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TWO-PARTY POWER GRAB

Marcus Browning

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In a move reflecting the common ground in policies between the government and Coalition, and to sideline the Greens and independents, the Albanese Labor government and the Liberal-National Coalition have cut a backroom deal to push through electoral laws that kneecap charities from speaking out during elections.

Backed by both major parties, the laws passed near midnight on 12 February after debate was cut inside Parliament while questions from minor parties and independents went unanswered. The legislation gives the Labor and Liberal/National parties an extra $80 million of taxpayer money per election to fund their political campaigns, but makes it much harder for charities, independents, and minor parties to hold power to account.

The bills ban charities from using general donations on public communications about "electoral matters", which includes commentary on issues like climate change during an election campaign.

Climate Council CEO Amanda McKenzie called the dirty deal an attack on democracy and truth in politics. "This law kneecaps charities from doing their essential work during elections. By silencing independent voices, the Labor and Liberal parties are making sure Australians only hear from politicians on issues like climate change.

"This law gags independent and fearless advocates like the Climate Council from speaking out on the very issue we were set up to solve. How will Australians know what politicians are up to on climate change, if the only voices left in the debate during elections are politicians or their financial backers in the fossil fuel industry?"

It's not just charities being silenced. The major parties have also stitched up the rules to disadvantage independents. Meanwhile, the big parties will still be able to pull in millions through their state branches, effectively sidestepping the new donation limits.

The new law does nothing to crack down on the real threat to democracy: the influence of vested interests and big corporate donors. Instead, it targets organisations working in the public interest while the Minerals Council and Business Council get special exemptions.

"Voters want fair and transparent elections, not politicians rigging the rules in their own favour," said McKenzie.

"This isn't reform, it's a power grab that entrenches political power at the expense of our climate and Australian voters."

Since its election in 2022, the Albanese government has drawn Australia into the AUKUS military pact in preparations for a war on China. It has pushed forward to unprecedented levels the militarisation of the nation, and overseen the further integration of the Australian military into the US war machine. It has backed fascist rule in Israel and Ukraine, and turned its back on the United Nations.

Instead, in synch with the Coalition, the government has given up Australia's independence and sovereignty to play toady to the US strategy of war and domination.

To bolster its position and enforce its policies of war, governments both federal and state have introduced legislation outlawing protest and freedom of speech with mandatory sentencing overriding rights of appeal.

In NSW, the Minns Labor government, in concert with its federal counterpart, has introduced new laws to parliament under cover of the beat-up around antisemitism that would give police new powers to shut down any protests held near places of worship regardless of their purpose.

There is some opposition within NSW Labor against the laws, with MPs pointing out that the legislation "has nothing to do with people being harassed going into a synagogue or church."

Sarah Schwartz of the Human Rights Centre called the legislation "rushed, kneejerk laws" that criminalise "a vague range of activities" and that "there is no evidence that protests outside places of worship have any connection to the recent spate of serious antisemitic incidents."

In the context of a growing economic crisis, the Albanese government has intensified its undermining of Medicare and introduced vicious anti-union legislation which has seen the government take over the Construction Division of the CFMEU and pursue its officials through the courts, to the applause of the employers and the Coalition. More attacks on the union movement are in the pipeline.

CPA ELECTION POLICIES

All these issues are at stake in the coming federal election.

During the election campaign the CPA will advocate:

1. Opposition to the militarisation of Australia, support for the United Nations, for withdrawal from AUKUS, and the maintenance of Australia's political, economic and military independence and sovereignty
2. The extension of democratic rights. This means the encouragement of participation by people in political life
3. The maintenance of Medicare with universal bulk-billing, full funding for public hospitals and defence of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
4. The diversion of government monies from private schools to the public education system
5. The abolition of university fees
6. The repeal of anti-democratic and anti-trade union industrial legislation.

The Communist Party supports left and progressive candidates who have people-centred policies and whose election can help challenge the two-party system and the Coalition-Labor grip on political power.

In the coming federal election, progressive independents and the Greens have the possibility of winning seats in both Houses of Parliament, and so undermining the two-party system. They have many progressive policies committed to peace, social justice, democratic rights and effective climate action.

On this occasion, in most electorates, they are therefore likely to be the best choice among any progressive candidates.

We propose the following preferences for House of Representative candidates:

- No. 1 vote for one of the left and progressive candidates in your electorate
- Always put Liberal, National Party and other right-wing candidates last
- For the Senate, vote for The Greens. ✪

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Imperialism and sub-Saharan Africa

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Real Divisions

Division has been in the news again. The idea has been used as an attack line for some time. Opposition Leader Peter Dutton made a big song and dance about not standing in front of Indigenous flags he said were "divisive." Protests supporting Palestine, and shows of support like wearing the keffiyeh have long been described as divisive. Most recently, a Murdoch tabloid, Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* has made a goose of itself by trying but failing to stoke division by getting some stooge to walk around a cafe asking the staff to say "Shalom" and claiming he found a picture of a Palestinian singer threatening. (You can read all about it on page 5 of this issue).

On one level, it all seems a bit silly. What's wrong with people having differences of opinion? Who says we aren't allowed to be divided if that's what we want? There are a couple of problems with the whole idea.

There's trying to divide people who really aren't divided at all. There's also using fake 'division' to distract from real divisions. The two are related.

In the case of Peter Dutton, stirring up racial division where not much actually exists is his bread and butter. Let's not forget the 'African gangs' disgrace (Dutton should *never* be allowed to forget it). The man who dislikes Australians being divided so much that he won't talk in front of Indigenous flags demonised Black Victorians by claiming that people in Melbourne were afraid to go to restaurants because of these non-existent gangs. Naturally Dutton had help from Murdoch's NewsCorp papers, who published cartoons demonising Black people as rampaging criminals.

When Dutton refused to stand in front of the flags, he was pretending that there had been a time when Australia was a division-free utopia, Aboriginal and non-indigenous Australians living in harmony. That implication is contradicted by the experience of every Indigenous person in the country.

Fascism, the servant of capitalism in times of stress, tries to stoke fake divisions between ethnic groups to cover over actual divisions. Migrants don't steal jobs and attack good conditions, billionaires do. It's not people from a different background who indulge in wage theft and exploitation – it's the class that has always exploited working people.

Other serious stoking of division has been between construction workers and other working people. Seizure of the CFMEU union from its members followed a campaign of demonisation of the construction workers union as thugs, criminals, bikies, drug dealers, you name it. CFMEU members might not look like the people you work with, if you're not a building worker yourself, but you have more in common with them; than you do with people who look just as white collar as you do, but is exploiting your labour.

These are fake divisions – if you're working for a living, you have much more in common with people with a different ethnic background who are also workers. Certainly more than with the billionaire owner of *The Daily Telegraph*.

The fake divisions are being stoked for a reason, to hide real unity we have with people in the same boat as us. This paper will continue to draw people's attention to the real divisions we face.

Robodebt reckoning

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) welcomes the announcement from the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) that they will investigate six individuals over their role in the unlawful Robodebt scheme.

The Royal Commission exposed the scheme as cruel and illegal, while the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) found senior officials had breached the APS Code of Conduct on nearly 100 occasions.

Despite these findings, those responsible have so far avoided consequences.

The CPSU has long advocated for those responsible to be held to account. This advocacy has included writing to the NACC urging them to reopen their investigation and writing to the Council for the Order of Australia requesting that they strip Kathryn Campbell of her honours.

The union, which represents those who worked in Centrelink during the crisis, has fought against the Robodebt scheme since it began.

CPSU National Secretary, Melissa Donnelly stated: "The announcement that the National Anti-Corruption Commission will investigate the six individuals that were referred to the body following the Robodebt Royal Commission, will be welcomed by CPSU members.

"For years, the architects of Robodebt have walked away without consequence, while the people they harmed have been left to pick up the pieces. That is unacceptable.

"The lives of countless Australians were devastated by this scheme, a Royal Commission labelled it cruel and illegal, and an APSC investigation found that senior officials, including former agency heads Kathryn Campbell and Renee Leon, breached the Code of Conduct on 97 occasions.

"This is an important moment in the ongoing push for accountability, and we continue to hope that it delivers the transparency, justice, and accountability so many Australians have been waiting for."

Meanwhile, the CPSU's commitment to the public service has secured major improvements to the ACT government's proposed recruitment freeze, reversing some of its most damaging aspects.

Following advocacy from the CPSU, the Government has significantly altered its approach, shifting from a rigid policy to a set of recruitment "guidelines" that allow for more flexibility across ACT Public Service (ACTPS) Directorates.

