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The ceasefire: hopes and aspirations must be fought for

Rally for Palestine/Boorloo, Sunday 27th October 2024.

William Briggs

There were images of intense jubilation on what were once the streets of Gaza when news first emerged that a ceasefire in Gaza might be a reality. That sense of euphoria came before the dawning of a new day and the enormity of the tasks ahead could be considered. The world has watched and wept as the carnage has unfolded. They hope the shelling, the bombing, the genocide might be at an end. The fears, the hatreds, the driving sense of wrong, will live with the people for a very long time to come.

The pause, as part of a staged end of hostilities in Gaza, is welcome, if long overdue. Too many people have died. Too many have been maimed, too many have been driven to despair. The peace, if peace it will be, will be a tenuous affair. But will that period of calm be sustained? Massive questions need to be asked. Those questions all boil down to one burning overarching question; what happens next?

At best it is a temporary 6-week pause in Israel's bombardments. Israel is not withdrawing from Gaza. It is telling the people to return to the major cities as if their homes will be there waiting for them. Is this yet another ploy to round them up for more mass bombings?

Another issue that will dominate the thoughts of many will be whether or not the war criminals responsible for the genocide, and the deliberate policy of withholding food as a weapon will be brought to justice. That is unlikely, given the level of support that is offered by the USA and its closest allies including Australia. But there are other pressing concerns.

If the ceasefire were to hold and if 'peace' return, then there are enormous obstacles to overcome. It has been conservatively estimated that reconstruction costs could be as high as $40 billion. Two-thirds of all structures in Gaza have been destroyed or damaged. There are 50 million tonnes of rubble to be removed. According to the UN Environment Protection Programme, this could take up to 15 years to accomplish.

While Gaza remains a disputed territory and one without continuous and stable governance, then investors will be chary about risking money. Capital requires a return and it will be capitalism that will seek to profit from any rebuilding program. The post WW2 Marshall Plan attests to that.

The future is precarious. The Palestinian people might not be thinking too far into that future. The immediate prospects of an end to the killing will be, for most, enough. Getting sufficient aid is next. Healing the physical wounds is now possible. Healing the psychological wounds is all but impossible.

The people, Palestinian and Israeli alike, cannot simply exist in an uncertain world, waiting for the next round of atrocity, of massacre, of bloodletting. The working people of both societies deserve so much better. Those who ensure that uncertainty hangs over the people need to be removed.

Peace must be more than simply the absence of war. As the negotiations for a pause in the destruction were being finalised, two statements were issued that deserve attention. One was from the Palestinian People's Party (PPP), the vanguard communist party in Palestine and the other came from the Communist Party of Israel CPI).

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Anarchic, corrupt capitalism

The inferno that has ravaged large spans of urban areas in Los Angeles, destroying thousands of homes and businesses, and taking with it more than 20 lives at the latest count, has shaken the world. Wild fires were once seen as largely confined to bushland and regional areas with the occasional encroachment on a city as was experienced by Canberra in the 2003 fires. Are we prepared for such an event in our cities? Are we prepared for climate change? When are governments going to take climate change seriously? Big questions at the heart of which lie the future of humanity.

The average warming of the earth in 2024 was 1.6°C above pre-industrial levels, surpassing the limit 1.5°C set by scientists by a large margin. Emissions continue to increase and are on a trajectory to reach a warming of 4°C as early as the 2060s. At present, country commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are not being honoured. Instead US President Trump has promised to press the accelerator on gas and oil production. In Australia, Labor has continued to expand fossil fuel production and a Dutton government would be even more dangerous as it hallucinates over nuclear power.

There are many factors contributing to the fires in LA and more may be identified when a full analysis carried out. Fire fighters were not adequately equipped to deal with the fires. Fire hydrants ran dry, private agri-business has control over much of California's water (see page 14). Funding to firefighting services had been cut. The geography of the area along with strong winds helped spread and increase the intensity of the fires. Climate change hit LA with vengeance and is a taste of the new 'normal.' The rich with their own private firefighters were not spared.

Politics also made a major contribution to the uncontained spread of the inferno. For example, the sale of up to 10 of Russia's powerful world-class Beriev Be-200 waterbombers to be used by an emergency services operator in California did not go ahead.

Those wishing to rebuild will need to deal with the large masses of toxic foam sprayed onto their properties. Farmers face land that is no longer suitable for crops because of the seawater used to put out fires.

The anarchic and corrupt nature of the capitalist system is a major factor. Cities are not planned with a view to addressing climate change or preventing fires, let alone being prepared for them. Science-based planning is required; it should not be left to corrupt developers and their crony politicians. We must recognise the knowledge of Indigenous communities and listen and work with them in bush-fire protection. They have lived in harmony with nature, as part of nature, for tens of thousands of years.

Instead of serious discussion about climate change and what should be done to prevent or limit future catastrophes, the media sensationalises and exploits the fires and the suffering of those caught in their path. There is little or no mention of the role of climate change, let alone its causes or what action should be taken.

The devastating droughts, the fires, the storms, the cyclones are set to worsen. The massive floods in Spain and Asia, the drought and famine in Africa, and the most recent storms and floods along the east coast of Australia are just a taste of what lies ahead. Governments are not prepared. They are not willing to take responsibility. Three years on from the devastating Lismore floods, many victims are still not rehoused nor adequately compensated. Some are still left high and dry with worthless properties.

Such fires could happen here. It cannot be left to business as usual, to corrupt governments and developers. We must pressure governments to act NOW. Fossil fuel production must be nationalised and wound back NOW. Those impacted must be compensated IMMEDIATELY. Science-based adaptation and mitigation measures must be taken NOW.

Deaths in custody continue to rise

Since the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody reported in 1991, there have been 582 Aboriginal deaths in custody. Most of the Commission's 339 recommendations have not been implemented. Twenty-four of the deaths were in the last 12 months.

These deaths occurred whilst in the custody of corrective services, police or juvenile detention.

Since 1 January 2024, 24 Indigenous people have died in custody – that's 2 a month on average.

During 2023-2024, a total of 104 deaths in total occurred in the custody of corrections, juvenile detention or Australian police. Twenty-three per cent of these deaths were Aboriginal, compared with 3.8 per cent of the population. Aboriginal people are vastly over-represented.

"Another key factor relating to why Aboriginal deaths in custody are of significance is that the lands of First Nations people were violently invaded and usurped by the British, which means these people who have been dispossessed of their lands, as well as continuing to have their self-determination denied, are dying at disproportionate rates inside their occupier's prisons," said Paul Gregoire of Sydney Criminal Lawyers.

"These deaths aren't invisible to our communities. They are highly visible," Dr Chelsea Watego told the ABC in 2021. The Mununjali and South Sea Islander academic added that the system often locks up First Nations people for matters that non-Indigenous people aren't imprisoned for.

The deaths are a result of racism, abuse and neglect. Incredibly no one has been convicted for any of these deaths.

"We need to shift the gaze back: not upon our people, our communities and speak of what is wrong with us," explained Dr Watego, during the 2021 documentary *Incarceration Nation*.

"But call out the systems that are perpetuating this violence, including the individuals that are part of those systems – to hold this place accountable to the lies that it tells itself about how its systems work."

The ceasefire: hopes and aspirations must be fought for

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In its statement, the PPP stressed that "stopping the genocide and destruction and ensuring the return of the displaced to their homes, in addition to the flow of aid to our people throughout Gaza, the release of thousands of prisoners and the withdrawal of the occupation forces from the Gaza, is a vital and necessary matter for our people. It necessitates the unity of all its forces and factions in order to ensure the implementation of the agreement and the achievement of these goals. This is also essential to prevent the occupation from evading the obligations of the agreement as is its permanent habit, and from its persistence in aborting the aspirations of our people."

The PPP's statement calls for unity of all "factions" engaged in the struggle. This is important. There has been a tendency to view the anti-genocide movement as being a campaign by Hamas alone. It tends to legitimise Hamas as the voice of Gaza and almost by default, the voice of Palestinian resistance.

It is with this in mind that the call by the Palestinian Party to "quickly unify the Palestinian political stance within the framework of the Palestine Liberation Organization" becomes important.

There is an immediate and pressing need to get aid to the people, to provide food, shelter and medical care and to begin the task of rebuilding. Without political resolve and without a clear program for the future, this will become a temporary measure as a prelude to a new wave of aggression. The Palestinian people are engaged in a national liberation struggle against Israel but also against the weight of monopoly capital and imperialism that threatens peace everywhere.

The statement from the ICP reflects a common accord with the aspirations of their Palestinian comrades. It, too, welcomes the agreement that will "bring everyone home – prisoners, abductees, detainees and hostages, Israelis and Palestinians alike." It continues, saying that "we are not satisfied with just the agreement reached and will continue to fight for progress toward serious negotiations that will lead to the end of the occupation and the siege, and lead to a just and comprehensive peace, based on recognising the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of its independent state alongside the State of Israel."

The Israeli Party declared that "we see the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip as an urgent task and call on the world to bear this responsibility, and to prevent the right-wing government in Israel from using the remaining time to complete the implementation of the agreement to continue with genocidal crimes or to resume them after the completion of the prisoners exchange deal."

The struggle of the Palestinian people is not confined to Gaza. The atrocities committed by the Netanyahu regime have also wreaked havoc on the West Bank. There are persistent calls by extremist settler groups, backed by the far right in the Knesset, to annex the West Bank and all of Palestine in order to create a 'Greater Israel.' The biblical referencing has little to do with any religious belief or interpretation on the part of the political right. Their real interests are more aligned with political intrigues, self-serving and the broader interests of US imperialism that seeks a greater Israel as a geopolitical stronghold in the region.

There is an objective necessity to unite those forces within Israel and Palestine who recognise that peace must be established and that it must be a lasting peace. A state for the Palestinian people must become a reality. The PPP recognise this. The ICP recognise this. The Palestinian Authority, the UN, the majority of states all recognise this to be the only rational way forward.

Those who call for a one-state solution need to remain clear-headed. A united secular state is possible but not before a socialist transformation of both Israel and Palestine has been achieved. The national liberation struggle of the Palestinian people is one significant step along the way. It would deal a blow to the aspirations of imperialism who require a divided and dislocated people. Two states, co-existing, might not be the best of all possible worlds but is worth striving for.

Solidarity actions in support Palestinians must continue.

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Health care alliance formed

Joint Statement: Nursing and Midwifery campaign for better primary health care for all Australians

Nine of the nation's largest nursing and midwifery organisations have formed an Alliance to campaign for significant and meaningful primary health care reform.

The Alliance calls on all governments to enable nurses, nurse practitioners, midwives, and allied health professionals to work to their full scope of practice to improve access to quality and affordable health care for all Australians, no matter where they live.

The Alliance of the nine Peaks – the Australian College of Nursing (ACN), the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF), the Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA), the Australian College of Nurse Practitioners (ACNP), the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM), the Australian College of Midwives (ACM), the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN), the Council of Remote Area Nurses of Australia (CRANAplus), and the Council of the Deans of Nursing and Midwifery (CDNM) – will campaign to promote the benefits of nursing and midwifery for all communities.

Securing support for the work of nurses, nurse practitioners, and midwives – particularly ensuring they can work to their full scope of practice – is a critically important election issue for the alliance.

The campaign will work with the Federal Government, the Opposition, and all parties and Independents, to ensure significant health care reform in line with the raft of independent reviews under the Strengthening Medicare banner – including the Review of General Practice Incentives, the Review of After Hours Primary Care Programs and Policy, the Working Better for Medicare Review, and the Unleashing the Potential of our Health Workforce – Scope of Practice Review.

The nursing and midwifery Peaks believe that the spirit of the consultation process throughout these reviews indicates that the government recognises the growing health needs of patients and communities now and into the future – and the government has an appetite for reform.

Patients and communities – especially in rural and regional and remote areas, including First Nations communities – will benefit when nurses, nurse practitioners, and midwives can use their full skill set under their scope of practice.

Nurses and midwives have spearheaded the promotion of culturally safe care, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

There is a critical connection between education, skills development, workforce, and clinical practice. Nurses and midwives are well educated and highly trained to safely deliver a wide array of healthcare.

For over 30 years, they have been educated in universities, backed by evidence-based research that reflects changing models of care and use of new technology.

Nurses, nurse practitioners, and midwives make up 54 per cent of Australia's health workforce. They are the most geographically dispersed health workforce in the country.

But one-third of nurses, nurse practitioners, and midwives in primary health care rarely work to their full scope. This must change.

Governments are clearly seeing evidence of the benefits of using nurses, nurse practitioners, midwives, pharmacists, and other health professionals to work to their full scope in providing more accessible primary health care services in the community.

Nurse-led primary health care has been operating successfully in Australia for decades.

This success has been built upon in recent times with an increase in the number of nurse-led walk-in clinics in some jurisdictions.

They are popular with patients because they are easy to access and are free. They are supported by governments because they take pressure off general practice and emergency departments.

Fully utilising nurses, nurse practitioners, and midwives will make health care more accessible and better value for all Australians.

The Nursing and Midwifery Peaks campaign includes:

- Meetings with MPs and Senators.
- Public and media education about the quality, breadth, and diversity of nursing and midwifery.
- Mainstream and social media materials and activity.
- Actively using evidence and data and facts to refute misinformation and ill-informed commentary on nursing, midwifery, and allied health quality, capability, and cost.
- As science-based health professionals, nurses, nurse practitioners, and midwives are essential in every clinical setting and are associated with stronger patient outcomes.
- Australia's nurses and midwives are increasingly post-graduate qualified.
- Australian-educated nurses and midwives are sought after globally.

NURSES AND MIDWIVES ARE TRUSTED

- Australians trust nurses, nurse practitioners, and midwives.
- Nurses and midwives are consistently ranked as the most trusted professions in health.

NURSES AND MIDWIVES ARE EXPERIENCED

- Australian nurses, nurse practitioners, and midwives are experienced. Nurses have an average age of 43. Midwives have an average age of 47. They have decades of clinical experience in all healthcare settings.
- Nurses typically work in more than three clinical settings, gaining valuable experience that benefits their patients and communities.

NURSES AND MIDWIVES ARE SAFE

- Nurses, nurse practitioners, and midwives are safe, regulated, and their care contributes to quality patient health outcomes.
- Nurse and Midwife are protected titles – becoming one requires specific education.
- The nursing and midwifery professions are regulated by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA).
- Insurers' data shows that nurses and midwives are safe. Professional Indemnity data show low claims.
- Patients are safe with nurses and midwives. Stronger patient outcomes are associated with higher rates of nursing.

