

What confronts the working people of Syria in the immediate and long-term future is insecurity and a loss of sovereignty. The new leadership in Damascus may have the very best of intentions for the future of the country and the people. They speak of unifying an intensely divided people and ensuring rights and freedoms to all.

Whether that is truly meant or not is secondary to what is unfolding at the hands of foreign powers. International frictions are being waged. Oil resources are being prepared for exploitation by the US. The governments of the EU are sniffing the wind.

None of this bodes well for the working people who need and deserve so much more. A future of sectarian violence might be able to be avoided. It is hoped that this can be so. The interventions from outside the country can only lead to more inequality and poverty, as capitalist exploitation tears the country further apart.

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Celebrate

After calling for a boycott of Woolworths last year over their lack of Australia Day stocks, Peter Dutton has now promised to force local councils to hold Australia Day events and citizenship ceremonies on 26 January. In his words, Australians ought to "celebrate" both our "incredible Indigenous history" and our "incredible migrant story," something which can apparently only be done on Invasion Day. Of course Dutton, with his long and shady war on migrants and his recent tantrum over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags, seems to have a very strange definition of "celebrating" these same communities.

Elites

Murdoch's *Sky News*, Deputy Executive Director of the Institute of Public Affairs Daniel Wild, and other right-wing figureheads have labelled opposition to Australia Day as part of a scheme by woke "elites" to "divide" the country. These "elites," who apparently run "relentless indoctrination" campaigns in schools and universities to destroy "civic pride," allegedly seek to bring "religious and ethnic division" to Australian communities. The hypocrisy of Murdoch and his bought-and-paid-for cronies, the true elites, call Indigenous Rights movements "elite" is beyond amusing.

Less well off

This one is from the liberal side of politics. The Liberal *Guardian* seems to be unable to use the phrase "working class," so they instead use the condescending phrase "less well off." Less well off as a definition for us, the working class, is very poor, because it assumes what so much of liberal media assumes; that the working class is a small minority at the bottom of society. No, the truth of the matter is the working class is the majority. We are most of society. We keep everything running. "Working class" is a phrase we're proud of, and, dear liberals, you're free to use it.

Housing downturn

This means a market downturn, a fall in housing prices. Downturn for who? Not for people. For people lower house prices is always good thing. Affordability is always good for people, yet Western media constantly presents a "weak market" as if it's bad for people. Chinese President Xi Jinping is rumoured to have said "What's so bad about deflation? Don't people like it when things are cheaper?" The answer to that question is yes. The only people who don't like it are the small minority who profit from the misery of the majority; i.e., the big capitalists.

The economy

The economy means an abstract bogeyman that is invisible, that we are all somehow related to, but also oddly has nothing to do with people. "The economy" goes up, and then it goes down. What about us? Never mind we don't matter. Up it goes ... down it goes ... there goes "the economy." This is the way mainstream and university economists speak, as if the economy is a thing without people, that doesn't involve people, that exists apart from people. It's high time we brought in the phrase "peoples' economy" to provide a corrective to this strange idea of an economy without people. But then that's the way capitalism likes to view things: a world without people.

Substantial progress

Whether it's Albanese or Jim Chalmers or some other Labor stalwart, "substantial progress" means going vaguely in a forward motion at about 0.000000000001 kph, and lagging a little behind the snail, that's thinking about getting started, but probably going in the wrong direction. The pace of Labor's "reforms," if they can be called that, is so slow it could be measured by how long it takes to squeeze three decades into half an election cycle. The only problem is, and everybody knows it, unless Labor brings concrete results soon, in sectors many of us work in, it looks like they may lose the election.

A map of suffering

Vijay Prashad

From early December 2024 to early January 2025, the body temperature of 8 babies fell below any acceptable amount and they froze to death. This condition is known as hypothermia. The most recent of these children to die, Yousef, was sleeping beside his mother because, as she told *Al Jazeera*, of the very cold weather.

Temperatures in Gaza have fallen to just above freezing, which in the context of a lack of housing, blankets, and warm bedclothes is deadly. Body heat is the only protection, which is minimal for an infant. Yousef's mother said, "He slept next to me and in the morning, I found him frozen and dead. I don't know what to say. No one can feel my misery. No one in the world can understand our catastrophic situation."