The CPSU has welcomed these changes but reiterated the union's strong opposition to the freeze itself and cautioned the ACT government against similar moves in the future.

Key Outcomes

- The recruitment freeze is now a guidance document rather than a policy, ensuring that Enterprise Agreement provisions take precedence.
- The ban on Higher Duties Allowance has gone, meaning workers acting in higher duties will continue to be paid accordingly.
- A review of the freeze will take place in April 2025, creating the potential for an early end to restrictions before the originally proposed June 2025 conclusion.
- Clear decision-making guidance for Director-Generals, including:
  - ◇ Recognition that recruitment decisions rest with Director-Generals or their delegates.
  - ◇ A requirement to consider Work Health and Safety (WHS) impacts.
  - ◇ A mandate for union consultation.
  - ◇ Assurance that funded roles can continue.
  - ◇ The need for Directorates to justify workload distribution when a position is not continued.

Maddy Northam, CPSU ACT Regional Secretary, said the ACTPS recruitment freeze was wrong, rushed, poorly communicated.

"Through the collective action of CPSU members, we've been able to secure crucial protections for workers and prevent some of the worst impacts from occurring.

"We have unfortunately already seen the harmful effects on frontline services, particularly in Canberra Health Services, where patient-facing jobs are not being renewed.

"To be frank, Canberrans deserve better than this. Attacking our public services is a low blow to workers and the community.

"The CPSU is determined to ensure that nothing like this is put on the table again."

RAFFWU Solidarity with Bangladesh

Retail and Fast Food Workers' Union (RAFFWU) members travelled to Dhaka in Bangladesh as part of a solidarity visit to meet with workers and union leaders. This followed a solidarity visit to Australia in 2023 by Taslima and Rupali of Bangladesh Garment Workers Solidarity (BGWS) as part of an Australia-Asia Worker Links (AAWL) program coinciding with the tenth anniversary of the Rana Plaza disaster when over 1,100 workers were murdered in a building collapse.

RAFFWU members Michael and Josh took the opportunity to share solidarity and stories from RAFFWU workers back home.

The visit followed a major uprising by student and worker activists in July and August 2024. The uprising began about special treatment in public position selection for descendants of the freedom fighters in Bangladesh's 1971 War of Independence. It spread quickly following violent repression to include many activists across the working class. The crackdown against the actions led to around 2,000 murders by goons and police. Despite this, the irrepressible spirit of millions of voices overthrew the fascist regime, and the autocratic Prime Minister fled the country.

Since August a special interim government with broad support has been charting a course towards a democratic election in the coming year. It was in this context that Josh and Michael visited for a week in January 2025. Josh had previously visited Bangladesh on solidarity visits, with AAWL, in 2014. They met with a number of unions including the Garment Workers Trade Union Centre (GWTUC), Bangladesh Garment Workers Solidarity (BGWS), Garment Workers Liberation Movement (GWLM) and the Garment Workers Unity Forum (GWUF).

In each meeting they learned more about the situation of garment workers in Bangladesh, the events of the 2024 uprising, the involvement of students and workers, and the hopes of workers as they emerge from a fascist regime.

While the Australian government has expressed support for the interim government, it should not be lost on anyone that the Australian government for many years – both Labor and Coalition – actively supported the previous regime which brutally oppressed workers.

RAFFWU

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Labor's big fail

Anna Pha

Labor has been in office for almost three years. It has introduced a number of progressive reforms, but in the lead-up to the federal elections it is worth looking at what Labor has not done, but should have.

The two greatest existential threats that humanity faces are nuclear war and climate change.

Climate change: Labor has sped up the approval and expansion of coal and gas projects. Ignoring the relevant science, it has failed dismally to curb fossil fuel production. It remains addicted to fossil fuel donations. A Coalition government would follow Trump's suicidal "drill, baby, drill!" approach.

Nuclear war: With tensions rising in the Middle East, the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and the US government declaring China as the enemy, the risk of nuclear war is real. Labor supported AUKUS, has handed over hundreds of millions of dollars to the US, and expanded the presence of US military personnel and weaponry. In addition it has facilitated the expansion of US military facilities in Australia and further integration of Australian forces into the US command.

The government has turned Australia into a launching pad for a war by the US against China and surrendered our sovereignty and independence. This has Coalition support.

Trade union rights: Labor made a few progressive reforms but failed to repeal the repressive laws restricting the right to take industrial action – one of the most critical trade union rights. Instead it stole the Construction and General Division of the CFMEU from its members, thus denying them their voice in their union's affairs in contravention of ILO Conventions.

Inflation: Prices have continued to rise under Labor adding to the inflation that developed under the Coalition, although at a slower rate in more recent times. The government failed to put price caps on rents, gas and electricity, food and groceries, or abolish university fees.

Interest rates: The government *had* the power to override the Reserve Bank of Australia's successive interest rate hikes that have driven many families into poverty or default on their mortgage repayments. Instead of using this power it has legislated to remove it.

NDIS: Labor passed legislation claiming to strengthen the NDIS. The legislation amounted to a crude cost-cutting exercise resulting in people with disability being denied access or losing access to the scheme. The mechanism that enabled additional payments in line with inflation during the period of a package was removed. The scheme is still largely privatised, and as such will continue to cost more through layers of profit and rorting by the private sector.

Education: The government has had three years to redistribute funding to address the huge disparities in payments between public and private education. Public schools are still falling short of the standard set by Gonski, even though it is Labor policy to meet this level of funding. The Coalition would be no better.

Labor failed to curb fossil fuel production. Photo: Harry Rose – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

Housing: Labor has failed to tackle the serious rental crisis. Instead, it has committed funding to developers and those who can afford to purchase a home. Only token amounts have been allocated for public rental accommodation.

Social security: Labor, like the Coalition before it, has failed to raise the rate. Social security recipients continue to struggle below the poverty line on punitively low payments. Capitalism sees them as second class, dispensable citizens, as not having the potential for maximising exploitation.

The Youth and Student Allowances for a single person living away from home is a paltry $47 a day which is 36 per cent of the minimum wage of $130.84 a day for a full-time worker. Jobseeker is $57.32 a day. The Disability Support Pension is $47.32 a day and the Age Pension for a single person is $83.14.

Aged care: There is a shortage of home care packages. Labor has made some progressive reforms to the residential aged care sector in terms of care and staffing, and by supporting a 15 per cent wage rise for aged care workers. However, it failed to address the profit-gouging by private operators. Quality of care is superior in state and community centres, and costs are far lower.

Women: Labor has failed to adequately fund measures to address domestic violence, legal services, accommodation for women, and other measures to improve the position of women. The gender pay gap remains large and economic security of women still needs to be addressed.

Indigenous: Following the defeat of the Voice referendum, Labor appears to have abandoned its support for truth-telling and treaty-making. It has failed to adequately fund housing and services for remote communities and has not given them control over their own affairs. The Coalition would be worse.

Health care: The government has not adequately funded Medicare or included dental care under the scheme. It has fallen short on funding to states and territories that are responsible for public hospitals. It didn't touch the $8 billion subsidy to private hospitals via private health insurance funds. It failed to introduce truly universal bulk-billing.

Taxation: Labor has not tackled the issue of tax avoidance, with one in three large corporations paying no tax. Instead, it has handed out tax cuts to the wealthy.

Privatisation: Labor has failed to nationalise key infrastructure and enterprises which were once publicly owned.

A Dutton Coalition govern would not do better on any of these areas. In fact, it would roll back almost all of the few progressive reforms introduced by Labor.

With such shortcomings, it's not surprising Labor has lost its social democrat credentials and former strong connections to and support from the working class. The ALP always was a party that claimed to rule for everyone, but it's obvious that it rules for donors first and foremost.

The abandonment of social democracy commenced in earnest under the Hawke/Keating government in the mid-1980s when it began deregulating the economy, privatising state enterprises and services, winding back welfare and contracting out government functions.

Successive Australian governments are not alone in their pursuit of neoliberalism or militarisation as dictated by the US. Across OECD countries such as the UK, the US, and Canada similar policies were pursued. So, it is no coincidence that OECD countries are experiencing the culmination of four decades of neoliberalism in the form of multiple crises in the cost of living, housing, healthcare, social security payments, public services, and climate change.

Nor is it a coincidence that the extreme right is on the rise in OECD countries as they promise the changes that people are demanding but which neither the Coalition nor Labor has delivered.