NURSES AND MIDWIVES ARE UNDERUTILISED

- Despite being 54 per cent of the health workforce, nurses, nurse practitioners, and midwives are underutilised, with one-third of nurses and midwives in primary health care rarely working to their full scope.
- The Scope of Practice Review consultation process has demonstrated that nurses and midwives are underutilised.

Monash Uni wage theft

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) has demanded an urgent federal parliamentary inquiry into university governance after Monash University admitted underpaying staff $7.6 million.

The new wage theft revelations at Monash are additional to $10 million in previous underpayments at Monash, and millions more in alleged underpayments NTEU is pursuing in the Federal Court for unpaid consultation hours.

The NTEU is calling for an independent investigation of governance at Monash, alongside a federal parliamentary inquiry into the governance crisis at universities across Australia.

The national university wage theft tally is now a confirmed $265 million, with a further $159 million set aside by universities to repay workers for suspected wage theft incidents.

More than 140,000 university staff have had wages stolen from them in recent years.

NTEU Monash Branch President Dr Ben Eltham said this admission brings Monash Uni's total wage theft bill to $17.6m since 2016. "These are wages and superannuation unlawfully withheld from hard-working teachers. Monash's executive and governing board have broken the law and stolen from their own staff.

"Union action directly led to this admission. It's no coincidence that this announcement has dropped while Justice Snaden considers his decision in a separate multi-million dollar wage theft case in the Federal Court of Australia.

"We wrote to Monash's governing Council in November about the crisis of wage theft at our institution. They haven't bothered to get back to us.

"Monash University's Chancellor Dr Megan Clark has been on the board for the entire time these underpayments took place. She has failed in her governance responsibilities. We urgently need a thorough and independent investigation into governance at Monash Uni."

NTEU National President Dr Alison Barnes stated: "It's disgusting that staff are continually being ripped off by their employers with no consequences for the wage thieves who are running rampant in public universities.

"There's no greater proof that the university governance system in Australia is broken beyond repair than the $400 million wage theft shame in our sector.

"Vice-chancellors earning more than $1 million a year are never underpaid yet more than 140,000 staff who are mostly insecurely employed have been.

We need an urgent federal parliamentary inquiry into the rotten governance in universities that has fuelled a wage theft epidemic, rampant casualisation and obscene executive pay."

NTEU Monash branch representative Tony Williams said: "Wage theft is endemic at Monash University. This newest disclosure of underpayments stands in stark contrast to the recent reporting of exorbitant executive salaries of university management.

"When viewed together, it paints a clear picture of who is and is not valued within the institution."

Despicable bank

In a truly despicable move, the Bank of Queensland has used the cover of summer to announce the closure of a whopping 14 formerly owner-managed branches, across Queensland, WA, NSW, and Victoria.

This comes barely a week after they sneakily announced the closure of the Logan Central branch in Queensland. Alongside the previously announced closure of the Werribee and Victoria Branch, there will be 16 Bank of Queensland Branches closing during February 2025 with a net loss of 18 roles.

These closures will leave 3 suburbs without a physical branch of any bank from 27 February 2025 (Applecross, WA, Hampton, Vic, and Bella Vista, NSW). This announcement will also result in the closure of two branches in Treasurer Jim Chalmers' federal electorate of Rankin (Springwood and Logan Central) and one in the Prime Minister's federal electorate of Grayndler (Newtown).

Finance Sector Union (FSU) national assistant secretary Jason Hall said that Australians rely on local bank branches and no amount of corporate spin from banks can deny that fact.

"Removing branches from local communities is a shameful act of betrayal by big businesses who care about their profit more than they care about delivering the local services banks used to be proud to provide to their customers," said Hall.

"There are 60 hard-working staff in those 14 branches of which only 42 will remain employed but will lose their connections to local customers and communities by being relocated to other branches/roles within Bank of Queensland. Four hard working staff in the Logan Central Branch are also being re-located to other branches.

Bank of Queensland at Maleny, Queensland.
Photo: Mattinbgn – Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0)

"The greedy actions of the Bank of Queensland are reprehensible, but sadly not surprising. CEO Patrick Allaway has been on a cost-cutting frenzy for more than 12 months, buying back franchised branches – which we always said was a precursor to more branch closures – and announcing staff cuts of 400 in September 2024, on top of 220 staff cuts in October 2023.

"Bank of Queensland customers are right to feel betrayed by these closures, and Finance Sector Union members stand with them in disgust at the actions of this greedy corporation. We shouldn't need to see more branches, ATMs and staff jobs slashed before the federal government acts."

Hall noted that banks are only able to slash branches and ATMs at will due to the lack of any regulations. It has been 8 months since assistant treasurer Stephen Jones received a Senate Inquiry Report into rural banking. "He has stayed silent and done nothing to indicate that protecting Australians' access to banking is a priority.

"That is why the FSU wrote to treasurer Jim Chalmers calling on him to take action. He must say that enough is enough. Banks should no longer have free rein to deny banking services to rural, regional and suburban customers.

"Given their failure to do so themselves, banks should face regulations to force them to keep branches and ATMs open. The treasurer should immediately commit to implementing all of the recommendations of the Senate inquiry, the first of which is to 'commit to guaranteeing reasonable access to cash and financial services for all Australians.'

"The Finance Sector Union believes there needs to be minimum standards introduced to ensure that all Australians have access to choice in basic banking services. The removal of branches and ATMs are designed to boost profits while reducing services. The absence of minimum standards allows banks to cut services on a whim with no regard to local needs or preferences."

"Time's up, Pay up"

Australian Unions are taking on mining giant BHP in a fight over Same Job Same Pay rises for more than 1,600 labour hire mineworkers.

Hearings into BHP's challenge to Same Job Same Pay at its Queensland coal mines got underway in the Fair Work Commission in Brisbane the week before last week.

ACTU Secretary, Sally McManus, Mining and Energy Union General Secretary, Grahame Kelly and Queensland Council of Unions General Secretary, Jacqueline King are at the hearing to support the case.

The application covers more than 1,600 BHP labour hire workers in three Queensland Bowen Basin mines and were made under the Same Job Same Pay laws, brought in by the Albanese government to stop companies using labour hire as a loophole to undercut wages in established enterprise agreements.

The Mining and Energy Union will argue that BHP labour hire mine workers do the exact same jobs as BHP's direct employees but are paid far less under the labour hire system.

BHP labour hire workers are in line for annual pay rises of between $10,000 and $40,000 to match the pay of permanent employees if the Fair Work Commission makes orders to regulate labour hire arrangements.

The Same Job Same Pay laws have delivered essential pay rises for other mineworkers, flight attendants and warehouse employees. Workers in these sectors have been at the hearings to defend the laws.

Said ACTU Secretary, Sally McManus: "BHP made an annual profit in the last financial year of $20.2 billion dollars. The only barrier to BHP paying workers fairly is the corporation's own greed.

"Whether it's Qantas or BHP, Australian unions are determined to stamp out exploitative labour hire practices; it is not okay to use loopholes to pay workers less by outsourcing labour.

"What is at stake here, is powerful national mining interests wanting to protect their $253 billion in annual profits, at the expense of workers everywhere. These laws are getting wages moving for all workers and we will defend them."

"We've seen major players like Qantas accept that the labour hire rort is no longer lawful or in line with community expectations," said MEU General Secretary, Grahame Kelly.

Kelly noted that this is the biggest, wealthiest mining company in Australia fighting tooth and nail to continue using labour hire to suppress wages. But that they are committed to continuing the fight to deliver wage justice for labour hire mineworkers.

"Wealthy mining companies have clawed money out of workers' pay packets over many years and it should be returned to regional families and communities."

Queensland Council of Unions General Secretary, Jacqueline King called BHP un-Australian: "BHP's challenge to Same Job Same Pay laws is an un-Australian act which flies in the face of a key initiative aimed at delivering real wage rises for regional communities and families.

"Our message to BHP today is – time's up, pay up."

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Dingo bytes

"LA 2028 will be the Olympic version of the *Hunger Games*," says Dr Tom Heenan, who lectures in sport, global and Australian studies at Monash University's Intercultural Lab.

"Even without the wildfires, the Games will cost Angelenos dearly, especially the poor and homeless, and prove to be another IOC-orchestrated budgetary blowout, if not a Montreal Olympics-type black hole. The additional infrastructure requirements will strain an already stretched public purse and shift labour from the much needed rebuild in the hills.

"For a city built on property speculation, 2028 could be a repeat of the 1932 games, which was a real estate agent's dream.

"The winners will be property developers and the head of LA's organising committee, Casey Wasserman, and his sport-entertainment empire.

"The losers may well be LA residents who will bear the expense of the Olympics and a costly yet questionable rebuild in fire-prone hills."

PARASITE(S) OF THE WEEK: are Musk and Theil. There is a common origin story to the new far-right billionaire backers of Donald Trump: apartheid South Africa.

Both Elon Musk and Peter Thiel – the biggest tech billionaires backing Trump – grew up there, where their fathers grew rich, respectively, mining diamonds and uranium – sectors at the core of the apartheid economy.

It can hardly be a coincidence that these two billionaires, alongside others with South African links, such as Trump fundraiser David Sacks, are now in the vanguard of a new global far-right elite pushing the world toward fascism and a civilisational war.

The billionaires of the capitalist class have been raking in trillions of dollars at the expense of ordinary people for decades, a process that accelerated with both the COVID-19 crisis and the Ukraine war.

As the recent killing of a US health industry executive exposed, the super-rich increasingly fear that ordinary people will start to hate those who are exploiting them and causing millions to suffer and die prematurely.

Speaking of which, nuclear proliferation is something of a close family interest. Thiel's father was involved in the clandestine drive of apartheid South Africa to acquire nuclear-grade uranium in Namibia.

His own firm's technology is bringing that apocalypse ever closer. Palantir is a major investor and creator of AI technologies. For over a decade, it has received major contracts from agencies across the US government – including the Department of Defence, Department of Homeland Security, and the FBI.

In the incoming Trump administration, at least 13 billionaires have been appointed to government posts. In the past, billionaires were donors and influencers, and politicians deferred to them because they wanted their "investment": under Trump they will be running the government.

While Musk is very big on the "threat" scare campaign against Muslims, spreading inflammatory lies on his platform X, Thiel is big on the threat of "one world government" – the right-wing's pet bogyman.

Musk is a key figure in Trump's new administration, in which his role will be to slash and burn the US government, in a manner similar to the chainsaw-wielding far-right president of Argentina, Javier Milei.

Mining corps' colonial arrogance

Marcus Browning

"Rio-Glencore merger would create a copper powerhouse" ran a headline in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 17 January, trumpeting yet another triumph in the drive by resources giants to global monopoly. The creation of a "mining superpower" as hailed in the article is no exaggeration. Their unprecedented power to plunder nature's mineral wealth represents the contradiction threatening the destruction of the environment: extracting infinite profits from the finite earth.

Last October, Australian transnational mining corporation BHP and its Brazilian offshoot, Vale, reached a $45 billion settlement with authorities in Brazil to compensate the country for the collapse of a massive waste dam at an iron ore mine in 2015.

Under the agreement, Samarco – a joint venture between BHP and Vale – are to pay the compensation over 20 years.

The collapse of the dam at the iron ore mine, near the city of Mariana in south-eastern Brazil, unleashed a wave of tailings in a disaster that killed 19 people, left hundreds homeless, flooded forests, and polluted the length of the Doce River. It was one of the country's worst environmental disasters.

The collapse of the dam unleashed a torrent of over 40 million cubic metres of highly toxic mining waste sludge, enough to fill 12,000 Olympic swimming pools.

The ochre-coloured muck from the dam in the town of Mariana flooded a dozen downstream villages in Minas Gerais state. We need not look far back past the Brazil disaster, its environmental destruction and devastating effect on Indigenous communities to see the pattern of destruction in the mining corporations' insatiable demand for profit.

In 2013 Papua New Guinea's huge Ok Tedi gold and copper mine became synonymous with environmental disaster.

BHP and the Australian federal government came out swinging in response to suggestions that control of a fund – set up to save face over the Ok Tedi mine environmental disaster – should be put in the hands of the Papua New Guinea government.

The story hit the front pages when it was announced outgoing Ok Tedi chairman, the multi-functional Ross Garnaut, had been banned from entering PNG after comments he made in a newspaper interview cast doubt on the trustworthiness of PNG authorities to carry out such a function.

The name Ok Tedi would be familiar to many Australians. BHP took over control of the copper mine in PNG's Western Province in the 1980s. Reports of major pollution from the mine had been hitting the media for some time before a report in 1999 finally spilled all the beans. Chemicals from the tailings had contaminated fish and poisoned the water source for 50,000 Indigenous people living in the villages downstream from the mine. Food crops were also contaminated.

BHP wanted out. World copper prices were low and the Ok Tedi operation was a public relations disaster. The "Big Australian" (as BHP was known at the time) set up the PNG Sustainable Development Program (PNGSDP) in 2002 to collect income from the ongoing mining operation and hold it in trust for remediation and further investment in PNG.

The public conscience was massaged and it was off to more profitable ventures! BHP maintain a veto on decisions of the fund's board and – until recently – the "right" to appoint 3 of the 7 board members from the company's HQ in Melbourne. The mining transnational was supposedly sorry about its disastrous environmental legacy but not that sorry.

The village of Bento Rodrigues after the disaster. Photo: Rogério Alves/TV Senado – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

There is another twist to the story. Copper prices have surged in recent times and, rather than winding down, Ok Tedi might actually be expanding. The monies sitting in the PNGSDP are considerable and long-term reserves are projected to hit $3.7 billion by 2022. Not surprisingly, the PNG government would like to access some of those locked away funds for cash-starved development projects.

BHP enraged PNG prime minister, Peter O'Neill, by accusing him of blocking the granting of exploration licences to the mining mega-corporation until control of PNGSDP is ceded to his government.

O'Neill was quoted as saying that BHP must drop its "colonial era mentality" and talk about "ending a role there can be no justification for its continuing to play." He vigorously denied any improper role in dealings with BHP or damaging the investment climate in PNG.