Each of these stories is incomprehensible. The al-Batran family in Deir al-Balah are living in a tent made of blue plastic. Their bedding is only acceptable to them because their entire household has been destroyed, and they have not received any relief. Twin brothers Ali and Jumaa were born during Israel's ugly genocidal bombardment in November 2024, but then one after the other succumbed to hypothermia. When the father felt Jumma's head, it was as "cold as ice."

By early January 2025, studies by the United Nations and the Palestinian governments showed that at least 92 per cent of housing units in Gaza had been destroyed. Most Palestinians who remain in northern Gaza have no homes in which to shelter. They are living in makeshift tents, not even having access to the United Nations tents that are sparsely available.

Because there are now no hospitals open in northern Gaza, children are being born in these tents, and they are not receiving any medical care. "The health sector is being systematically dismantled," Dr Rik Peeperkorn of the World Health Organisation told the UN Security Council on 3 January.

The story is the same up and down Gaza's length: the cold has come at night, ceaseless rain has made everything damp, the tents are inadequate, the blankets are thread worn, and the infants – the most vulnerable – have begun to die.

The map of such suffering is not restricted to Gaza or to the Palestinians. Such stories of a parent waking to find their child beside them in an inadequate tent, with no blankets because of the lack of relief in a war zone, are sadly not unique.

The children frozen in the Kabul slum of Chaman-e-Babrak in 2012 had names that are utterly forgotten outside their families. These were victims of a war that trudged on and threw these rural Afghans into cities where they lived in glorified plastic bags.

Similarly, there is little memory of the precious infants who froze to death in the unnamed camps north of Idlib, Syria, along the Turkish border. The parents of these children went from tent to tent over a decade, trying desperately to find a stable life. Some of their children froze to death; other families perished as their dangerous heaters in these plastic tents set their entire families on fire.

WARS ON CIVILIANS

War zones are no longer places where combatants fight each other. They have become charnel houses for civilians, and entire populations taken hostage and brutalised. In May 2024, before the full toll of the Israeli genocide had been measured, the UN Secretary-General provided a report to the Security Council on civilian deaths.

The data is stunning:

The United Nations recorded at least 33,443 civilian deaths in armed conflicts in 2023, a 72 per cent increase as compared with 2022. The proportion of women and children killed doubled and tripled, respectively, as compared with 2022. In 2023, 4 out of every 10 civilians killed in conflicts were women, and 3 out of 10 were children. Seven out of 10 recorded deaths occurred in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel, making it the deadliest conflict for civilians in 2023.

The number regarding the Occupied Palestine Territory includes the Israeli violence from October to December 2023, but not the violence that intensified across the entirety of 2024.

A look backward at the post-9/11 Western wars on Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen shows the bleakness of the general attitude toward civilians in these parts of the world. The direct deaths from the bombs and the gunfire have been calculated to be nearly one million, an enormous underestimation but still a very large number. Adding in excess deaths, including from starvation and hypothermia, the toll is calculated to be nearing five million, also an underestimation but at least indicative of the impact on these parts of the world.

On 29 August 2021, two US MQ-9 Reapers hovered over a white Toyota Corolla that had pulled into a parking area of a multi-family home in Kabul's working-class Khwaja Burgha neighbourhood. The US drone operators, who had tracked the car for the past 8 hours, watched as a man left the car, as a group of people came to greet him, and as one person took out a black bag from the rear seat of the car.

At that point, the US decided to fire a hellfire missile at the man and the people around him. They were all killed. It turned out that the man, Zemari Ahmadi, was not a member of the enemy group ISIS-K, but was an employee of a California-based non-governmental organisation called Nutrition and Education International (NEI).

The people who came to greet him from inside the house were his children, grandchildren, and their cousins. The black bag, which the US claimed might have had explosives, carried a laptop from NEI, and another bag carried water bottles.

The list of people killed by the United States on that day should give one pause because of the youth of so many of them: Zemari Ahmadi (age 43), Naser Haidari (age 30), Zamir (age 20), Faisal (age 16), Farzad (age 10), Arwin (age 7), Benyamen (age 6), Malika (age 6), Ayat (age 2), and Sumaya (age 2). This is the last US drone strike before the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Not one US soldier was charged with the murder, let alone found guilty. Not one Israeli soldier will be charged or found guilty of the deaths of the Palestinian children in Gaza. This is the impunity that defines the assault on civilians, including those little Palestinian babies freezing to death in their blue tents, lying beside desperate parents.

Globetrotter

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"No one can feel my misery. No one in the world can understand our catastrophic situation."

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