This resurgence of the extreme right must and can only be countered by the united and militant struggle of trade unions, environmental and peace groups, and other progressive organisations and individuals to bring about real change.

10 income support deaths: ACOSS demands action

ACOSS is demanding an overhaul of the income support compliance system following shocking revelations that at least 10 people have died after being wrongfully cut off from vital payments.

"We have known for years that payment suspensions and cancellation have extremely harmful impacts on people, including homelessness, relationship breakdown, and destitution," said ACOSS CEO Cassandra Goldie.

"Revelations that at least 10 people have died after having their income support payments wrongfully cut off are shocking, devastating and demand an immediate response from the Federal Government.

"The Targeted Compliance Framework that cuts off people's payments must be urgently stopped and overhauled."

In November it was revealed that around 1,000 income support payments may have been illegally cancelled in the period between April 2022 and July 2024.

A previous computer failure that wrongly cut people off from income support was reportedly discovered by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations in 2020 but no action was taken for more than three years.

Following an ACOSS complaint, the Commonwealth Ombudsman is now investigating serious issues with the Targeted Compliance Framework with a focus on whether income support cancellations are being made in a way that is lawful, reasonable and fair.

The system has been plagued by errors in recent years, including previous instances of confirmed illegal payment cancellations and large scale IT problems leading to confusion and distress for people affected.

Since its introduction in 2018, ACOSS has consistently opposed the Targeted Compliance Framework and formally warned successive Ministers about the serious harm it causes, urging the payment suspensions to be stopped.

"Every three months 240,000 people – over a third of people in Workforce Australia – have their payment suspended. The TCF must be urgently removed to prevent further harm to people on low incomes," said Dr Goldie.

ACOSS

Dutton opposes childcare cost-of-living relief for families

Australian Unions have blasted the Coalition for trying to defeat cost-of-living relief for families paying for childcare.

The Senate has passed the government's bill to guarantee parents a minimum three days of subsidised childcare, helping more than 100,000 families to get more hours of subsidised care.

The Coalition voted against the Bill on the grounds that it would replace the activity test. The Test has been heavily criticised for creating barriers for young families to access work and care.

Coalition Senators and United Australia Party Senator Ralph Babet, Former Queensland Liberal-turned-Independent Gerard Rennick and One Nation voted against the early childhood education and care cost-of-living relief.

The Coalition also earlier opposed government commitments to build 160 urgently needed childcare centres in outer urban and regional Australia.

The bill's passing means the next step towards universal childcare will pass into law before the federal election, guaranteeing three days of subsidised childcare fee relief for about 66,700 families and extra hours for more than 100,000 families from January next year.

Families who gain access to additional childcare will save $1,460 a year on average from the measures that apply to families earning between $50,000 and $100,000.

The Coalition has consistently tried to stop parents from getting extra relief from childcare costs, despite a Productivity Commission review recommending the current parents' activity test be scrapped as it hurts families who need childcare most without changing workforce participation.

ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien said "Childcare is one of the biggest expenses for a young family.

"Peter Dutton is happy to give bosses long free lunches but refuses to support families struggling with the costs of childcare.

"Peter Dutton and the Coalition are not interested in helping families make ends meet. If they were they would have voted in support of these measures."

O'Brien also pointed out that the Coalition has opposed pay rises for early educators – calling those "a sugar hit."

The Communist Party of Australia supports free government-run properly paid early childhood education.

Union asks what uni leaders have to hide

The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) has raised serious concerns about university leaders' reaction to a federal parliamentary inquiry into governance.

The Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee has released its full terms of reference with the inquiry to look at a raft of issues including governing bodies, transparency and accountability, employment practices, executive pay and the use of consultants.

Universities have been preemptively defensive about the inquiry, using terms like "witch-hunt" and warning of "knee-jerk" regulations. With masterful understatement, the Murdoch University vice chancellor said that there had been "some instances of less than desirable behaviour" and objected to wage theft being called wage theft because "nobody ever intended to underpay their staff."

The NTEU has campaigned hard for a federal parliamentary inquiry into university governance after a raft of scandals uncovered shocking mismanagement of public institutions.

NTEU National President Dr Alison Barnes said university leaders – including vice-chancellors, chancellors and executives – should not ignore serious sector-wide problems.

"Just to name a few issues, we've seen $734 million splashed on consultants in a single year, a hiring-firing yo-yo, an insecure work explosion and the stacking of university governance bodies with corporate appointees," Dr Barnes said.

"That's before we even mention obscene executive pay, more than $400 million in wage theft and conflicts of interest that would make the corporate sector blush.

"It's incredibly concerning that despite all these issues, some university leaders want to keep their heads firmly in the sand and deny there's serious systemic problems.

"The governance crisis denialism we're seeing does nothing to improve universities so staff are given the best possible chance to provide world-class teaching and research.

"The terms of reference make it clear that this inquiry is designed to find genuine ways to reform higher education. It's a mission all universities must commit to.

"We want to thank Committee Chair Tony Sheldon and his fellow senators for backing such an important inquiry into university governance."

The inquiry will present its report on 4 April, and will take submissions until 3 March.

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Australian soccer star Samantha Kerr has been found not guilty of racially harassing a London policeman after calling him "stupid and white" during an incident in 2023.

Dr Megan McElhone, Senior Lecturer, Criminology, at Monash University noted that Kerr was widely condemned when news broke that she had called a London police officer "stupid and white" during an altercation.

"But many argued her comments did not amount to racism given the power dynamics at play: not only is Kerr of Indian descent, but official inquiries have found the Metropolitan Police to be institutionally racist.

"Historically, police have played a role in sustaining colonialism, racism and white supremacy. Calling Kerr's words racist overlooks that they don't accord with an entrenched, global system of power.

"Broadly speaking, public order offences criminalise words and behaviour that might breach the peace. Police have significant discretion to use these offences as tools to regulate people's uses of public space.

"In Australia and the UK, police have been shown to use these powers in discriminatory ways. Kerr has conceded her behaviour was regrettable, but the charge against her is difficult to align with the purpose of public order."

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: are the fossil fuel polluters, led by the mining companies. The Climate Council says climate pollution is amplifying the extreme rain and flooding that's pummelled Queenslanders, as Victorians grapple with being flung between fire and storm conditions.

Climate Councillor, Professor David Karoly said: "Our thoughts are with everyone enduring bushfires and heat in Victoria, as well as those impacted by the ongoing flood emergency in north Queensland, where some areas had close to two metres of rain in the past three days.

"This flooding comes after 2024 was declared the world's hottest year on record – a year in which the total amount of water in our atmosphere also reached record levels. We know a warmer world is a wetter world overall and, sadly, Queenslanders are suffering the consequences time and time again.

"As the 2024 State of the Climate Report from CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology notes, since 1994, wet season rainfall in northern Australia has been 20 per cent above the 1900-1993 average. Seven of the 10 wettest wet seasons in northern Australia have occurred since 1998.

"This extremely heavy rainfall around Townsville and Ingham is happening because climate pollution, caused by the burning of coal, oil and gas, has warmed our oceans and air to a point where heavy rainfall events are more intense.

"The full scale of the damage will take some time to calculate, as communities have a long clean-up ahead and the next devastating flood event or heatwave could be just around the corner."

Professor Karoly said that Victorians have also been left shaken by extreme conditions this week: "Historically, fires have often occurred in Victoria at this time of year but what climate pollution is doing is making rapid, wild swings in conditions more likely. This experience of 'climate whiplash' has flung Victorians from one extreme to another, with the state almost simultaneously experiencing heatwaves, fires, storms and flash floods.

"As a Victorian, I'm feeling for those who have lost property or suffered damages from these events. Yet, as a climate scientist I am resolute because I know the solutions are clear. We need to accelerate our switch to renewable energy, battery storage, cleaner transport and manufacturing to slash climate pollution and prevent climate whiplash that's hurling us from one unnatural disaster to another.''

"It starts with words"

Inside the *Daily Telegraph*'s failed provocation

Talaat Sehia is a chef at Cairo Takeaway, a restaurant on Enmore Road in Sydney's inner west.

Talaat was working on an early Wednesday afternoon when a man came in and ordered a mint tea. The man was wearing a crisp white t-shirt, a blue-and-white baseball cap emblazoned with the Star of David and a Star of David pendant.

"He came in and ordered a tea, which Sam, the waitress gave him," Talaat says. "It was a takeaway tea, but once he got it, he just stood there, he didn't leave. And because the place was empty, he just stood out."