"Last month I addressed 1,400 mining and oil and gas leaders, and financiers in Sydney at the annual PNG Mining and Petroleum Conference. The claim that this issue has undermined confidence could not be further from the truth," O'Neill said.

The business pages rallied to the side of BHP Billiton and the federal government. They claimed that PNG has a reputation internationally for corrupt government. Just to prove it the *Australian Financial Review* quoted an unnamed "industry source" who is concerned PNG will "... end up like Nigeria." The visa ban on Garnaut was "intemperate and outrageous." The PNG's actions were a "serious infringement of free speech."

Racist attempts by the corporate media to portray mining plunderers as thanklessly bearing the "white man's burden" are not new and continue today as Australian governments continue to try and lord it over Pacific Island nations. The peoples of the region are rejecting the paternalistic arrogance of successive Australian governments and the corporate interests they promote with foreign policy in the region.

Partners in US aggression

Jo Dunleavy

The US ended the Second World War by dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki when the war in the Pacific was all but finished. Their action killed over 200,000 people (Hiroshima was an open city and did not play any significant role in the Japanese war effort) and its legacy is still felt today.

This use of nuclear weapons was aimed much more against the Soviet Union which had played the foremost part in the defeat of Nazi aggression and routed the most important part of the Japanese armies in Manchuria. The bombing of Hiroshima has often been interpreted as the first blow in WW3.

It was not long after this (1950) that the US launched war on the Korean Peninsular – and let's not be taken in by the lie that it was the North that invaded the South. And let's also not forget that General Douglas MacArthur intended to invade China at the time, an idea that was overruled by President Truman as being politically too dangerous even for the United States. (The People's Republic of China had been established in October 1949).

And then, when the French where thrown out of Vietnam, the United States moved in and, together with Australia and a number of other countries that it was able to round up, imposed a monstrous war on that poorest of poor countries.

More than 2 million Vietnamese were killed by the US (and others) using its high-tech weapons and by spraying the countryside with Agent Orange. Vietnamese children are still being born with serious deformities.

Meanwhile, in Latin America the US kept in power a network of military fascist dictatorships which made the continent safe for US corporations by the use of death squads trained in the "School of the Americas."

The CIA was involved in the overthrow and killing of the democratically elected Salvadore Allende in Chile and the establishment of the Pinochet dictatorship. So much for the alleged promotion by the US of democracy and freedom!

The US has steadily built its network of military bases in more than 100 countries in its drive for world domination and has blocked every move to eliminate or even reduce weapons of mass destruction.

We have the illegal invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq and the resulting horrors brought to both these countries. It is threatening Iran with nuclear consequences which are impossible to foretell, except that such an action would destabilise the international situation and could lead to the Armageddon that the religious fundamentalists in the US administration contemplate for the world.

Slavish support for the US alliance, even if it is spiced with occasional feather duster criticism, ties both Liberal and Labor governments to a policy which is clearly leading to a disaster for the peoples of the world.

Hiroshima. Photo: (Public Domain)

In Australia it's a tale of two cities

William Briggs

"It was the best of times. It was the worst of times." When Dickens wrote those words he was talking of hope and of despair. In Australia, in 2025, the rich and fatuous are continuing to enjoy the best of times. The poor, the disadvantaged, the majority, are forced to eke out a living in what are the worst of times. A recent article in *The Age*, and targeted at a comfortable middle class who might still aspire to something 'better,' showed how far removed from reality are the lives of the wealthy.

At this moment there are homes that are having 'sensory showers' installed. This toy of the rich has coloured LED spotlights. Red lights emanating from the shower bay are designed to allegedly stop the ageing process. Blue lights are to aid in skin purification. The shower offers a fragrance diffuser, and even acts as an actual bathroom shower.

While the homeowner struggles with the decision to either purify skin or stop the ageing process, more than a 100,000 other homeless Australians wonder where they will rest their heads tonight. UNICEF reports that 1 in 6 children in this country are living in poverty. The Smith Family run advertisements on our television screens seeking sponsorships to help children get to school. Families are increasingly facing the dilemma of how to feed their children, of whether to keep warm in winter or eat well.

Average mortgage repayments have risen by $2,000 a month since the COVID pandemic. Rents have risen by 60 per cent in that same time and are rising by an average of 13.5 per cent a year. Wages have stagnated. Our politicians argue about which party might be better at addressing the 'cost-of-living problem' facing the country. They argue but nobody is listening. Listening to lies and obfuscation is a luxury that too few have time for. Keeping the lights on and finding enough paid hours to find the money to pay the mortgage or rent leaves no time for the fantasy of bourgeois political debates.

Life is obviously stressful and taxing for those other Australians; the Australians who face the daunting choice of whether or not to opt for indoor trees as part of a seamless drift from outdoor to indoor living areas.

Photo: Leonard J Matthews – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The Age article described how homes were also being equipped with electromagnetic field therapy panels. In some suburbs in Australia are people, giving AI-driven instructions to turn on the coffee machine, or to check the contents of the fridge while they do the supermarket shopping. There is a surge in people demanding that their homes become 'wellness' centres.

The article quoted an interior designer who commented that "there's a huge global trend around longevity and lowering your biological age versus your real age, and it's not just wellness influencers that are interested but older businessmen too."

It is important to keep in good shape when faced with the vagaries of life while finding a way through a decaying economic system. Who, then would be so heartless as to begrudge someone a bespoke leather-bound treadmill? After all, we are all on one treadmill or another.

The ostentatious display of wealth is not entirely surprising. The fact that there are islands of extreme wealth amid a sea of poverty and struggle is entirely in line with Marx's description of how capitalism plays out. What we are witnessing in suburban Australia is a microcosm of capitalism at work, even if many of these individuals do not themselves own the means of production, they profit enormously from the venal work of the system.

This display of greed and overconsumption simply shows the truth of Marx's declaration that the "accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole."

While none of this should surprise, the reporting, in such simpering tones by a leading and allegedly 'progressive' newspaper is to be condemned. The fact that *The Age*, without a blush can cheerfully report on the lives of the rich, while on another day or even on another page, appear to wring its editorial hands at the news that people are struggling with rising living costs is revealing. What it reveals is the class nature of the bourgeois media and the importance of that media to the state that exists to support capitalism and capitalist exploitation.

UK: an answer to the housing crisis

For an answer to the housing crisis, it helps to turn to Marx. "The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an 'immense collection of commodities'; the individual commodity appears as its elementary form."

These are the words with which Karl Marx began his study of the capitalist mode of production, *Capital*, published over 150 years ago. He goes on to describe how a commodity, which "appears at first sight and extremely obvious, trivial thing" is in fact "a very strange thing abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties."

Crucially, he argues, every commodity both has a use value (it satisfies a human need of whatever kind) and is a bearer of exchange value (it can be exchanged for other commodities, based on its worth or value).

Fundamentally, Marx argues, there is a contradiction between the use value of any commodity (which can be realised only through its consumption), and its exchange value (realisable only through parting with the object in exchange for some other commodity).

Nowhere is this more clearly seen in Britain today than in the case of housing.

According to Shelter, in 2024, over 159,000 children did not have a home. Over 350,000 people in total experienced homelessness. On any one night, around 4,000 people sleep rough in England. Meanwhile, average rents in England rose by 9.3 per cent, driving the average monthly rent over £1,362 (AU$$2,671.03), and 2 million people in England and Wales were contacted by bailiffs.

This is a full-blown housing crisis and, as with any crisis, has led to some truly monstrous behaviour.

You only have to follow Acorn tenants' union on social media – and you should – to see daily examples of bullying, intimidation and people who believe they should live a life of luxury off the back of the rents paid by others.

Take, for example, the recent headline in the paper: "I'm a landlord. The soaring UK rents mean I can live my dream life in Lisbon." Or tenants served Section 21 eviction notices because they complained about repairs. Or the Welsh village of Aberllefenni bought up by property developers run by a millionaire couple and turned into a ghost town.

Much of this will be addressed by the Renters Rights Bill making its way through Parliament. But not the root cause of the problem – the fact that housing is a commodity, and one which is traded in a market where profit means everything.

The reality is that for housing as a commodity, the contradiction between its use value – housing as a home – and its exchange value – housing as an investment and a source of unearned income – is very real.

Housing as a home, housing the hundreds of thousands of homeless people in our country, providing security to the hundreds of thousands in insecure housing, will never be a priority when the commodity nature of housing dominates, and a very few can get very rich on the misery of the many.

However, one simple move could change this calculation.

Rent caps, while they would not resolve the contradiction between use value and exchange value, between a home and a source of unearned income, would certainly shift the balance. Capping rents by the lowest of CPI or average wage growth would ensure that those currently renting are not priced out of their homes in the short term by greedy landlords.

Homeless protest, St Ann's Square, Manchester.
Photo: Matt Harrop – Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 2.0)

It would also do something towards challenging the excessive profits in property speculation. It would also provide a model for other sectors, from energy to food, where price caps would be in the interests of the vast majority.

Ultimately, though, we need to raise our sights and begin the struggle for a society where the contradiction between use value and exchange value – between valuing people and valuing profit – is resolved for once and for all.

Morning Star Editorial

Childcare's corporate cowboys

Photo: Kaboompics.com – pexels.com (CC0)

Marcus Browning

> "Childcare entrepreneur's $22m Noosa waterfront mansion"
>
> *Financial Review* headline

The policies of deregulation and privatisation have exposed all aspects of life to exploitation for profit. Even early childhood education and care, a crucial part of the lives of so many working people and their children, is used as a cash cow by corporate cowboys.

Both major parties kick childcare around as a political football, and both parties are guilty of handing over childcare services to the private for-profit sector.

A strong grassroots movement for the provision of quality, affordable childcare had gathered considerable momentum by the 1980s. As a result, community-based and government-funded centres received operational subsidies and parent fee relief on a sliding scale, which allowed access for low-income families.

Publicly run centres were set up with federal funding and funding from local councils. Care was strictly regulated. In 1993 Australia's first national system for child care was introduced. The landmark Quality Improvement and Accreditation System was formulated through discussions with childcare organisations in the states and territories.

It was based on 52 principles and recognised that "good quality care must appreciate the individuality of every child and treat all children equally." The special needs of children with disabilities, children from non-English speaking backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were included.

The principles set 4 fundamental standards of care: Unsatisfactory, Basic, Good Quality, and High Quality. These took into consideration the relationship between staff and parents, staff and children, staff and staff, the programs for the children, nutrition, health and safety, centre management and staff development.

Quality of care was paramount. Staff-child ratios were set and strictly adhered to, with children under 2 requiring extra qualified staff.

It was in 1990 that the then federal Labor government began providing funding to the for-profit childcare industry by extending fee assistance to parents using private centres.

The owners of these private centres had opposed the new system. Coordinator for the NSW Community Child Care Cooperative, Jill Ruchel, voiced her concern at the time: "I think it is very short-sighted [of the private centres]. Frankly I'm a bit worried about what they're so afraid of – what are they doing in their childcare centres that they are so afraid of having people see?"

More and more government funding was diverted into the for-profit sector as government commitments to provide quality, affordable childcare were abandoned. Though the high standards still applied in community-based centres, the lack of funding began to bite.

Centres were increasingly forced to make hard budget decisions that avoided affecting the quality of care. This meant such things as reducing the number of places available and increasing fees.

Meanwhile, the private centres increased their fees. Most refused to take children under 2 years of age because they didn't want to employ the extra staff required.

And the Howard government came to office and seized the opportunity that had so thoughtfully been provided by Labor and immediately ripped into childcare services.

In 1997, after less than a year in government, Howard's hatchet men had left their own trail of destruction, cutting hundreds of millions of dollars from child care funding. The resultant fee increases forced thousands of parents away from the community centres. Centres across Australia began closing.

The Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union (LHMU) representing childcare workers, reported they were being contacted each day by workers who had been made redundant or had their hours reduced.

The concerns expressed by the Community Childcare Cooperative were confirmed with revelations about the two biggest private operators. Peppercorn and ABC Learning came under the scrutiny of the *7.30 Report* on the national broadcaster.

Together the two for-profit operators ran more than 600 centres with over 50,000 children around Australia in their care each week. When former staff told the *7.30 Report* that food was rationed, Peppercorn chief executive Michael Gordon was asked if his company generally cuts the food budgets of centres they take over. He replied, "No, we generally don't."

He said it comes down to the efficiency of the centre's cook in using the budget. Gordon views parents and children as profit opportunities: "Over time it will be seen that these corporate structures can actually add and deliver an increased level of value to parents and children."

Revealingly, Gordon listed his priorities as what he called the "four stakeholders," in this order: the investor; the parents; the children; the staff.

As the LHMU warned, the first thing private owners do is look at reducing the budget, in particular through the staff – who are already among the lowest paid workers in Australia – with the intention of cutting wages and conditions, at the time using the Howard government's Australian Workplace Agreements (individual contracts).

ABC Learning at the time was worth $500 million and was the corporate sponsor of Brisbane Bullets basketball team. Managing director Eddie Groves made it onto the *Business Review Weekly*'s list of richest Australians.

Like his counterpart at Peppercorn, Groves had been funded by taxpayers via the government's unofficial corporate welfare program, but you'd never know that listening to him crow to the *Australian Financial Review* about the secret of his success in exploiting children and their carers.

"Every barrier that a government or a bank, or somebody put in front of me, I jumped through it; I didn't care how hard it was, I'd just do it."

In January 2011, Groves was charged with "aiding an alleged dishonest use of position by fellow ABC Learning director Martin Kemp" in regards to the sale of 3 childcare centres to ABC Learning by Kemp. In June 2012, Kemp was found not guilty in the Brisbane District Court of charges of breaching his director's duties.

In January 2013, Groves was declared bankrupt.

PEACE NOTES

War consumes all

AUKUS, the euphemistically called 'security partnership' between Australia, the US, and the UK, is sold to the public as promoting "a free and open Indo-Pacific that is secure and stable." A baby of the Morrison Coalition government, it was enthusiastically taken up by the Albanese/Marles Labor government.

The agreement has two Pillars. Pillar 1 focuses on Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered attack submarines and the rotational basing of US and UK nuclear-powered and possibly nuclear-armed attack submarines in Australia and troops. It also involves more powerful missiles and materiel. The US already has a large number of military bases and facilities carrying out surveillance, training, testing, exercises, and stationing of forces across Australia.