Given his dress and strange behaviour, Talaat was worried the man had hostile intentions.

"I knew he was a provocateur straight away. The way he was dressed, I thought 'Oh fuck, here we go,' but I just put my head down and kept cutting an onion," he says. "I thought maybe he was just a bit of a loony who would get his tea and leave."

However, the man soon began trying to start a verbal altercation with the waitress who had served him.

"Sam asked him whether he needed anything, to which he replied: 'Do you have a problem with me because I'm Jewish?'" Talaat says. "She was taken aback by this, because she knows nothing about the situation in Palestine. She asked him if he could leave and not cause any trouble, and he asked again if it was because he was Jewish.

"He asked her to say the word 'shalom' – 'Can you say the word 'shalom' for me? Why won't you say 'shalom'? Have you got something against Jews?'"

Talaat says the man also claimed he found a mural on the wall "intimidating," and that he felt "unsafe." Talaat posted later on X that the mural in question depicts Umm Kulthum, an Egyptian singer and actress who died in 1975.

At some point, Sam stepped outside onto Enmore Road, where she was confronted by a journalist, cameraman and photographer from the *Daily Telegraph* who had been waiting across the laneway.

"We didn't know who they were, but the two men had big cameras, so I made the assumption they were some kind of media. I knew that was the situation," Talaat says. "Every time the conversation got heated, the tall cameraman would get his camera up and start filming. So he was waiting for a moment."

Sam became upset and began filming the trio – *Telegraph* journalist Danielle Gusmaroli, photographer Rohan Kelly and video producer Jeremy Span. (I have sent questions to Gusmaroli and *Daily Telegraph* editor Ben English regarding the incident, but have not heard back.)

The confrontation began to draw attention from passersby and people in nearby shops.

"Other people in the street and from neighbouring shops, just random people, came out and started telling the *Daily Telegraph* people to leave, saying 'Get out of our community, you're causing trouble.' Two Indigenous guys came out and gave them a mouthful," Talaat laughs.

At this point, Kelly began urging Gusmaroli, Span and the man in the white t-shirt to leave the area.

"The tall cameraman was grabbing the female journalist and saying 'We need to leave' because a lot of people were coming now and screaming at them," he says. They weren't in control of the situation anymore. That seemed obvious to the tall guy."

The man in the white t-shirt has been identified as Ofir Birenbaum, a consultant for a software company and a prolific Zionist agitator who has been extensively quoted and profiled by News Corp publications. The Australian Jewish Association has also described Birenbaum as a "Friend of AJA" in multiple social media posts.

In December 2024, Birenbaum appeared on *Sky News* after claiming he was moved on by police after confronting a pro-Palestinian protest outside the Great Synagogue in the Sydney CBD. The protest was directed against the Synagogue's hosting of an event with Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, an Israeli university that supplies armoured bulldozers to the IDF.

In November 2023, Birenbaum was quoted extensively in *The Australian* after organising a rally outside the electorate office of Greens senator Mehreen Faruqi, during which he and other Zionists stood in bins.

In January 2025, Birenbaum was quoted extensively in a News.com.au article about antisemitic graffiti in Maroubra.

"Racism in general, and antisemitism, it doesn't start with violence," he said at the time. "It starts with words. It starts with good people being silent. It starts with tolerating what we see in our streets."

On October 3 2024, Birenbaum was photographed outside the NSW Supreme Court seemingly posing as a pro-Palestinian activist – complete with a 'FCK ISRL' sticker on a backpack – as a crowd of supporters waited to hear the outcome of the NSW Police application to prevent the Palestine Action Group from staging rallies in the Sydney CBD on October 6 and 7.

As more people began cursing out the *Daily Telegraph* crew, they began walking up Enmore Road. Still filming, Sam and Talaat followed.

"Sam confronted the female journalist, saying 'How dare you come into a restaurant intimidating workers,'" Talaat says. "And then the journalist said 'How dare you get appalled by a Jewish man coming into your restaurant', which is complete nonsense. No one was appalled, we served him – Sam doesn't even know what a Zionist is.

"I was giving it to the cameraman, telling him: 'You're a grown man, this is what you do

Photo: everythingisfine.beehiiv.com

This seems to be intentional provocation

for a living? Do you tell your kids you come into people's workplaces and upset people? You should be ashamed of yourself.' And he looked a bit ashamed, actually," Talaat says. "He looked like 'Aw fuck, I wish we weren't here'."

"They left in the same car. All four of them. The two cameramen, the journalist and the Zionist guy," Talaat says.

"It was comical, like *Looney Tunes*-level comical. The way they were waiting there. Him dressed the way he was, sucking on the straw, saying 'Say shalom, say shalom'. When he was in the store ordering the tea, they were across the lane waiting, outside Domino's. They were three metres away! You could see them! At one point the journalist literally had her face pressed up against the window, looking from the outside in, just lurking. It was like a performance piece.

"My thoughts on News Corp are pretty ... you know. It's poison. I have no tolerance for these people. I know they're trash. But I was a little shocked at how obvious it was. Like, coming in the same car and waiting across the road. I know they do this kind of thing, but it was the level of amateur theatre to it. Afterwards, we had a laugh about it."

The police arrived later that day. Initially, they seemed uninterested.

"I said to the police, 'This seems to be intentional provocation.' And the cop said 'It is, but it's not criminal,'" Talaat says.

"I said to him, 'What if it had been an Arab guy going into a Jewish-owned place?' He didn't really respond, he just kind of looked down and took some notes."

However, with growing interest in the case on social media – Cairo Takeaway owner Hashem El Masry has recounted the incident in detail on Cairo Takeaway's Instagram – police interest in the case has picked up. On Tuesday evening, other police officers arrived and spoke to Sam. Two detectives followed up with Cairo Takeaway staff on Wednesday morning and requested the restaurant's CCTV footage.

Despite being angry at the restaurant being targeted, Talaat hopes some good will come out of it.

"This impunity has given them the courage to do things like this, because no one really does anything about it," he says. "So it's good that people are speaking up. Maybe they'll get the message that you can't just do this kind of thing.

"If you know Sam, she doesn't follow the news at all, she stays right out of that. She actually asked me later that afternoon – we sat down and had a quiet cup of tea, just to calm her down – she asked me, 'What exactly is a Zionist?'

"I told her, 'Now you know'."

Alex McKinnon
everythingisfine.beehiiv.com

CUBA TODAY

A report on the Southern Cross Brigade 2025

First hand information from the WA people who travelled with the 40th Southern Cross Brigade to Cuba that took place on 4-23 January 2025.

2-5pm – Sunday 2 March

Perth Trades Hall training rooms
82 Beaufort Street Perth

Free event

For more info call 0419 812 872 or email acfsperth@gmail.com
Organised by the Australia-Cuba Friendship Society WA branch
FB event: https://www.facebook.com/share/18rurDEcjh/

Peter Dutton is super popular

(except among all the people who hate him)

C Bartholomew

The Murdoch Press and other conservative media outlets have been trying their best to convince Australians that Peter Dutton is all the rage. Anytime a poll shows Dutton in the lead the papers are there to sing his praises.

A lot of media attention has also been focused on the demographic of young men who Dutton seems to be luring in with the same reactionary, 'anti-woke' rhetoric that spiked in popularity during the first Trump election. In contrast, with the exception of outlets such as *Crikey*, there seems to be a media blackout on key demographics such as young women. The reason is simple: these demographics don't fit the narrative of Dutton's popularity.

The same *Australian Financial Review* poll which showed Dutton's rising popularity with young men also indicated that young women did not approve of either major party leader and were as likely to vote Greens as Labor. As Labor and the Coalition teamed up to push through electoral reforms designed to stamp out the rise of the Greens and teal independents, it would seem that their failure to attract young women ought to be a larger story.

The media silence, however, is a deliberate strategy. Young women – alongside young queer people and similar demographics – are becoming more politically organised. Aside from the memes and internet trolling which has swamped Dutton's attempt at TikTok fame, young women have also responded to the Trump election and Dutton's 'Temu Trump' rhetoric with more direct actions. From on the street organising to the creation of websites such as 'Build a Ballot,' young women have been making their voices heard. The media silence is designed to hush up those voices.

It is worth noting that the *AFR* poll being paraded by the media to show Dutton's popularity among young men actually found that Albanese was more popular among *all* young voters, regardless of gender. While young women disapproved of both leaders, with Dutton losing spectacularly, young men also disapproved of Dutton and actually had *favourable* approval ratings for Albanese. However, admitting that the young voters who will likely make up around half of the electorate hate your guts is not a good electoral strategy.

Dutton and his media mates are focusing so much attention on the minority of young men who support him because they want to convince more young men that Dutton is the candidate for them. They want a Trump-style swing of young male voters to secure Dutton's victory. On the other hand, keeping silent about young women is meant to help avoid any uncomfortable questions about exactly why young women hate Dutton so much.

It is also meant to stymie the growing political activism of this demographic. If young women are unable to see themselves in political discussions, or if they can be convinced that Dutton is so popular among other demographics that his victory is inevitable, then they will be less likely to be politically organised, less likely to develop class consciousness, and less likely to be an issue for Dutton and his donors.

Dutton's entire career in politics and public offices is marked by rampant corruption, abuses of power, and sheer ineptitude. Dutton handing half a billion dollars to a company run out of a shack as part of his immigrant detention scheme, or being voted by doctors as the worst health minister in decades, or planning to squander $600 billion on a nuclear plan designed to expand fossil fuels and worsen energy costs are not good headlines.

The conservative press must be silent on these points if it wants to continue to pretend that Dutton will be better on government efficiency, health, and energy than Albanese. To secure Dutton's image as a popular leader, they must ignore all the doctors, scientists, unions, and young women who hate him.

Also passed over is Dutton's extensive use of racism; from the baseless 'African gangs' smear campaign, to walking out on the Apology, and campaigning for white South African farmer migrants, Dutton has form.

Here too, Dutton's popularity is sustained by silence.

Photo: UK Government – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

the media silence is a deliberate strategy

Offshore detention update

They haven't been in the news for a long time, but there are still around 70 asylum seekers left in PNG, more than ten years after they were first detained on Manus Island. The refugees were dumped in Port Moresby in 2019 after the closure of the Manus Island detention centre. They are not safe and have no secure future. Around 16 of them are too ill, some due to mental health problems, even to engage with refugee authorities about any possibility of resettlement in another country.

Australia abandoned them and declared them officially the responsibility of the PNG government in 2019. But under a secret deal in late 2021, the Morrison government agreed to provide continued funding for accommodation and services for the refugees. There are fears that services and accommodation will be cut off completely, with the money now apparently all gone. Concerns about corruption surround the money that was previously provided.

The refugees desperately need resettlement in a safe country. Some may eventually get to New Zealand under a separate deal with the government there, but their future remains uncertain. They continue to face the threat of attacks and robbery in a dangerous situation while in PNG. The Australian government should accept responsibility and bring them here now.

There are also around 1200 refugees who were detained on Manus and Nauru now in Australia, after arriving for medical treatment including under the Medevac law. This is one third of the entire number originally sent offshore. They have been refused permanent resettlement, and told "Australia is not an option for you" even though some have been here as long as nine years, have children in school , and have made lives here. They need permanent visas to allow them to stay here.

Why are asylum seekers sent to Manus and Nauru?

Manus Island and Nauru first became the locations for Australia's offshore immigration detention centres in 2001, when former Prime Minister John Howard launched the "Pacific Solution."

Labor reopened the centres in 2012 as part of a plan to prevent any asylum seeker arriving by boat from gaining resettlement in Australia. Liz Thompson, a former migration agent involved in refugee-assessment interviews on Manus, described the process as a "farce," saying, "Manus Island is an experiment in the ultimate logic of deterrence, designed to frustrate the hell out of people and terrify them so that they go home."

Offshore detention is designed to be so brutal that asylum seekers are forced into despair and agree to go back home to whatever they have fled. Twelve refugees and asylum seekers have died there.

Dumping people in such remote locations also means denying them proper legal support, medical services and contact with the Australian public. Nauru is 3,000 kilometres from the Australian mainland, while Manus Island lies 300 kilometres north of the main island of Papua New Guinea.

Where have they been resettled?

Refugees have spent more than ten years in limbo as a result of Australia's offshore detention policy. Efforts to resettle them in third countries have been appallingly slow and difficult, with most countries rejecting Australia's efforts to abuse human rights and keep refugees out.

In 2016 a resettlement deal was struck whereby the US agreed to take 1250 of the refugees on Nauru and Manus Island. The first refugees were resettled in late 2017, after more than four years of detention. But six years after the deal was first announced some refugees approved under the deal are still waiting to go to the US. At 30 November 2022, 1075 had been resettled there with around 200 others approved to go.

Others have gone to Canada under a sponsorship scheme, which required supporters in Australia and Canada to fundraise around $18,000 per refugee to have them accepted.

In March 2022, a deal was finally agreed with New Zealand, which agreed to take 150 refugees over three years. But less than 40 refugees from Nauru will end up in New Zealand, with most already heading to the US or Canada. The bulk of the places in New Zealand will go to refugees from offshore detention now in Australia, who were transferred for medical care or under the Medevac law. Most of them do not want to go to New Zealand, having already lived in Australia for years. The process will also take three more years, when they have waited almost ten years already, and there are not enough places for all of them, with 505 to miss out.

The attempt to send refugees to Cambodia in 2015 was also farcical. Just seven were "resettled" there, at a cost of $55 million. Only three remain there as of May 2017, with the others regretting the decision to go to Cambodia and returning home in despair. Cambodia is one of the world's least developed countries and has no infrastructure for resettlement. The Philippines has also refused to accept refugees from Manus or Nauru. Kyrgyzstan was even floated as an option.

The asylum seekers and refugees must be brought to Australia, the country the whole world views as responsible for them. The offshore detention centres on Manus Island and Nauru must be closed.

Refugee Action Coalition

Maritime Union welcomes more shipping resilience

The Maritime Union of Australia has welcomed an announcement by the Cook Labor Government that it will establish a $5 million Supply Chain Resilience Fund aimed at bolstering Western Australia's shipping capability.

MUA WA Branch Secretary Will Tracey said the announcement was a positive step towards reintroducing a dedicated shipping service to the WA coast.

It comes at the same time that the MUA is working closely with the Federal Government to deliver on a long-term policy reform to revitalise Australian shipping through the Strategic Fleet of Australian crewed and Australian registered coastal trading vessels.

"The shipping task of an island nation such as Australia's is massive, but for many years our sovereign capacity to transport vital materials, fuels and supplies, as well as cargoes, has dwindled further and further. The action by state and federal governments towards reestablishing that sovereign capacity with initiatives such as the Strategic Fleet and WA Labor's commitment to state maritime transport capacity and resilience are crucial steps towards ensuring we retain that capacity to respond to economic, environmental and social crises in the national interest," said the MUA National Secretary, Paddy Crumlin.

"Today's announcement is a welcome one for the MUA and its members in WA, and our hope is that the $5 million will go toward returning a ship onto the WA coast," Tracey said.

"Since the last state ship was pulled from the WA trade in 2013, road and rail closures have been a frequent occurrence as a result of floods, fires, and cyclones. And without fail, supermarket shelves are stripped bare in our regional and remote communities.

The offshore supply ship, *Sea Swan* departing Fremantle Port, 2015, destination Barrow Island. Photo: Andrew Priest (CC BY 2.0)

"The union warned back then it was a bad idea to stop the route, and we have been sounding the alarm bell what feels like every couple of months when interstate and intrastate roads and rails fail.

"We are also excited about the opportunity a consistent shipping route could bring in terms of training up young West Aussies who want to go to sea. Currently, the industry is almost 100 per cent reliant on the training pipeline of the oil and gas industry, which is subject to boom-and-bust economic conditions.

"While there is more to be done, particularly from the Federal Government, to protect Australia's sovereignty when it comes to shipping, this is a positive step in the right direction."

The MUA has long advocated for the reinstatement of a dedicated WA coastal shipping service to ensure essential supplies reach communities during times of crisis and to strengthen local employment opportunities for Australian seafarers.

The union looks forward to working with the WA Government on ensuring this funding is directed toward re-establishing a reliable and sustainable coastal shipping service for the state.

Maritime Union of Australia

The dying left in pain

Growing shortages of essential palliative care medicines in Australia are having a devastating impact on patients, especially those nearing the end of life, and the clinicians who care for them.

"Patients are suffering unnecessarily, enduring heightened pain and distress, because the medications that typically control their symptoms are either unavailable or prohibitively expensive," says Dr Peter Allcroft, Chair, Palliative Care Australia.

"I am even aware of people ending up in hospital as a result of not being able to access the medicines they need – adding to the distress families feel and placing further pressure on our overstretched hospital system."