The public and our parliamentarians are kept in the dark as to what takes place in these facilities, and are denied access to many of them. The Chinese government's response to the announcement of AUKUS was that it risked "severely damaging regional peace" and had a "cold-war mentality." Australia's forces – land, sea, and air – are already highly integrated in the US war machine and in many instances train and carry out exercises under US command.

Pillar 2 entails the collaborative development of advanced capabilities in six technological areas: undersea capabilities, quantum technologies, artificial intelligence and autonomy, advanced cyber, hyper- and counter-hypersonic capabilities, and electronic warfare. It also involves innovation and information sharing. The target is China.

A few facts not widely known by the public: Australia is responsible for the storage and disposal of all nuclear waste from the AUKUS agreement and indemnifies the US and UK from any liability, loss, costs, damage, injury arising from nuclear risks.

Former PM Paul Keating, in an interview with Sarah Ferguson on the ABC's *7.30* program said, "What's wrong is that we completely lose our strategic autonomy: the right of Australia, Australian governments, and the Australian people to determine where and how they respond in the world is taken away, if we let the United States and that military displace our military and our foreign policy prerogatives."

He agreed that increasing the presence of US troops and the broader military presence here makes Australia more of a target. "We are better left alone than we are being protected by an aggressive power like the United States." He went on to clarify that China has "no strategic designs upon Australia." "We're not threatened by the Chinese military."

"I see Australia as the beachhead to counter China," said US Congressman Michael McCaul, until recently the chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 15/01/2025)

The US is in economic decline while China is rapidly making economic gains. The US is losing its grip on world domination with countries of the South forming various partnerships and alliances.

The impact of AUKUS on Australia's budget will be massive. Australia has already coughed up $10 billion to each of its AUKUS partners to refit their shipyards. The Australian people will pay through cuts to essential social services. The only beneficiaries will be the military industrial complexes of the UK and US conglomerates.

War is the supreme destructive activity of capitalism which can provide seemingly limitless markets, which can raise prices and revive profits, which can use production to produce super profits through war. War consumes weapons and equipment generating further orders; it offers the private sector profits from being integrated in the war machine itself during war, and then it provides billions of more profits from reconstruction programs.

In times of recession, capitalist states like Australia promote war and the threat of war to ensure the protection and expansion of corporate empires and to divert working people from their economic problems.

While the world suffers under the growing economic recession, leading armaments corporations and military contractors are reporting super-profits.

A brief history of kill lists

Medea Benjamin &
Nicolas JS Davies

The Israeli online magazine *+972* has published a detailed report on Israel's use of an artificial intelligence (AI) system called "Lavender" to target thousands of Palestinian men in its bombing campaign in Gaza. When Israel attacked Gaza after 7 October, the Lavender system had a database of 37,000 Palestinian men with suspected links to Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ).

Lavender assigns a numerical score, from 1 to 100, to every man in Gaza, based mainly on mobile phone and social media data, and automatically adds those with high scores to its kill list of "suspected militants." Israel uses another automated system, known as "Where's Daddy?," to call in airstrikes to kill these men and their families in their homes.

The report is based on interviews with six Israeli intelligence officers who have worked with these systems. As one of the officers explained to *+972*, by adding a name from a Lavender-generated list to the Where's Daddy? home-tracking system, he can place the man's home under constant drone surveillance, and an airstrike will be launched once he comes home.

The officers said the "collateral" killing of the men's extended families was of little consequence to Israel. "Let's say you calculate [that there is one] Hamas [operative] plus 10 [civilians in the house]," the officer said. "Usually, these 10 will be women and children. So absurdly, it turns out that most of the people you killed were women and children."

The officers explained that the decision to target thousands of these men in their homes is just a question of expediency. It is simply easier to wait for them to come home to the address on file in the system, and then bomb that house or apartment building, than to search for them in the chaos of the war-torn Gaza Strip.

The officers who spoke to *+972* explained that in previous Israeli massacres in Gaza, they could not generate targets quickly enough to satisfy their political and military bosses, and so these AI systems were designed to solve that problem for them.

The speed at which Lavender can generate new targets gives its human minders only an average of 20 seconds to review and rubberstamp each name, even though they know from tests of the Lavender system that at least 10 per cent of the men chosen for assassination and familicide have only an insignificant or a mistaken connection with Hamas or PIJ.

NAZIS/CIA

The Lavender AI system is a new weapon, developed by Israel. But the kind of kill lists that it generates have a long pedigree in US wars, occupations and CIA regime-change operations. Since the formation of the CIA after the Second World War, the technology used to create kill lists has evolved from the CIA's earliest coups in Iran and Guatemala, to Indonesia and the Phoenix program in Vietnam in the 1960s, to Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s, and to the US occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Just as US weapons development aims to be at the cutting edge, or the killing edge, of new technology, the CIA and US military intelligence have always tried to use the latest data-processing technology to identify and kill their enemies.

The CIA learnt some of these methods from German intelligence officers captured at the end of the Second World War. Many of the names on Nazi kill lists were generated by an intelligence unit called Fremde Heere Ost (FHO Foreign Armies East), under the command of Major General Reinhard Gehlen, Germany's spy chief on the eastern front (see David Talbot, *The Devil's Chessboard*, p. 268).

Gehlen and the FHO had no computers, but they did have access to 4 million Soviet prisoners of war from all over the USSR, and no compunction about torturing them to learn the names of Jews and communist officials in their hometowns to compile kill lists for the Gestapo and Einsatzgruppen [mobile killing units].

After the war, like the 1,600 German scientists spirited out of Germany in Operation Paperclip, the United States flew Gehlen and his senior staff to Fort Hunt in Virginia.

They were welcomed by Allen Dulles, soon to be the first and still the longest-serving director of the CIA. Dulles sent them back to Pullach in occupied Germany to resume their anti-Soviet operations as CIA agents. The Gehlen Organisation formed the nucleus of what became the BND, the new West German intelligence service, with Reinhard Gehlen as its director until he retired in 1968.

After a CIA coup removed Iran's popular, democratically elected prime minister Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953, a CIA team led by US Major General Norman Schwarzkopf (who was to head the 2003 invasion of Iraq) trained a new intelligence service, known as SAVAK, in the use of kill lists and torture. SAVAK used these skills to purge Iran's government and military of suspected communists and later to hunt down anyone who dared to oppose the Shah.

By 1975, Amnesty International estimated that Iran was holding between 25,000 and 100,000 political prisoners, and had "the highest rate of death penalties in the world, no valid system of civilian courts, and a history of torture that is beyond belief."

In Guatemala, a CIA coup in 1954 replaced the democratic government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman with a brutal dictatorship. As resistance grew in the 1960s, US special forces joined the Guatemalan army in a scorched-earth campaign in Zacapa, which killed 15,000 people to defeat a few hundred armed rebels. Meanwhile, CIA-trained urban death squads abducted, tortured and killed PGT (Guatemalan Labour Party) members in Guatemala City, notably 28 prominent labour leaders who were abducted and disappeared in March 1966.

Once this first wave of resistance was suppressed, the CIA set up a new telecommunications centre and intelligence agency based in the presidential palace. It compiled a database of "subversives" across the country that included leaders of farming cooperatives and labour, student and Indigenous activists, to provide ever-growing lists for the death squads.

The resulting civil war became a genocide against Indigenous people in Ixil and the western highlands that killed or disappeared at least 200,000 people.

When General Suharto seized power in Indonesia in 1965, the US embassy compiled a list of 5,000 communists for his death squads to hunt down and kill.

Twenty-five years later, journalist Kathy Kadane investigated the US role in the massacre in Indonesia, and spoke to Robert Martens, the political officer who led the State-CIA team that compiled the kill list.

"It really was a big help to the army," Martens told Kadane. "They probably killed a lot of people, and I probably have a lot of blood on my hands. But that's not all bad – there's a time when you have to strike hard at a decisive moment."

PHOENIX

The Phoenix program was designed to uncover and dismantle the National Liberation Front (NLF)'s shadow government across South Vietnam. Phoenix's Combined Intelligence Centre in Saigon fed thousands of names into an IBM 1401 computer, along with their locations and their alleged roles in the NLF.

The CIA credited the Phoenix program with killing 26,369 NLF officials, while another 55,000 were imprisoned or persuaded to defect. Journalist Seymour Hersh reviewed South Vietnamese government documents that put the death toll at 41,000.

CHILE COUP

After backing General Pinochet's coup in Chile in 1973, the CIA played a central role in Operation Condor, an alliance between right-wing military governments in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Bolivia, to hunt down tens of thousands of their and each other's political opponents and dissidents, killing and disappearing at least 60,000 people.

The CIA's role in Operation Condor is still shrouded in secrecy, but Patrice McSherry, a political scientist at Long Island University, has investigated the US role and concluded, "Operation Condor also had the covert support of the US government. Washington provided Condor with military intelligence and training, financial assistance, advanced computers, sophisticated tracking technology, and access to the continental telecommunications system housed in the Panama Canal Zone."

McSherry's research revealed how the CIA supported the intelligence services of the Condor states with computerised links, a telex system, and purpose-built encoding and decoding machines made by the CIA Logistics Department.

As she wrote in her book *Predatory States: Operation Condor and Covert War in Latin America*: "The Condor system's secure communications system, Condortel, … allowed Condor operations centres in member countries to communicate with one another and with the parent station in a US facility in the Panama Canal Zone. This link to the US military-intelligence complex in Panama is a key piece of evidence regarding secret US sponsorship of Condor… ."

SCHOOL OF AMERICAS

The US School of the Americas (SOA) trained thousands of Latin American officers in the use of torture and death squads, as Major Joseph Blair, the SOA's former chief of instruction, described to John Pilger for his film *The War You Don't See*: "The doctrine that was taught was that, if you want information, you use physical abuse, false imprisonment, threats to family members, and killing. If you can't get the information you want, if you can't get the person to shut up or stop what they're doing, you assassinate them – and you assassinate them with one of your death squads."

When the same methods were transferred to the US hostile military occupation of Iraq after 2003, *Newsweek* headlined it "The Salvador Option." A US officer explained to *Newsweek* that US and Iraqi death squads were targeting Iraqi civilians.

The United States sent 2 veterans of its dirty wars in Latin America to Iraq to play key roles in that campaign. Colonel James Steele led the US Military Advisor Group in El Salvador from 1984 to 1986, training and supervising Salvadoran forces who killed tens of thousands of civilians.

Third World Resurgence

The speed at which Lavender can generate new targets gives its human minders only an average of 20 seconds to review and rubberstamp each name …

The Coloniser's mask has slipped to the floor

Vijay Prashad*

A decade ago, on a road north of Bamako, Mali, the jeep I was driving in had to pull off the road to permit a French military convoy to pass. The convoy was on its way to the main airfield used by the French air force as a part of Operation Serval (2013–2014).

It was a long, dusty wait as the trucks went along the road, struggling a little in the mud that had begun to claim the roadway. I waved to some soldiers, just to be polite, but got a firm look from them. I could only imagine what they were thinking, so far from home, so confused about their mandate.

Something about the situation made me think of the cartoon Beau Peep, about a British man who joined the French Foreign Legion that was deployed in northern Africa so that he could escape from his wife Doris.

In fact, the character that I remembered was Beau Peep's commanding officer, Colonel Escargot, who believed that while stuck in the Sahara Desert he was in a conflict with "those warmongers of Switzerland" (January 1986). There was something about Brigadier General Bernard Barrera, who commanded Operation Serval, that reminded me of Colonel Escargot: "*What are we doing here*," he seemed to say when he came out in public.

When the convoy had gone by, my friends in the jeep said, "Let's see how long they last." It was a worthwhile comment. When there is no good reason for an occupying force to be in a foreign environment, they often depart more silently than they arrive.

Besides, troops from the Global North no longer wanted to operate in African and Asian countries when they were not protected by immunity agreements. For instance, the United States military had insisted on a Status-of-Forces agreement with the Iraqi parliament, and when the Iraqis decided not to renew that in 2011, US forces began to leave the country (many remain in a backroom deal). Already, rumours had begun to slip in from northern Mali that French aircraft had struck and killed civilians. When will *Les Toubab* (the Europeans) leave?

It was in Bamako [Mali's capital] a decade ago that I first heard the phrase—"*France dégage*" or "France, Get Out" – in reference to the intervention of French troops. Anyone who was following the situation of the French intervention knew that France had caused the very problem that it had now come to solve: the French-engineered attack by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on Libya in 2011 had provided air cover for jihadi groups, who then made a dash for Algeria and northern Mali.

The problem had been caused by *La mêre patrie*, as France is often ironically called, the motherland. Even if this claim that France is to blame is often inflated, in this case, it was accurate.

One of my friends in Mali, who always used the phrase "French-backed al-Qaeda," told me that "French-backed al-Qaeda had captured land that is about the size of France." This includes the three major Malian cities of Gao, Kidal, and Timbuktu.

I had been fascinated by Gao, which had become the cocaine capital of Mali; cocaine from Latin America was being flown there, to be driven across the Sahara, and then taken to Marseille to enter the European market. Under al-Qaeda, the coke stopped moving for a little while, but it appeared that the smugglers quickly made a deal with al-Qaeda's branch of cigarette smugglers to keep the product on the road. The rhetoric of *La mêre patrie* was a cruel joke.

None of the explanations by François Hollande, then the president of France, for the continued intervention (*la lutte contre le terrorisme*, *le jihadisme*, etc.) made sense. It was even more peculiar to be sitting in the Sahel and reading a story about the release of two French pilots – Bruno Odos and Pascal Fauret – who had flown for NATO in the 1999 destruction of Yugoslavia, had been arrested in the Dominican Republic as part of the Air Cocaine affair, and had then been released through pressure from the French government.

There was no higher ground here. Between the French government, the cocaine, cigarette, and human smugglers, and al-Qaeda, they were all slipping for the lowest surface possible.

It was not hard to anticipate the cycles of popular protest that started in Mali, in fact only a few days after the French troops entered the country and then developed across the Sahel from Senegal to Niger. The phrase "*France degage*" was infectious, but there were other phrases. In Senegal, the movement just said, "*Y'en a Marre*," (We are Fed Up). It was out of that wave of protest that the vehicle for popular distress became the military coup led by patriotic officers.