Despite sector representations to the Minister for Health, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and the Department of Health and Aged Care, there has been little progress toward ensuring a stable supply of these life-changing drugs.

"A collective of seven organisations wrote to parliamentarians in early December trying to escalate this issue after months and months of slow or no progress, people, including children are dying without adequate pain relief," Dr Allcroft says.

In fact, the situation has been building for several years and has become especially challenging in the past 12 months as global supply chains and pharmaceutical companies falter and reprioritise.

Most of the affected medicines are vital opioid analgesics that have been used for decades to manage severe pain and other symptoms in palliative care patients. With the supply of these drugs becoming increasingly uncertain, clinicians are forced to prescribe less effective alternatives, resulting in less reliable pain relief and risking unwanted side effects.

Adding to the distress is cost, with many of the alternative medications not subsidised through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). One of the most startling examples is hydromorphone SR, which costs the public $182 for 32mg. The overseas alternative, which is not PBS-listed, is $4,209 for 100 tablets – 23 times more expensive!

As part of the "better access to palliative care" campaign leading up to the federal election, PCA has launched an 11-point plan to resolve this ongoing issue.

"Those responsible seem stuck for answers, so we have collaborated with our members and six other leading health and care organisations to help lead the way," Dr Allcroft says.

"Our recommendations centre on establishing a national stockpile of critical medicines, fostering domestic pharmaceutical manufacturing, strengthening the PBS, and empowering the TGA.

"400 people die every day of a terminal illness; limited or no access to these critical medications has a ripple effect through families and communities – it can leave loved ones with lifelong trauma."

So far, close to 20,000 people have signed the "better access to palliative care" petition, with more signatures every day.

"Australians want action on this and are supporting our plan in the run up to the election," Dr Allcroft says. "We remain hopeful that those who want to make up the 48th parliament of Australia will respond and work with us to fix this so that quality of life at the end of life can be delivered to every Australian.

PEACE NOTES

Peace and your grocery bill

There's an understandable, but mistaken tendency to treat the subject of war and peace as optional extras, as not the main game. As a topic, peace is sometimes treated as if it's a craze that belongs in the 1980s.

This approach is mistaken, but understandable. Military budgets don't get anywhere near the detailed scrutiny that the rest of the budget gets. This country is not at war and because most of the media we consume goes along with the idea that questions of war and peace aren't as real as questions about mortgage rates, the price of petrol, or social security payments.

There's also a bias towards English-speaking countries, which is why a 'respected commentator' can declare that the US-dominated global order has led to sixty years of peace and stability – something which is true only if you're prepared to overlook wars in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. That's a lot of land to overlook, but not difficult for English-speaking people to do, because most of our media sees the non-English-speaking parts of the globe as somehow less important.

Recently, US President Donald Trump has been criticised for asking Ukraine and Nato countries to pay for protection. He's asking Ukraine for a $500 billion US "payback deal," in return for all the money that the US has piled into Ukraine's military over the last three years. He's made similar comments about Nato. As the UK's Morning Star puts it, Trump "stated aloud motives that previous US presidents preferred to hide in the guise of counter-terror or humanitarian missions."

Trump is, as the saying goes "saying the quiet part out loud." He's not making a dramatic departure from how the US conducts its foreign policy. The question "what's in it for us?" has always hung over US relations with the rest of the planet. What Trump is really saying is that it's all about resources.

If war and the threat of war is always about resources, so too is peace. The road to peace is through attention to those material realities. Peace isn't just about being nice or even just about preventing massive loss of life. Peace is about resources.

Peace is about *everything* because of what's called 'opportunity cost.' Our government is proposing to spend more than $368 billion on a nuclear-powered submarine deal we don't need. If they scrapped the deal and reverted to previous submarine proposals costing a mere $50 billion, we'd have $318 billion over for adding dental to Medicare, or for education.

Peace is also about education. Children in South Australia are being softened up for war right now, through nuclear-submarine-related science material and the funding of 'Defence schools.' That's another opportunity cost – what our children could be doing if they weren't being educated towards working on those subs.

The next time you're thinking about cost of living, education, or your conditions at work, remember the difference that over $300 billion could make to that part of your life.

The road to peace lies through attention to those daily material realities. We need governments that work for people. We need the people to own the resources now being used towards war. That's why the Communist Party of Australia doesn't just make pro-peace noises, but campaigns hard for a country where everything is owned and run by the people.

Political economy

Monopolies destroying the planet

Jo Dunleavy

Food monopolies are intensifying agricultural production in ways that both produce more emissions and which leave us vulnerable to climate impacts by increased use of monoculture crops. But there are other ways monopolies fuel climate change too.

The energy sector is dominated by massive corporations. Oil giants are particularly well known: think Shell, BP, Exxon, Chevron, and Total. As with food corporations, these conglomerates made profits, of $195 billion in 2022, at precisely the time so many people struggled to pay vastly inflated energy bills. These same corporations used around $110 billion to directly enrich their wealthy shareholders, rather than investing it into any form of energy transition. In fact, the funds they did invest were overwhelmingly in further fossil fuel production, not in renewables.

In the UK, energy supply is also highly concentrated in both production and retail. In 2019, more than two-thirds of all energy was produced by the largest six companies. While a plethora of smaller companies emerged in the retail market in the 2000s, during 2021 dozens of companies failed, further concentrating the big suppliers' hold. Electricity infrastructure is similarly concentrated in the hands of six giants.

Monopolies have encouraged the growth of environmentally destructive practices like built-in obsolescence. Just look at Apple, which has for years been criticised for preventing third-party service and software installation, allowing, in the words of Cory Doctorow, Apple rather than the iPhone's owner "to decide when an iPhone is beyond repair and must be shredded and landfilled ... This is a very useful power to wield, especially in light of CEO Tim Cook's January 2019 warning to investors that the company's profits are endangered by customers choosing to hold onto their phones for longer rather than replacing them."

There are indirect ways that energy monopolies fuel climate change too. We've seen how monopolies help fuel inequality. The biggest polluters by far are concentrated at the highest end of the wealth spectrum, with the investments of a billionaire effectively emitting a million times more greenhouse gas than the average person. More billionaires means more climate change. Monopoly capitalism is creating new billionaires every day.

On top of that, monopolies are able to apply direct political pressure, donating more money to lobby politicians to protect their interests. They can also afford to fund think-tanks which publish climate-sceptic propaganda rubbishing the scientific consensus. Oil major Exxon has recently been shown to have intentionally undermined climate change science for decades, even though corporate executives understood the damage they were doing.

The good news is that renewable energy tends to be less open to monopolisation than the fossil fuel industry, with much smaller businesses, but also cooperatives and groups of citizens able to produce renewable energy. That doesn't mean we shouldn't be wary of attempts to monopolise renewable energy technology.

While climate change declarations regularly stress the need to share climate-friendly technologies, in practice these technologies are often protected by strict intellectual property provisions, undermining the growth of independent economic development in most countries in the world. As with medicines, we need to immediately suspend these global trade provisions for climate technologies, and find new ways to reward innovation.

Photo: Chris LeBoutillier – pexels.com (CC0)

The most obvious impact of monopoly power is economic. Monopolies protect businesses from the pressures to either invest in better products or lower prices for consumers. Instead, they can keep prices high to reward shareholders, which entails a transfer of wealth from ordinary people to corporate coffers. This can drive cost-of-living increases, but there are wider problems too. For instance, without strong unions, the market power of monopolies can allow them to pay their workers less, contributing to wage inequality.

It's no wonder that monopoly power has dramatically shifted society's resources from labour to capital. The share of global income that accrues to workers (as opposed to owners and shareholders) has fallen by around six to eight percentage points since 1980. According to the Balanced Economy Project, that shift is massive, with workers losing out to the tune of around $6 trillion a year: "an order of magnitude greater than the estimated $400-$600bn in annual losses to tax abuse." While corporate concentration is not the only factor at play, it's certainly a big one.

It's a point made eloquently by economist Paul Krugman in a 2016 piece entitled "Monopoly power is killing US economy", where he says "profits are at near-record highs, thanks to a substantial decline in the percentage of GDP going to workers." In fact, for Krugman, this inequality is actually driving the whole economy into a death spiral, because these profits aren't being invested in "plant, equipment, and technology" or other productive activity, but 'mergers and acquisitions' and returning wealth to shareholders. The economy begins to eat itself.