There was no other alternative that presented itself. Very quickly, these patriotic coups made decisions that have now become general across the region. The most important framework was to demand that their governments exercise sovereignty not only in terms of forces (get the French military out) but also in terms of economic policy. But first, the French, told to get out in waves:

Mali, February 2022
Burkina Faso, February 2023
Niger, December 2023
Chad, December 2024
Senegal, December 2024
Ivory Coast, December 2024

Add to this the ferociousness of the anti-French attitude now growing in its far-flung Overseas Territories, from New Caledonia's Front de Libération Nationale Kanake et Socialiste to the angry citizens of Mayotte [a French overseas department in the Indian Ocean].

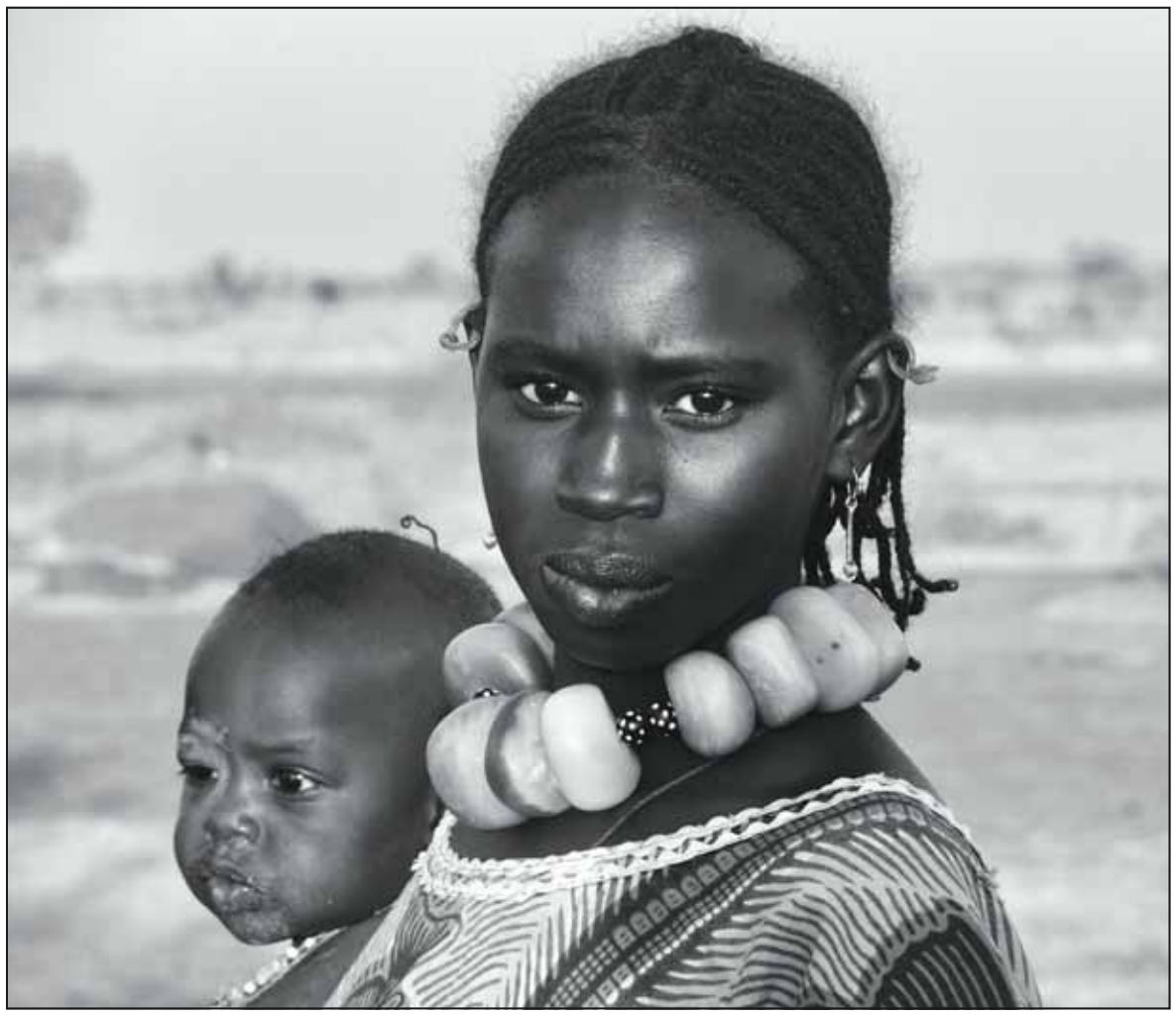
No wonder France's President Emmanuel Macron behaved like an old colonial officer when he spoke in Paris on 6 January 2025. France, Macron said, had not been forced out of the Sahel but had decided to "reorganise itself." "France is not in decline in Africa," he insisted with a churlish hollowness. It is not the French colonial attitude and practice that is to blame, he said, but "a contemporary Pan-Africanism of good quality that uses a sort of postcolonial discourse, while having back-channel support from today's imperialists."

The rambling from Macron was familiar. This is the imperial master at the podium, saying whatever he wants, claiming Reason as his own and manipulation as his enemy. By "today's imperialists," Macron referred to "the interests of Russia or others in Africa," not even having the guts to name China (for who else would be the "others" that detained Macron?). The keywords were all there: terrorism, disinformation, the West.

Then, Macron said what he had come to say. "Ingratitude is a disease that cannot be transmitted to humans. I say this for all the African rulers who haven't the courage to wear it in the face of public opinion. None of them would be in a sovereign country today if the French army hadn't been deployed in this region."

Be grateful. We made you. This is the old colonial attitude that would be familiar to the old French colonial heads Louis Faidherbe (Senegal), Henri Gouraud (Syria), Paul Doumer (Indochina), and Joseph Gallieni (Madagascar), nasty men, all of them.

Ibrahim Traoré of Burkina Faso and Assimi Goïta of Mali were at the inauguration of Ghana's new president John Mahama. Macron was not there. When Traoré went to the stage to greet Mahama, he was the only one to get a loud applause.



Mali woman with child. Photo: pexels (CC0)

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There was no higher ground here. Between the French government, the cocaine, cigarette, and human smugglers, and al-Qaeda, they were all slipping for the lowest surface possible.

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

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West Papua: The Jakarta method

Before the US – especially the CIA – meddled in the situation, the Dutch government had started to give the Melanesian people of Papua Barat (West Papua) their independence. However, the US interfered and forced the country to be handed over to Indonesia – an ASIAN nation.

West Papuans are not ASIANS! The only common factor that they had was that the Dutch colonised both countries.

Then in 1965, the CIA assisted general Suharto to overthrow the government of Sukarno and replace it with a fascist dictatorship which lasted until 1998. The death toll caused by the mass murders of progressive Indonesian people by the Indonesian military (TNI) and its vigilantes numbered between 500,000 and 3 million.

This brutal overthrow became known as "the Jakarta Method" and the CIA has used it in about 25 other countries since. [See Vincent Bevins' book *The Jakarta Method – Washington's Anticommunist Crusade & the Mass Murder Program that Shaped Our World*]

In 1968, Suharto said that he would give the West Papuans an Act of Free Choice. The TNI was sent to intimidate the people to vote to stay with Indonesia. Those who didn't were murdered or "disappeared." The whole process was totally undemocratic and representatives chosen by the TNI were told they had to vote publicly in front of Indonesian soldiers. The UN officials who were there were useless.

The exercise was a total sham and the West Papuans refer to it as the "Act of NO Choice!"

Suharto's dictatorship then went on to commit genocide in Papua Barat – about 500,000 people murdered since 1962; East Timor – where the TNI wiped out about a 1/3 of the population; and Acheh – where the TNI wiped out tens of thousands. Drastic action was also taken against parts of Indonesia where the people rebelled against the total brutality of the TNI – eg the Moluccan Islands (Maluku).

On-going resistance by the East Timorese and Achehnese, the massive corruption of the Suharto dictatorship, the Asian economic crisis in 1968 with Indonesia's economy in severe crisis led to the downfall of the corrupt Suharto family and its cronies.

This led to an independence referendum in East Timor supervised properly by the UN despite the mass murders of pro-independence East Timorese by the TNI and its militias.

There should also be a UN organised independence referendum in West Papua too, but the US and its allies would block it. The reason being that along with the Indonesian government, US corporations have profited greatly out of the stealing of West Papua's resources of copper, gold, oil, timber, and other forest products.

The TNI genocide in West Papua continues today. And looks very likely to continue under the presidency of the brutal and corrupt Prabowo Subianto – a former TNI general and a Suharto son-in-law.

If the leaders of the US and its allies were really committed to democracy, human rights, social justice, the rule of law, independence and fair dealing between nations as they claim, the UN would be able to supervise a true Act of Free Choice in the country without the presence of the mass-murdering and torturing TNI to terrorise the people which it tried to do in East Timor.

A very important book exposing this very sordid and shameful history is *JFK Vs Allen Dulles: Battleground Indonesia* by Professor Greg Poulgrain of the University of South Queensland.

UNTUK PAPUA BARAT – MERDEKA!

Andy Alcock

Streaming Review

Slow Horses

Floyd Kermode

Do you like a spy story? More specifically, do you like a British spy story? Don't mind class issues in your face? Step right up, *Slow Horses* is here for you.

Ever since 1963 ***The Spy Who Came In From the Cold***, ***The Ipcress File*** (turned into the very anti-Bond series of Harry Palmer spy movies starring a young Michael Caine) and later on, the grimetastic TV series *Callan*, the British have been turning out spy movies and TV shows pitched directly against the glamour and conspicuous consumption of the Bond movies.

If you're a fan of this genre, you know the drill by now: upper-class bosses lord it over and betray the working-class underling who succeeds despite having the odds against them.

Slow Horses fits right into this tradition. A sterling young spy, Jack Lowden (River Cartwright) messes up a training exercise involving ethnic stereotyping causing a minor disaster. He's demoted to "Slough House," a surveillance operation in a scungy house on the other side of town from the big rooms full of TV monitors where lucky, successful spies get to do their stuff. There's a strong hint that Slough House is really just a way of parking the agents who've stuffed things up. It's in London, but the house is nicknamed Slough House because the quality spies say it might as well be in Slough, famed for being unfashionable and lower class.

Yes, this series is full of class consciousness, but as it's a British TV show, that's like revealing that a car has wheels. This kind of drama does not have the kind of class consciousness that leads to anyone joining up with the rest of the working class and taking action, mind, more the grumpy but stoic "that's the way it always is" variety.

To add to the demoted spy's misery, Slough House is run by Jackson Lamb, played by Gary Oldman, who will definitely represent the UK if irate swearing ever becomes an Olympic sport. He sits around chain-smoking, farting, and swearing, occasionally taking time out to drink whisky amidst piles of dusty rubbish. Oldman spends his every non-drunken moment piling foul-mouthed abuse on the unlucky spies who have to work for him.

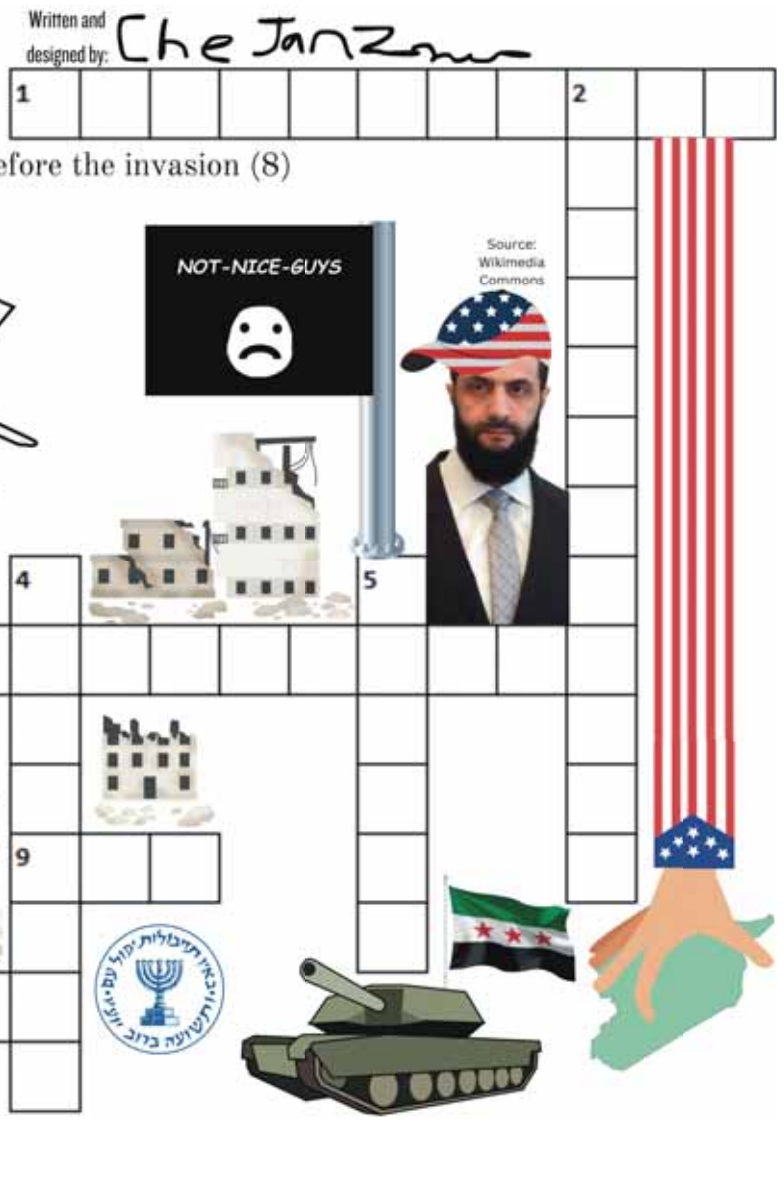
Our downtrodden hero thinks he's on to something though, and is dangerously going off reservation by tracking down an evil racist far right politician.

Could this lead to danger, and clashes with the successful snooty spies, led by a languid and world-weary Kristin Scott-Thomas? As sure as Gary Oldman's next swearing fit, it could.

Despite the predictability of its attempts to shock, *Slow Horses* gets you in. We want to see the downtrodden hero succeed, and we want to see the far-right racists and their cynical upper-class exploiters go down in a heap. We know that Gary Oldman and Kristin Scott-Stewart are going to be cynical and nasty, but we don't know exactly how far they'll go and who will get hurt while they're doing it. With all this and a great theme song by, of all people, Mick Jagger, there's a lot to like.