Monopolies can feed other forms of inequality too. They tend to remove value from communities in a variety of ways. Think of smaller farmers more likely to see their livelihoods squeezed. Or the closure of small businesses, more likely to be owned by people from traditionally marginalised groups. The US alone has lost 65,000 small independent retailers in just 10 years, with one in three local banks closing, leaving one-third of US counties without a local financial institution.

There's also evidence that monopoly pricing affects poorer groups more strongly, with the poorest households on average using markets that are 30% more concentrated than markets faced by the richest households, and "likely to be at a greater risk of the effects of concentrated markets, as they are more reliant on goods and services that are characterised by such an industry structure".

Monopolies also make the economy fragile. The drive towards ever-longer supply chains under corporate control, allowing "just in time" production, makes us highly vulnerable to a crisis, to climate change – even to a trading ship getting stuck in a canal.

Remembering the Soviet victims of Auschwitz and other death camps

Graham Holton

Eighty years ago Soviet troops liberated the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination and labour camps. The Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum website gives a history of Poles and Jews killed at the camps, but neglects the Soviet POWs murdered there. The Western press give histories of the Nazi extermination of Jews in these camps but also fails to mention the Soviet troops killed there.

Soviet prisoners of war were amongst the first victims at Auschwitz-Birkenau and other death camps. This happened well before 20 January 1942, when the Wannsee Conference in Berlin outlined the 'Final Solution to the Jewish Question.' The memory of the Soviet victims of the Nazis has been written out of this history. It is therefore important to remember the horrific suffering of the Soviet POWs and the Soviet peoples.

The Wehrmacht, along with other Axis armies, invaded the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, in a massive ground and air assault called Operation Barbarossa. They captured over five million Soviet Red Army troops of which 3.3 million were murdered. Germany had signed the Geneva Convention and was therefore obligated to treat Soviet POWs humanely, which they did not do. Instead, the Wehrmacht followed the *Guidelines for the Treatment of Political Commissars* which instructed German soldiers to separate Soviet political officers from other POWs and execute them.

Soviet POWs were amongst the first victims of the Nazi policy of mass extermination. German forces were called upon to take "energetic and ruthless action" and "use their arms" unhesitatingly "to wipe out any trace of resistance" from Soviet POWs. A decree issued on 8 September 1941, allowed the use of arms against Soviet POWs "as legal," allowing German soldiers to kill Soviet POWs with impunity.

According to the *Holocaust Encyclopedia* website, the Nazi regime claimed that it had no obligation to treat Soviet POWs humanely. Soviet POWs received as little as 700 calories per day, often fed "Russian" bread made from sugar beet husks and straw flour. Within weeks huge numbers died from starvation. Numerous reports tell that POWs tried to ease their hunger by eating grass and leaves. Lacking adequate food, clothing, shelter, and the spread of disease took a terrible toll. In October 1941, epidemics of typhoid and dysentery caused the death of 5,000 Soviet POWs each day.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek and other camps were originally constructed for the Soviet POWs, as sites of mass execution. In the Gross-Rosen concentration camp, the SS (Schutzstaffel) killed more than 65,000 Soviet POWS by feeding them only a thin soup of grass, water, and salt for six months. In Flossenbürg, SS men burned Soviet POWs alive, and in Majdanek, the SS shot Soviet POWs in trenches. In Mauthausen, Austria, up to 500,000 POWs were shot, the rivers and streams ran red from the blood, contaminating the local water supply. According to Red Army reports up to 70 per cent of the prisoners on transport trains died *en route* to Germany.

Auschwitz I was built in April 1940, as a quarantine camp for Polish political prisoners. The first mass transport to Auschwitz were 728 Polish male political prisoners, on 14 June 1940. The first gassing at Auschwitz was of a group of Soviet POWs, in August 1941. Lagerführer Karl Fritzsch murdered Soviet POWs by using Zyklon B crystals in block 11 of Auschwitz I. A second group of 600 Soviet prisoners of war were gassed between 3-5 September. The construction of Auschwitz II-Birkenau, a prisoner-of-war camp, began in October 1941 in Brzezinka, three kilometres from Auschwitz. At Auschwitz, Soviet POWs worked building the huge industrial conglomerates the SS planned for firms such as I.G. Farben. By January 1942, only a few hundred of the original 10,000 Soviet prisoners were alive, and no further Soviet POWs were expected at Auschwitz.

Trump International Hotel and Tower, Gaza

Vijay Prashad

Trump International Hotel, Las Vegas. Photo: Supermac1961– flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

Donald Trump spoke to reporters for over three hours on Air Force One on his way to see the Super Bowl in New Orleans on 9 February 2025. It was not clear to the reporters who broadcast his comments whether Trump was speaking as the President of the United States, a member of the United Nations, or as a real estate magnate.

Gaza, he said, is a "demolition site" that needed to be "leveled out" and "fixed up." Since Gaza is on the Mediterranean Sea, Trump said, it could be developed into a new French Riviera. According to him, it is not the crime scene of a genocide but "a big real estate site." The United States, he said, with his presidential smile on, "will take over the Gaza Strip, and we will do a job with it too".

Palestinians from Gaza listening to this commentary could have imagined that the United States would be funding the reconstruction of Gaza, which has been estimated by the United Nations to be – at a minimum – $53 billion (the cost after the 2014 pulverization of Gaza by Israel was $2.4 billion). In 2023, total US Overseas Development Aid was $66 billion, and, with the cuts proclaimed by President Trump, it is unlikely that the US can muster anything near the bill for the reconstruction of Gaza.

There was nothing humanitarian in Trump's comments about the making of the Gaza Riviera (or since this appears to be a gift to Israel, it is more likely that Trump imagines it to be the 'Azzah Riviera,' using the Zionist name for Gaza, meaning "strong city").

The Israeli establishment has, from the start of this genocidal campaign, said that it wants to annex Gaza, which seems to be aligned with the Trump vision to make Gaza 'American' or to develop Gaza as a beachside resort for US tourists and Israeli settlers.

Knowing Trump, he will likely want to reserve a section of the beachfront for himself and to build a Trump International Hotel and Tower that has a casino attached to it for good measure.

ZIONIST GENTRIFICATION

None of this is a surprise, nor are these ideas original to Trump. The entire Zionist project imagines an Eretz Israel that stretches from the borders with Egypt to that of Iran. The real estate deed for this is a line in the Bible, "To your descendants, I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river the Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18).

It is not clear which river in Egypt this line refers to, whether the Nile or Wadi el-Arish (in the Sinai Peninsula). If the Euphrates is taken as its border, then the land that Zionists claim includes the entire West Bank and Jerusalem, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and the western half of Iraq.

There are maps of this kind that can be seen in the offices of far-right Israeli politicians (on 19 March, Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich spoke in Paris from a podium that displayed an Israeli map that included Jordan).

This is utterly normal in the world of the illegal settlements in the West Bank (part of the UN-mandated Occupied Palestine Territory), which the settlers call Judea and Samaria. Their geography has been different since at least when their spiritual guide Ze'ev Jabotinsky wrote in *The Iron Wall* (1923) that Zionists must build Eretz Israel behind an "iron wall, which is to say a strong power in Palestine that is not amenable to any Arab pressure".

Trump is not much of a reader. He probably has never heard of Jabotinsky or of Theodor Herzl. He probably cannot define Zionism. But he knows a real estate opportunity when he sees one, and that is how he has understood his solution to the problems facing Israel.

In his first term, Trump made the "deal of the century", the Abraham Accords, which brought a series of states to normalise relations with Israel: Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (September 2020), Sudan (October 2020), and Morocco (December 2020). With Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994) having already made peace deals with Israel, the map had begun to shift away from the Palestinians and toward the Israelis.

The new governments in Lebanon and Syria are not far from making their own separate agreements, and Saudi Arabia has already said that it would normalise with Tel Aviv.

Trump is a "bazaari" (marketplace) politician, one who tosses outlandish agreements in the air (for Morocco, the acceptance of its illegal occupation of Western Sahara) in utter disregard for international law. He is now doing the same with Gaza.

"I think that it's a big mistake to allow people – the Palestinians, or the people living in Gaza – to go back yet another time," he said on Air Force One. "We don't want Hamas going back", Trump said. "The United States is going to own it."

It did not take long for all the UN Special Rapporteurs to sign a strong letter condemning Trump's comments. They made the correct argument that his idea, if implemented, is a war crime.

Trump does not understand international law. He thinks like a gentrifier. This is what he has been doing across the United States: evicting ordinary people and building hideous buildings as a monument to the fabulous wealth of the few. Trump, like the illegal settlers, conducts Zionist gentrification.