The in-your-face class stuff, not unknown in British drama, mirrors real life tensions in the UK, where decades of conservative governments have made it increasingly harder for people to come from a working-class background and make acting a profession the way Gary Oldman did.

Apple TV+



The possibility of a war against Iran

Vijay Prashad*

In early January, most of the major military forces of Iran participated in a large military exercise called Payambar-e Azam (Great Prophet), which started as an annual exercise 19 years ago. These forces included the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Basij Resistance Force, and took place in the air, on land, and in the sea.

The exercises began in Iran's western Kermanshah province, with the Mirza Kuchak Khan Brigade in the lead. Mirza Kuchak Khan (1880-1921) successfully led the Jangal (forest) Uprising in northern Iran in 1918 against the British and counter-revolutionary Tsarist forces.

Then, after a triumph, he created the short-lived Socialist Republic of Gilan in June 1920 (which was eventually overthrown by the Shah's forces in September 1921). That a brigade of forces in the Islamic Republic is named after this socialist warrior is interesting by itself, but not germane to the fact that these Special Forces are now playing a leading role in what appears to be military exercises for the defence of the Iranian state against a possible attack.

The military exercises began on 3 January 2025, which is the 5th anniversary of the assassination by the United States of General Qasem Soleimani, the leader of the IRGC's Quds Force. The Quds Force is responsible for Iranian military operations outside the boundaries of the country, including building what is called the 'Axis of Resistance.'

The latter includes various pro-Iranian governments and non-governmental military forces (such as Hezbollah in Lebanon). Soleimani's assassination was the start of a determined new political and military campaign by the United States, Israel, and their European allies to undermine Iran's role in West Asia.

Punctual strikes by Israel and the United States on Iranian logistical bases in Syria and Iraq weakened Iran's force posture. Israel's regular assassinations of IRGC military officers both in Syria and in Iran itself have also had an impact on the leadership of the Iranian military forces.

Israel's assassination of the Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah on 27 September 2024, and the Israeli and US-assisted overthrow of the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria on 8 December 2024, dented Iran's strength across the Levant region (from the Turkish border to the Occupied Palestinian Territory) as well as along the plains from southern Syria to the Iranian border. Hezbollah's new Secretary-General Naim Qassem admitted, "Hezbollah has lost its military supply route through Syria."

In an interview published in the *Financial Times* on 3 January 2025, US secretary of state Antony Blinken said that, "Iran is not in much of a position to pick a fight with anyone" given the strategic setbacks that it has faced in both Lebanon and Syria. The grand scale of Payambar-e Azam this year is intended to both lift the morale of the Iranian military forces and to send a message to Tel Aviv and Washington that Iran can and will defend itself from any direct attack on Iranian soil.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made a statement on 14 December 2024, that shows how Israel sees the situation regarding Iran: "A year ago, I said we would change the face of the Mideast, and we're indeed doing so. Syria is not the same Syria. Lebanon is not the same Lebanon. Gaza is not the same Gaza. And the head of the axis, Iran, is not the same Iran; it has also felt the might of our arm."

Netanyahu did not mention Yemen, whose government – led by Ansar Allah – continues to fire missiles at Israel and has shut down Israel's only Red Sea port at Eilat. Israel and the United States have fired barrages of missiles at Yemen, but – like the Saudis before them – they are finding that the Yemenis are simply not backing down.

Netanyahu also did not mention Iraq, where many of the forces close to the Assad government fled, and where the Iraqi militia groups remain intact. On 5 January, at the commemoration of the assassination of both Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, who was one of the leaders of Iraq's Popular Mobilisation forces, Iraq's Prime Minister Shia' al-Sudani said that Iraq was prepared to respond to any "potential aggression." In other words, despite many setbacks to Iran (such as in Lebanon and Syria), the forces against the Western ideas for West Asia (such as in Yemen and Iraq) remain engaged.

Israel continues to bombard the military bases of the Syrian army and of military units close to the Iran IRGC in Syria. Initially, these attacks and the Israeli invasion of Syria beyond the Golan Heights had been welcomed by the new government of Ahmed al-Sharaa (formerly the al-Qaeda leader Abu Mohammed al-Golani), since these attacks weakened Syria's government of Bashar al-Assad.

Now, the contradictions have begun to set in. Al-Sharaa, however much he is a Western, Turkish, and Israeli creation, is nonetheless forced to respond to these continued violations of Syrian sovereignty, which he started to do in a muted manner. He has asked Israel to stop attacking Syria but has also said that Syrian soil will not be used to attack Israel.

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Ground Force.
Photo: Ayoub Ghaderi/Mehr News Agency (CC BY 4.0)

The moment Israel feels that Iran has no way to retaliate against Israel, Tel Aviv – either with the United States directly or with US backing – will launch a massive military attack on Iran.

In October 2024, Israeli military aircraft violated Iranian airspace and struck two Iranian weapons facilities, one in Parchin and the other in Khojir, both less than an hour's drive from Tehran. Both facilities are known to be part of Iran's missile development program. Hitting these hard, as far as Israel is concerned, was a way to damage Iran's ability to make medium-range and long-range missiles. Israel claimed, as it was expected to, that these were nuclear weapons facilities, but Iran's foreign minister Abbas Araghchi said in response, "Iran is not after nuclear weapons, period."

On 11 November 2024, Israel's defence minister Israel Katz had a meeting with his military's General Staff. After the meeting, he said on X, "Iran is more exposed than ever to strikes on its nuclear facilities. We have the opportunity to achieve our most important goal – to thwart and eliminate the existential threat to the State of Israel." What Katz has announced publicly is that Israel is ready more aggressively to attack Iran, including launching a barrage of missiles at what it claims are nuclear weapons production sites, but which are, from Iran's perspective, its research unit for nuclear power, its ballistic missile production lines, and its other weapon production units.

This aggressive behaviour from Katz comes because of what Israel sees as the weakness of Hamas and Hezbollah, and the lack of any credible forward deterrent from Iran (Israel has been striking Yemen hard to diminish the ability of Ansar Allah to fire its rockets at Israeli targets). The moment Israel feels that Iran has no way to retaliate against Israel, Tel Aviv – either with the United States directly or with US backing – will launch a massive military attack on Iran. This is not a theoretical possibility as far as Iran is concerned, but an existential reality.

At the Payambar-e Azam exercises, Iranian brigadier general Kioumars Heydari said something that is revelatory and true: "Our country's armed forces, especially the Army's Ground Forces, will prevent whatever type of encroachment against our Islamic nation's soil, by relying on national will and integrity."

Heydari's statement, like that of other military leaders from Iran in recent weeks, suggests that they are anticipating a massive Israeli attack. His statement shows how the Iranian military is building a national consensus to defend their country if the strikes are followed by an attempt to change the government by force.

There is a certainty that most of the Iranian population will rally against any infringement of their sovereignty. Even if "Iran is not in a position to pick a fight with anyone," as US Secretary of State Blinken put it, Iran will not collapse before the combined might of the United States and Israel. Pride in Iranian independence and defiance against a repeat of the coup of 1953 are cemented into the Iranian consciousness. That is the meaning of Heydari's statement.

Iran, meanwhile, has announced that it is ready for peace talks (almost unreported in the Western press). The Western capitals have not responded.

Globetrotter

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Solutions to Crossword

Issue #2129 20-01-2025

Down

1. **Frontier Wars** – The series of massacres committed by Europeans against Indigenous Australians
3. **Squatters** – Early European settlers who illegally occupied land belonging to Indigenous Australians
6. **White** – The name of a set of policies that made Australia an apartheid state until 1973
8. **Truth** – One of the 3 demands from the Uluru Statement highlighting to preserve, understand, and acknowledge the histories & stories of First Nations people

Across

2. **Janszoon** – Last name of the Captain, who first lit the spark of European invasion of Australia
4. **Tent** – What the Aboriginal Embassy consists of
5. **Spear** – The first Aboriginal flag had this on it instead of a sun
7. **Dreamtime** – The spiritual beliefs & creation stories of Indigenous Australians, which were suppressed during colonisation
9. **Children** – What Indigenous families were robbed of during much of the 20th century
10. **Census** – What Indigenous people were excluded from until 1971

Workers must combine workplace fights with a political one

Parker Palmer

> "The number of Toronto paramedics who are saying no to overtime shifts to highlight the city's need for more EMS [Emergency Medical Workers] workers has doubled."
>
> ***Toronto Star***

As negotiations heat up between the city of Toronto and paramedics represented by the Toronto Civic Employees' Union (TCEU – CUPE Local 416), you would be forgiven for thinking that the above statement was recent. In fact, that *Toronto Star* article was written 13 years ago.

Despite at least a decade of mounting evidence of a crisis and a continuous chorus of alarm bells sounded by workers and their unions, the situation for municipal employees, including paramedics, has only deteriorated since.

In 2012, the city manager told the public "We've been responding with business as usual," a reference to the city's response the weekend the article was published, but also inadvertently alluding to government inaction in the face of decades of social service deterioration at the hands of neoliberal austerity.

A SYSTEMIC PROBLEM

Reading about the current conflict between municipal unions and the city, you would be forgiven for thinking that the problem was purely local. The narrative has been, sometimes justifiably, that the city refuses to fund and manage the paramedic service correctly and we are therefore now in an emergency situation as ambulance response times continue to climb. The same story is told about the shelter system, municipal housing, or parks.

However, if this is only an isolated municipal issue, why are ambulance services in Britain and the US suffering similarly? Is it merely coincidence that disparate paramedic services, who largely follow similar procedures and organisational structures, are in crisis all at once? Moreover, is it by chance that a similar crisis is afflicting emergency medicine in hospitals, whose funding structure is not municipal at all? What about housing?

For many of us, the answer is obvious: these crises are happening simultaneously because – while there are obviously other issues at play including ones relating to management, productivity, organisation and efficiency – our communities are ultimately being crushed by the blight of austerity, one of many political projects aimed at dismantling public services to create new capital markets for private interests. But this is not how the public, or even many workers, understand the problem.

Many working people assign blame by pointing to the city executive or a specific municipal service itself as the main culprit. People are adept at internalising interpersonal narrative stories – not just because they are easier to follow, but also because they're rife with drama and intrigue.

It's easy to digest a story about the supposedly pro-labour Mayor Olivia Chow facing off with unions in a battle of wills. Or think about the ubiquity of anti-Trudeau thought.

For workers engaged in the struggle, management becomes the main foil. This is especially true when the most common "analysis" is that public services should be run as businesses, and the problem is public bloat leading to inefficiencies as fat cat municipal bureaucrats try to protect their cushy jobs to the detriment of "the taxpayer." Elon and Vivek [part of Trump's team] have made this their cause célèbre south of the border.

And of course, some of these narratives contain truth. For example, municipal services are sometimes inefficient: this year, the Auditor General announced that the city of Toronto spent C$11 million (AU$12.4m) on unused software and C$36 million (AU$40.5m) on software licences for former or inactive employees.

There is also a genuine conflict between city management and workers as the city looks to squeeze increased productivity from an already bled stone, using industrial efficiency techniques antithetical to normal human operation. Commonsensically, the proximity of the municipal government to its employees would suggest that this antagonism is the primary conflict to overcome.

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

In this struggle, there is a seed of class consciousness. Certainly, municipal workers have built lines of solidarity to fortify themselves with an understanding of the commonality of their struggle. They correctly identify one of their enemies: the boss. But, like many union struggles, the goal often begins and ends with a good contract. This is the case with paramedics, who look at the greener pastures of other first responders, instead of thinking about the enfranchisement of the entirety of the working class.

Contract tunnel vision and the proliferation of business unionism, combined with an aggressively anti-worker media environment and legislature, has led to the public's dismal view of unions generally. A poll taken in 2022 highlighted paramedics as the number one most respected profession in Canada with a score of 92. In the same poll, union leaders – the ones ostensibly representing paramedics – scored a failing grade of 42, placing them in the bottom five. Sandwiched between business executives and MPs, union leaders have never kept worse company. With stagnating wages, increasingly unmanageable work environments, decaying social conditions and sometimes downright offensive collective agreement capitulations, it's no wonder many workers question paying their dues.

Photo: Raysonho – flickr.com (CC0 1.0 Universal)

But the holistic view is complicated and overwhelming.

"As a political project, neoliberalism has been characterised by a capitalist class and state offensive in which the aim has been to rescind the collective gains made by labour in the quarter-century following World War II, while at the same time extending new forms of commodification," explains Carlo Fanelli in his indispensable Megacity Malaise, which documents worker struggles in Toronto.

But despite the necessity of understanding this phenomenon, who is going to have luck diving into it with their work buddies over a beer? Especially when our current political climate has been characterised by nihilism, overwhelm and exhaustion.

Of course, this is nothing new. Marxists and social activists of all stripes have struggled with promoting class consciousness ever since the concept was identified. Luckily, we have decades of history to educate ourselves. And class solidarity is as important now as it ever has been.

One of the foundational issues that triggered the strike by 55,000 postal workers was the fight against job precarity. As a result of working-class struggle, proletarianisation has not always meant destitution but, at times, the proliferation of well-paying, full-time work with benefits and a pension.

Postal workers identified that Canada Post pushing for temp and part-time labour was the first battery in an attack on their livelihoods, an attack waged successfully in the so-called "gig economy" by Uber and their ilk. On the CUPW strike lines, workers related stories of friends and family cobbling together 2 to 4 jobs just to afford the necessities.

That postal workers were standing around an oil drum in below freezing temperatures – not just for themselves, but for all of us – was not a narrative widely promoted. But that's exactly the story that needs to be told to people in Canada, who don't realise that gig, part-time and temp labour will come for them too.

Amazon, who offered *Canada Post* a horrible contract they rightly turned down, relies heavily on gig logistics ("Delivery Service Partners") and ruthlessly terminates their contracts when they deign to unionise. Workers worried about robots coming for their jobs are missing the forest for the trees: is automation the threat, or is the real menace when the threats are in the hands of capitalists?

Unions are a bulwark against the excesses of capital, but as we've seen since WW2, that bulwark has been in steady decline, as union power and presence is worn down by unremitting attacks. Often bargaining teams will tell their members they "can't do better" and point to the attacks they parried from management as a success. But a defence is not a victory, and eventually a garrison under siege will starve. With a stagnating economy, years of inflation and a cost-of-living crisis, workers cannot be and are not satisfied with a defence leaving them to eat mouldy carrots.

STATE IS NOT NEUTRAL

The Canadian government on the other hand relishes it. Whether through absurd legal hurdles that gatekeep worker strikes, to the anti-worker "comparator" assessments of binding arbitration, or the flagrant uses of "back to work" legislation, it's difficult not to see the government as a reserve army when employers can't get their way through brute force.

Solidarity within a union is meant to show a united front to management, a disciplined army that will not wither or abandon when the battle commences. Union solidarity is a coalition amongst different unions, creating a much larger united front that is not as easily isolated and broken. Working-class solidarity is the realisation that this is still not enough, and for the battle to be finally won, we must commit ourselves to socialism. But with most workers not unionised, many unions not disciplined and few large coalitions, the path to class consciousness remains a tricky one.

But there is hope. Despite CUPW's rights being crushed by legislators, 62 per cent of posties voted to stay on the strike line, defying government dictates like the unions of old. As the collaborators of business unions are found wanting, workers will inevitably search for alternatives. In this is an opportunity for socialists to inject class into the conversation, use the continued immiseration of the working class as a stepping stone to broader analysis and broader horizons. Create a vision of a world beyond doomsaying and exhaustion, where we deserve and have more, where the fruits of our labour are shared in concert.

People's Voice

But that's exactly the story that needs to be told to people in Canada, who don't realise that gig, part-time and temp labour will come for them too.

Demonstrations against Trump's threat to take Panama Canal

Graham Holton

On 23 December 2024, US president-elect Donald Trump threatened to take back the Panama Canal, in a post on his Truth Social platform, because of the high fees charged to US shipping. Panamanian president, José Raúl Mulino, a right-wing politician, countered that the canal's ownership is not negotiable and the tolls will not be lowered. "There's nothing to talk about." Mulino also denied that Chinese soldiers were operating along the Canal. "The canal is Panamanian and belongs to Panamanians."

Trump told the 20,000 crowd at the America Fest, Phoenix, Arizona: "We're being ripped off at the Panama Canal," and his country "foolishly gave it away." Trump attacked the "ridiculous" fees charged for US ships using the canal. Although only 5 per cent of world's maritime shipping uses the Canal, the US accounts for 74 per cent of its usage, followed by China with 21 per cent.

The transit fees vary by size and purpose. The fee covers managing traffic and the associated costs, including maintenance of the canal and the services provided during the passage. The Panama Transit Fee is US$7 per ton. For a one-day special transit, the fee is US$5,000, although some shipping companies have paid up to $4 million to get ahead of the queue.

Over the past 12 months fees have increased by 400 per cent due to a severe drought which has forced up costs. The Panama Canal Authority (ACP) now limits the number of vessels passing through the canal, creating a backup of shipping. This drought has posed unprecedented challenges without historical precedence. The Canal requires 101,000 cubic metres of water from nearby Lake Gatun to fill the locks each time a vessel passes through. The ACP has employed the US Army Corps of Engineers to develop a long-term water solution.

The US's control of Panamanian territory dates to 1903 when the US supported the cession of Panama from Colombia. In return Panama gave up its sovereignty to the Canal Zone in perpetuity. The US Canal Zone covered an 8-kilometre-wide strip with an area of 1,380 square kilometres. The Canal was built by the US, and opened in August 1914, at the start of World War I.

Panama's lack of sovereignty over the Canal Zone produced smouldering resentment which fermented into open violence on numerous occasions. In 1958 the Panamanian Union of University Students attacked the US Embassy, planting Panamanian flags in the Canal Zone. Violence exploded onto the streets in 1960 and again in 1964, when 22 Panamanians and four US soldiers were killed during the riots. Today it is celebrated as Martyrs' Day (Día de los Mártires), the National Day of Mourning. The US saw the Panamanian Riots as a Communist plot, though no evidence was produced. The US finally handed back the Zone to Panama on 31 December 1999, under treaties signed by US president Jimmy Carter and General Omar Torrijos. The treaties provide no legal basis for the US to retake control of the canal.

There have been quick reactions in Latin America to Trump's imperial ambitions. Demonstrators in Panama protested against the US government, with the crowd chanting, "Trump, animal, leave the canal alone." Banners carried messages, "Donald Trump, public enemy of Panama," and "¡F*** Trump!" The leader of a construction union, Saul Mendez, said "Panama is a sovereign territory and the canal here is Panamanian." The union had jointly organised the protest. Mendez said, "Donald Trump and his imperial delusion cannot claim even a single centimetre of land in Panama."

The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), made up of ten Central and South American countries, denounced Trump and affirmed support for Panama's "sovereignty, territorial integrity and self-determination." The Mexican president, Claudia Sheinbaum, the Colombian president, Gustavo Petro, the governments of Chile, Bolivia, and Venezuela, and the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro, all demanded the US comply with the canal treaty agreements.

Undeterred, Trump announced on his Truth Social that Kevin Marino Cabrera will be the new US ambassador to Panama. His choice illustrates Trump's tough stance on the region. Cabrera is the fourth appointee to Trump's cabinet with a Cuban background. Trump announced: "Few understand Latin American politics as well as Kevin." Trump's threats are part of the long history in which US imperialism has used aggression and violence towards Latin America to gain control and exploit at will.

Germany: Police attack pro-Palestine marchers

Police attacked the annual march to the graves of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht today, targeting marchers expressing solidarity with Palestine. The second Sunday in January sees a traditional procession from Berlin's Frankfurt Gate to the Friedrichsfelde cemetery, where a monument marks the graves of communist revolutionaries killed in the struggle, with thousands joining to place red carnations on their graves.

But a Palestine solidarity bloc came under immediate attack as the march moved off, with police charging marchers who chanted "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" and seizing individuals from the crowd.

Organisers halted the march and called for everyone to close gaps to prevent any bloc being separated and beaten up by police. But officers continued to snatch people from the crowd, saying placards or items of clothing were promoting "unconstitutional" messages, which ranged from expressions of solidarity with Palestine to one member of the German communist youth league being detained for wearing a red triangle, the badge assigned to political prisoners by the Nazis as the yellow star was for Jews.

Though the march closing up led police to back off, eyewitnesses told the *Morning Star* the police attacked again toward the end of the demo, charging young people stood around talking without provocation.

Leipzig-based *Morning Star* supporter Keith Barlow said he was unable to see what the young demonstrators targeted were handing out and whether it was unconstitutional or not, but "there was no need for fists, they were not attacking anyone."

A delegation from the Communist Party's Manchester branch took part in the demo, with member Dan Ross saying the worst police violence was averted by the march grouping together and organisers ensuring nobody was left behind.

The *Morning Star* had the day before attended the yearly Rosa Luxemburg conference organised by our German sister paper *Junge Welt*, at which former Irish MEP Clare Daly called for mobilisation against a new world war in the spirit of Luxemburg and Liebknecht's unpopular defiance of the warmongers of their day.

Belgian Workers Party leader Peter Mertens said building the power of communist and Marxist parties was a priority for the whole European left, which should not fear but seize on "the turbulence to come."

Morning Star

Global Briefs

MYANMAR: Myanmar's government and a major ethnic rebel group have signed a formal ceasefire agreement. The new ceasefire was brokered by China and came into effect earlier this month. China has major geopolitical and economic interests in Myanmar and is deeply concerned about instability along the border. "We hope that all parties will maintain the momentum of ceasefire and peace talks, earnestly implementing existing common understanding in de-escalating the situation on the ground and further negotiate and settle relevant issues through dialogue," commented the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson.

YEMEN: The Houthi-led government signalled that it will limit attacks in the Red Sea to only Israeli-affiliated ships. The Houthi attacks have significantly disrupted traffic through the region, cutting deeply into the revenues of shipping companies, forcing them to use alternative and longer routes between Asia and Europe.

QATAR: Qatar's Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister urged the lifting of sanctions against Syria. The Foreign Minister pointed out that the punitive measures were taken against the previous government. "We cannot expect the new administration to respond to international concerns and work for the benefit of its people while the country is under sanctions," he said. At the same time, he rejected Israel's ground incursions into Syrian territory, calling them reckless. "We stress the need for Israeli withdrawal and that those raids should not constitute a new reality," he pointed out.

USA: Thousands, mostly women, demonstrated in Washington DC, New York and Seattle on 18 January to protest against president-elect Donald Trump on the eve of his inauguration. The People's March was organised by a coalition of groups opposing Trump's policies.

NIGERIA: Nigeria has been admitted as a 'partner country' to the BRICS bloc of developing economies, according to Brazil, BRICS' present chair. "[As] the world's sixth largest population – and Africa's largest – as well as being one of the continent's major economies, Nigeria shared convergent interests with other members of BRICS," the Brazilian government said. "It plays an active role in strengthening South-South cooperation and in reorganising global governance issues that are top priorities during Brazil's current presidency." Nigeria becomes the 9th BRICS partner country, joining Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Thailand, Uganda, and Uzbekistan.

BULGARIA: Bulgaria's parliament formally approved a coalition government led by the right-wing GERB party, which has pledged to restore financial stability and maintain cordial relations with the EU and NATO. Rosen Zhelvazkov was elected as prime minister to lead a new government ahead of party leader Boyko Borissov, who led three governments between 2009 and 2021.

BURKINA FASO: Burkina Faso's president banned the use of British and French colonial-style wigs by judges in courts. The president highlighted the necessity of moving away from colonial customs and adopting practices that reflect Burkina Faso's cultural identity.

The "Bandung spirit" lives on

Roger Mckenzie

China's huge growth and trade success have driven the expansion of the BRICS alliance. Now is a good time for the global South to rediscover 1955's historic Bandung conference, and learn its lessons.

This year is the 70th anniversary of the historic Bandung conference, a landmark moment for the global majority.

It was the first-ever summit-level meeting of independence leaders from Africa and Asia and is a beacon for the new mood of determination to break the largely "flag independence" that followed the end of colonialism.

Bandung provides important lessons for the global majority on how to meet the challenges of creating a new multilateral world.

This will be the defining geopolitical project of the remaining three-quarters of the 21st century which must have both Africa and Asia at its heart.

The historic conference in Bandung, Indonesia, took place from April 18-24, 1955.

The gathering included China's Zhou Enl ai, Indian premier Jawaharlal Nehru, president Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, U Nu of Burma and the host, president Sukarno of Indonesia. Leaders from Liberia, Sudan, Gold Coast, Jordan, Iran, Ceylon, Nepal, Pakistan and the Philippines were also present.

It took place against a backdrop of a world increasingly divided between East and West. Conference delegates vowed not just to take a middle ground in the cold war but to assert their own right to independent thought and action.

Many Western powers, including especially the US, were hostile to the conference and the notion of any alliance between the nations of Africa and Asia.

The US feared that they would lose their ability to control the nations of Africa and Asia and lose access to the natural resources that they and their allies had plundered for many years.

They were right to fear this because this is exactly what should happen when the former colonies unite and assert their own agency.

The challenge to the control exerted by the US and its allies over these huge continents through their application of debt and international aid policies is also a blow in favour of genuine independence.

Sukarno's opening speech is well worth recalling. In the speech, Sukarno issued a clear warning to all the leaders at the conference not to believe that colonialism was dead.

He said: "We are often told 'Colonialism is dead.' Let us not be deceived or even soothed by that. I say to you, colonialism is not yet dead.

"How can we say it is dead, so long as vast areas of Asia and Africa are unfree?

"And, I beg of you, do not think of colonialism only in the classic form which we of Indonesia, and our brothers in different parts of Asia and Africa, knew.

"Colonialism also has its modern dress, in the form of economic control, intellectual control, actual physical control by a small but alien community within a nation. It is a skilful and determined enemy and it appears in many guises. It does not give up its loot easily."

Sukarno added: "Wherever, whenever and however it appears, colonialism is an evil thing, and one which must be eradicated from the Earth."

The other 28 leaders gave equally eloquent speeches that also warned about the dangers of colonialism and called for maximum unity, self-determination, mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, and, not least, equality.

The final statement of the conference provided the basis for global majority co-operation with concrete proposals for promoting economic, political, technological, and cultural spheres.

It also declared support for the cause of freedom and independence for all peoples and denounced all forms of colonialism and racism.

Showing that the demand for changes to the structures of the UN is far from new, the leaders also demanded changes to the representation of African and Asian countries on the UN Security Council.

It is worth setting out in full the Ten Principles that were agreed at the conference:

1. Respect for fundamental human rights and for the purposes and the principles of the charter of the UN.

Bandung conference, 1955. Photo: UNESCO/Wikimedia Commons (Public domain)

2. Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations.

3. Recognition of the equality of all races and of the equality of all nations large and small.

4. Abstention from intervention or interference in the internal affairs of another country.

5. Respect for the right of each nation to defend itself singly or collectively, in conformity with the charter of the UN.

6. (a) Abstention from the use of arrangements of collective defence to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers,

6. (b) Abstention by any country from exerting pressures on other countries.

7. Refraining from acts or threats of aggression or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any country.

8. Settlement of all international disputes by peaceful means, such as negotiation, conciliation, arbitration, or judicial settlement as well as other peaceful means of the parties' own choice, in conformity with the charter of the UN.

9. Promotion of mutual interests and co-operation.

10. Respect for justice and international obligation.

The statement concluded by declaring that friendly co-operation in accordance with the Ten Principles would contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security, while co-operation in the economic, social and cultural fields would help bring about the common prosperity and wellbeing of all.

What became known as the "Bandung spirit" led to the establishment in 1961 of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and continues to inspire global majority co-operation.

The NAM was followed by the establishment of the Group of 77 in 1964.

These two multilateral groupings of the global majority provide a collective voice in the UN and other international arenas to promote unity and solidarity in the global South in their common struggle for a fairer world.

The new hope provided by the BRICS bloc of nations – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, supplemented recently with Iran, Ethiopia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and most recently Indonesia – can also trace their lineage to the spirit of Bandung.

But BRICS must learn the lessons of Bandung on how best to handle the backlash from the Western nations that have ruled the roost for centuries.

Key to this will be winning back the right to trade with whatever country BRICS nations wish to trade with without fear of retribution from the US because that nation may have been on the White House naughty list.

China is the great trade success story of the last 20 years thanks to its willingness to engage in win-win relations in the international arena.

This principle is at the heart of BRICS and clearly harks back to the spirit of Bandung.

It may be that a new currency will eventually come about to replace the dollar as the reserve currency. But the development of arrangements for countries of the global South to trade in their own sovereign currencies and not be beholden to the almighty US dollar seems to me to be particularly significant.

Similarly, anything that can break the over-reliance of the global South on debt and so-called international aid can only help to generate genuine independence and the sort of freedom that was obviously desired at the historic Bandung gathering.

The spirit of Bandung is alive and well, but must be ready to face the new challenges of the remainder of the 21st century.

Morning Star

What's fuelling LA's fire crisis?

Svetlana Ekimenko

Multiple wildfires have erupted in California, killing at least 10 people and forcing tens of thousands to evacuate. Damage estimates from the ongoing blazes in and around Los Angeles range from $135 billion to $150 billion, according to AccuWeather.

Los Angeles fire hydrants have run dry as wildfires rage, forcing residents to rely on pool water and garden hoses. Amid the chaos, attention has turned to billionaire agribusiness moguls Stewart and Lynda Resnick, notorious for their control over California's water resources.

The Resnicks own a 57 per cent stake in the Kern Water Bank, one of the state's largest underground water storages.

This control was secured through the controversial Monterey Amendments of 1994, which transferred ownership to five water districts and the Resnicks' private Westside Mutual Water Company, according to More Perfect Union.

Critics accuse the Resnicks of profiting during water shortages by selling stored water at inflated rates and wielding political influence.

A California Watch review found the Resnicks donated US$7,000 to Senator Dianne Feinstein's 2000 campaign, with Mother Jones alleging she later supported drought-era legislation favouring agribusiness.

While the current water crisis is driven by infrastructure issues, climate change, and budget cuts, the Resnicks' massive agricultural water use in California's Central Valley adds further strain to the fragile system.

Also fuelling the crisis, budget cuts have strained firefighting resources. Mayor Karen Bass reduced the LAFD budget by US$17.6 million for 2024-2025, leaving US$837 million – just 65 per cent of the city's US$1.3 billion homeless budget. Firefighter shortages have persisted since 2020.

Sputnik

Sydney Vigil

STOP USA BLOCKADE ON CUBA

4:15 pm till 5:00 pm Monday 17 February

USA Consulate, 50 Miller Street North Sydney

Russia & Iran

Breakthrough strategic agreement

On 17 January, Russian and Iranian presidents Vladimir Putin and Masoud Pezeshkian signed a bilateral Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership following talks in Moscow.

The relations between Russia and Iran are based on the 2001 Treaty on the Fundamentals of Relations and Principles of Cooperation. The treaty is automatically extended every 5 years.

Moscow and Tehran assumed over the years that the document does not meet the new geopolitical realities and on a higher level of cooperation. The parties proceeded to work on a new treaty in January 2022 after Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Moscow.

Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali said on 11 January that the document consists of 47 articles that will determine the relations between the countries in all areas for at least the next 20 years.

"In order to update and draft a new agreement, the foreign ministers of the two countries agreed that the Islamic Republic of Iran will prepare a draft. We prepared the draft and handed it over to the Russian side," he said in an interview with Iranian news agency IRNA. "It took about two and a half to three years, there were many meetings and discussions, numerous changes were made, until an agreement was finally reached," he added.

The document does not provide for the creation of a defence alliance between Russia and Iran, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi noted.

The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement between Russia and Iran is a breakthrough document, Putin said at a press conference following the talks with his Iranian counterpart Pezeshkian, *TASS* reports.

"This truly breakthrough document is aimed at creating necessary conditions for the stable and sustainable development of Russia and Iran, as well as the entire Eurasian region," the president said.

Putin also explained the meaning of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement signed with Iran. The Russian leader pointed out that Moscow and Tehran "are united in their desire to go the extra mile and take relations between the two states to a qualitatively new level."

When asked how to maintain a balance of power in the Middle East, Putin said that one needs to be guided by the UN Charter.

"One should not try to use the norms of international law for some selfish interests, turning them instantaneously in a direction that is advantageous to one or a group of states. One should not replace the UN Charter with some rules that no one has ever seen," he said.

In 2024, Russia signed two interstate agreements in the field of security:

The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement with the DPRK (signed on 19 June during Putin's visit to Pyongyang, entered into force on 4 December), which assumes that one side will provide military assistance to the other in the event of an attack.

The agreement with Belarus on security guarantees within the Union State (signed on 6 December), which assumes that in the event of a threat to the Union State, the parties will be able to use all forces stationed in Belarus including tactical nuclear weapons.

Pravda

Cuba rejects new Trump measures

The Revolutionary Government of Cuba has issued a strong statement in response to recent decisions by US President Donald Trump, who has intensified economic warfare measures against the island.

The statement was led by the foreign minister of the Caribbean nation, who declared that since the first day of his term, Trump has attacked Cuba "without any pretext."

According to the statement, this includes denouncing the inclusion of the country on the list of states alleged to sponsor terrorism. This designation, described as "arbitrary," reflects an "absolute disregard for the truth."

The statement issued by the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs on January 14 had already anticipated that "the government of that country could revert in the future the measures adopted today." This, according to the text, "demonstrates the lack of legitimacy, ethics, consistency, and reason for its conduct against Cuba." Additionally, U.S. politicians are criticized for their inability to find valid justifications for their actions.

This, according to the text, "demonstrates the lack of legitimacy, ethics, consistency, and reason for its conduct against Cuba." Additionally, US politicians are criticised for their inability to find valid justifications for their actions.

The statement also lashes out at Trump's ambitions, describing him as an "emperor" with expansionist desires ranging from conquering Canada to stripping the Panama Canal. This new act of aggression is presented as a reaction to the "inability to bend our will" and to the support that the Cuban Revolution has garnered at the international level.

The new economic measures, which are added to the existing blockade, are intended to have a "very harmful effect" on the Cuban economy and the well-being of its people. However, the statement highlights the gratitude of the Cuban people for the many expressions of solidarity received from various parts of the world.

Finally, the message concludes with a strong reminder of the determination of the Cuban people: "Here prevails the conviction that CUBA WILL WIN. HOMELAND OR DEATH, WE WILL WIN." This statement reaffirms Cuba's commitment to its sovereignty and resistance to external pressures.

Telesur

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Half the Sky

Women in Korea

Amelia, Canberra

One of the key policy areas of South Korea's *Minjung Party* (translated as "Progressive Party") is fighting for women's rights, feminism, and the rights of LGBTIQA+ people. This is a hot topic in South Korea given the extreme far-right, anti-feminist conservative government of Yoon Suk Yeol and the People Power Party (PPP). Protests against the now-impeached Yoon were overwhelmingly by women in their 20s and 30s. Teenage women also led the 2008 candlelight protests against US beef imports and unequal trade agreements, and the 2002 protests concerning 2 schoolgirls killed by a US military vehicle. The South is deeply divided over women's rights. But the status of women in North Korea is rarely discussed; how do women fare in the North?

The story of women in North Korea is an extraordinary one that dates back to the revolution, overcoming Japanese imperialism in the first half of the 20th century, and then US imperialism from the 1950s – the country was carpet-bombed by the US to such an extent that every city in the country, was flattened: 90 per cent of all buildings across the whole country were destroyed. This war crime has not been acknowledged. In the early period of reconstruction after the US atrocities, what was known as the *inminban* (neighbourhood watch-like form of cooperative local organisation) had women playing a significant role in community leadership.

Then came the Korean Women's Socialist League, which demanded education, maternity leave and other provisions from the government. The League played an oversized role in the formation of North Korean communist principles. Women also joined the workforce *en masse* in this period, in many sectors, like journalism, teaching and administration. As Suzy Kim puts it in her fascinating book *Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950*, women in the revolutionary period went from living a subservient and exploited "family life" to a "socially productive life," with the right to public office, the vote, and full participation in the everyday life of socialist modernity.

Laws like the Law on Sex Equality in 1946 saw women receive equal rights in all spheres of rights, including free marriage and divorce, equal rights to property and land, and an end to polygamy, arranged marriage, concubinage, and prostitution.

But women's rights didn't stop in the revolutionary period up to 1950. The Chollima Movement ("Flying Horse") which began in the late 1950s saw an upsurge in women's work as well as the socialisation of housework – the provision of public laundries. In the 1972 constitution women received not just rights but material benefits, including maternity leave without pay, maternity hospitals, free nurseries and kindergartens, and reduced working hours for working mothers. Now, in the Kim Jong-Un era, we are seeing women occupy positions of leadership in the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK). Women workers are glorified in DPRK media.

As feminists in the West, it is easy to overlook the hard work of women in the Third and Second Worlds in women's social advancement and in fighting for rights that it can be easy for us to take for granted. But in the case of Korea, it is even more inspiring – women engaged in the construction of socialism and communism. The role of ordinary working class women, of Marxist-Leninist women in the socialist countries, is often overlooked. Any discussion of the North is likely to be mocked in the West, where the North stands only for "tyranny" and "evil." But the contribution of Korean women is real and ongoing. They are the front line of the global class struggle, and we stand with them.

Capitalism, AI, and class

Graham Holton

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing the face of the world. Like all transformations and 'revolutions' in society that capitalism has wrought, AI has enormous possibility for good, but the problem is that it remains firmly in the grip of private capital and the capitalist state. It serves the interests of profit.

Inequality has never been greater as capitalism devours all before it in a quest to maintain and expand profit, even as the rate of profit shrinks. We hear that AI technology has been used to restore sight to the blind. This is astonishing and offers hope for the future. At the same time, here in Australia, we can't find a bulk-billing doctor. Basic health-care is out of reach for millions. Just another contradiction of capitalism.

What does the rise, resistible or irresistible, of AI mean for the future? Does it mean a bright, profitable new golden age for capital, without the irritation of workers? Or does it mean a further irreconcilable contradiction for capitalism and another nail that it is driving into its own coffin? What does it mean for the working class?

Huge amounts of capital are being pumped into AI technology by capitalism. Rival capitalist states and corporations wage war with each other to 'get there first.' It is, for capital, the latest and possibly last throw of the dice. Ever since capitalism arrived on the world stage, it has been engaged in a life and death struggle for survival and for growth.

CAPITALISM

Capitalism derives its wealth from an ever-intensifying extraction of surplus value from labour. It has also been constantly hunted and haunted by a tendency for the rate of profit to fall. Capital has sought to forestall this by speeding up production, incorporating more and more technological innovations to increase production using fewer workers, globalisation of production, the physical movement of capital and production to low wage regimes, and now the last bright and best hope appears in the form of AI.

Much of the innovation of capitalist production over the past two centuries has had a progressive capacity. Revolutions in transport, in technology that make work less strenuous, in scientific advances, have all had the potential to liberate and yet all have, ultimately, tied the working class more closely to the bourgeoisie. Fundamentally, AI has an enormous potential for good and yet, it is already a fearful thing as hundreds of millions of jobs are forecast to be destroyed in the very near future.

Capitalism, as Marx and Engels described in the *Manifesto*, "with its relations of production, of exchange, and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells." The spectre that capitalism has conjured, the all-devouring monster of its creation is now set to destroy itself and the working class along with it.

SHORT-SIGHTEDNESS

The ideologists of capitalism accept the madness and short-sightedness of their masters. There seems to be a sincere belief that the new technology will bring a solution to the crisis of capitalism. They seem to seriously believe there will be total profit to be derived from the machines. There seems to be a belief that a fully-automated capitalism, disencumbered by labour will seize the heights. In denying the role of labour in the acquisition of profit, the system turns its back on economic theory and the historical development of capitalism. They ignore and deny their own history.

Surplus value is the basis of capitalist growth and profit. The worker who provides that surplus is also a consumer. An entire class of workers both produce and consume products that require a new and eternal round of production, creating surplus and profit and importantly, reproducing capital.

Slavery came to an end because slaves had no capacity to increase capital by consumption, or by purchasing the fruits of their labour. The reproduction of capital was, at best, minimal. Somehow, in the fevered imagination of capitalists AI, which in a raw economic sense is the modern-day equivalence of slavery, offers answers to perennial economic problems and crises. At best it will produce dividends for sections of capital and for a relatively short period of time, before the same contradictions that drove capital to the wall recur.

Individual capitalists and economies, seek a comparative advantage over their rivals. Where one capitalist concern introduces an innovation to lift profit rates, then others must follow. This is happening before our eyes with the introduction of AI across so many sections of industry. The bourgeois economists use the term 'restructuring' of the labour market to describe the wholesale job-shedding that the new technology ensures.

The US multinational investment bank, Goldman Sachs, released a major report in 2024. It described a "disruption" to the labour market in the coming period. This "disruption," according to the report, will mean 300 million workers being 'exposed' to the effects of AI and that 60 per cent of all jobs would be affected to some degree by the automation that is coming. The report indicates that up to a quarter of all current work carried out in the USA and in the EU could be automated.

Image: Wesley Fryer – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

It has also been reported that global employment in the developed capitalist economies is likely to shrink by 5 per cent this year as a direct result of AI technologies.

The 'transformation' of work and society that AI is bringing is hardly a uniform thing. Human labour, as the source of surplus value and profit will not disappear. The division of labour between skilled and unskilled will sharpen. The exploitation of labour will intensify. The 'army of unemployed' will grow, thereby allowing employers to further push down wages.

The concept of a privileged workforce will assume a greater reality. There will be a section of the skilled workforce who, by dint of human intelligence, will control production and there will be those whose tasks will be beyond the scope of the 'intelligence' of the machine. Their value, the surplus they produce, will ensure their place in a hierarchy of labour.

AI, as a tool of capital, will support capitalism and immediate profitability. The working class will be increasingly compelled to exist in ever more poorly paid jobs. Our bourgeois economists and statisticians show that employment remained high in Australia after the collapse of the manufacturing industry. They are right. A look at the casualised workforce, the struggling families working two and three part-time jobs, the gig economy, all attest to the fact that 'employment' remains high. Wages, however, shrink.

AI will remain and increase. Capitalism demands it to be so. It is foolish to assume otherwise. Marxism does not advocate a return to the 'levellers,' to Luddism, to the machine breakers. Marxism does advocate and demands that the machinery of capitalism be taken and used for the good of the working class. ✪

60 per cent of all jobs would be affected to some degree by the automation that is coming.

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