SILENCE

Marwan Bardawil is an engineer with the Palestinian Water Authority. At a little-noticed press conference in Ramallah, Palestine, Bardawil said that 85 per cent of the water and sewage facilities in the Gaza Strip were destroyed by the Israeli genocide. It will cost $1 billion to repair and replace the water and sewage facilities in Gaza. Polio, which was eradicated in Gaza a quarter of a century ago, has returned because of the collapse of the water system.

The Palestinians are being silenced as the debate around Gaza unfolds. If they want a Trump International Hotel and Tower, that is up to them, not up to Trump or Netanyahu. But they are not clamouring for a golden tower. What they want are their homes. And their universities. And their hospitals. And the photographs of their family members who are now all dead.

Globetrotter

Water levels in Rafah and North Gaza, worsen a health catastrophe

The resumption of aid into Gaza, including fuel to operate undamaged water and sanitation facilities along with water trucking, has improved the amount of water available to people in some parts of Gaza. But the picture remains extremely bleak and dangerously critical, especially in the North Gaza and Rafah governorates, warned Oxfam.

Fifteen months of Israel's military assault has destroyed 1,675 kilometres of water and sanitation networks. In North Gaza and Rafah governorates, which have suffered the most destruction, less than seven per cent of pre-conflict water levels is available to people, heightening the spread of waterborne diseases.

As fragile ceasefire negotiations hang in the balance, any renewed violence or disruption to fuel and the already inadequate aid would trigger a full-scale public health disaster.

Clémence Lagouardat, Oxfam's Humanitarian Coordinator in Gaza said: "Now that the bombs have stopped, we have only just begun to grasp the sheer scale of destruction to Gaza's water and sanitation infrastructure. Most vital water and sanitation networks have been entirely lost or paralysed, which is creating catastrophic hygiene and health conditions.

"Our staff and partners have told how people are stopping them in the streets asking for water, and that parents are not drinking to save water for their children. It is heartbreaking to hear about children having to walk for miles for a single jerrycan of water."

In the North Gaza governorate, almost all water wells have been destroyed by the Israeli military. Over 700,000 people have returned to find entire neighbourhoods wiped out. For the few whose homes remain standing, water is non-existent due to the destruction of rooftop storage tanks.

In Rafah, over 90 per cent of water wells and reservoirs have been partially or completely damaged, and water production is less than five per cent of its capacity before the conflict. Only two out of 35 wells are currently operational.

Despite efforts to resume water production since the ceasefire, the destruction of Gaza's water pipelines means that 60 per cent of water is leaking into the ground rather than reaching people.

Oxfam Australia

Letters to the Editor
The Guardian
74 Buckingham Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010
email: editor@cpa.org.au

Reform and Opening Up

Comrade Editor
A small note on the recent editorial on China: I note that the Editorial published 10 February places China's population at 1.3 billion people, but its population has now surpassed 1.4 billion. The editorial is an excellent summary of the general trend of Chinese revolutionary history, and China's path towards constructing a socialist society.

I would however add some complexity to the "Reform and Opening Up" period, which was a correct decision implemented by Deng Xiaoping, but was achieved through strenuous debate. The decision to pursue Reform and Opening Up came from the intense 'Truth Criterion Debate' of 1978, one of the most important debates in twentieth-century Marxist theory and practice, between Hua Guofeng's 'Two Whatevers' and Deng Xiaoping's 'Reform and Opening Up.' The debate was rightly won by Deng, but there has been a tendency to read this as a victory against 'Maoism' rather than in many ways a continuation of many aspects of Mao Zedong Thought, which remains a cornerstone of CPC philosophy and is written permanently into the Constitution. Deng strenuously opposed bourgeois liberalisation, and did not oppose Mao in many respects. What Deng opposed was the "Whateverism" of Hua. However, the "wild nineties" as it is sometimes called, did pose a threat to the dictatorship of the proletariat and some aspects had to be brought under control. The issue of corruption posed a threat to the survival of the CPC, which Xi Jinping has paid special attention to in recent years.

Reform and Opening Up brought in various problems, but the CPC has made the right decision to continue to pursue it, while acknowledging the difficulties that arise; by cracking down on capital expansion, eliminating corruption among CPC officials, looking at problems squarely using Marxist-Leninist science, and with "practice as the sole criterion of testing truth" as the guide.

Fraternally,

A Carruthers

International Women's Day

It is 124 years since this day was commemorated in 1911 with over one million people celebrating in Austria, Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland. It was inspired by the women garment workers' protest in New York City, on 8 March 1857, but in 1911 women were demanding the right to vote, to fight against sex discrimination in the workplace, and the right to hold public office.

This day is more important than ever for women to protest as there is still ongoing gender inequality and increasing violence towards women. So why the silence, girls? Do we realise that this might be caused by the rampant competition which a globalised, capitalist society encourages? It has never been more pronounced, leading to the complete lack of ethics or morals by those in power: exemplified by the current incumbent of the Office of President of the USA, whose prevailing contempt for women is also pervading our society here in Australia, aided and abetted by the LNP and the Murdoch media.

The treatment of women who report rape cases is still beneath contempt and predatory men are encouraged by this. It's all part of the capitalist dialectic, which sees a brave new world built on exploitation, where the 'winners' are those that are the strongest, e.g. it's okay to be a bully as long as you achieve your goal. While men (and some women) keep thinking in this way, violence against women will continue, as does the rape of Mother Earth that we're currently witnessing, or the genocide of Palestinians and the thinking behind such an atrocity.

So, I ask again. Why aren't women marching on 8 March? It's no less important now than it was in 1911. We have to keep fighting for a better world and, in WA on 8 March, let's hope voters do just that.

Eileen Whitehead

www.cpa.org.au

Too little too late

Comrade Editor,
When I read your account of the state of school funding ("Government funding for private schools outpaces public schools," *Guardian* #2133) I had a sense of deja vu. The Australian Education Union has said it's grateful for the Albanese government's recent commitment to "deliver full and fair funding of 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) by 2034."

Two words stand our there for me: 'recent' and '2034'. Funding public schools at 100 per cent of SRS is something Albanese could have gotten cracking on three years ago. Instead, 'Albo' has pulled this out of his hat at the last minute, no doubt after saving it up as a 'goodie' to give out just before the election, instead of the top priority adequate education funding should be. Compare and contrast with the speed the ALP showed on AUKUS and tax cuts for the rich.

It's a bit like Joe Biden and Cuba: Biden promised to take Cuba off the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism before he was elected President. He then did nothing about it until a week before he left power, no doubt thinking only of his legacy,

In both cases, a promise delayed until the last minute, the promise-maker thinking only of themself.

Peter Farmer
Melbourne

Book Review

Saudi Arabian Oil Policy and the Iran-Iraq War
by Alexander John Hay

Graham Holton

With US President Donald Trump promising to produce cheap global oil, this is a useful study that shows why the United States has tried, but failed to control Middle East oil prices. Following World War II US foreign policy was to gain control of Middle East oil reserves to assure cheap oil prices for its domestic market. This view has dominated analysis of the US-Saudi Arabia relations. Little has been done on examining the regional political influence on Saudi oil policies and its crude oil production levels. This Hay does well, by comparing economic and political influences on Saudi oil policies during the Iran-Iraq War (1980 to 1988).

Political analysts saw Saudi Arabia as using its massive oil reserves as a political tool to strengthen its political security in the Middle East. They failed to consider that Saudi Arabia was a weak player compared to the regional power structure dominated by Iraq, Iran and Syria. Hays argues that this was the major factor in Saudi decision-making and explains what economists saw as the lack of an economical rational self-interest to its long-term oil policy. Saudis could only follow economic self-interest when they were politically secure to do so.

In 1979, in reaction to the overthrow of the Shah of Iran and the establishing of the new Islamic republic, the hard-line Iraq-Syria alliance, and the Soviet Union sending troops into Afghanistan to support its government, Saudi Arabia reduced its oil prices under what it saw as short-term political pressure. Hays sees the Saudi government's reaction as being weak compared to its militarily and political powerful neighbours.

In September 1980 the Iran-Iraq War began. OPEC (the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries) flooded the market with cheap oil to lower international oil prices thereby reducing Iranian oil receipts. Saudi Arabia became the "swing producer," adjusting oil production to maintain international oil prices, often against OPEC wishes. Such a policy came at a cost. By reducing its oil production in 1981 Saudi Arabia lost US$31 billion.

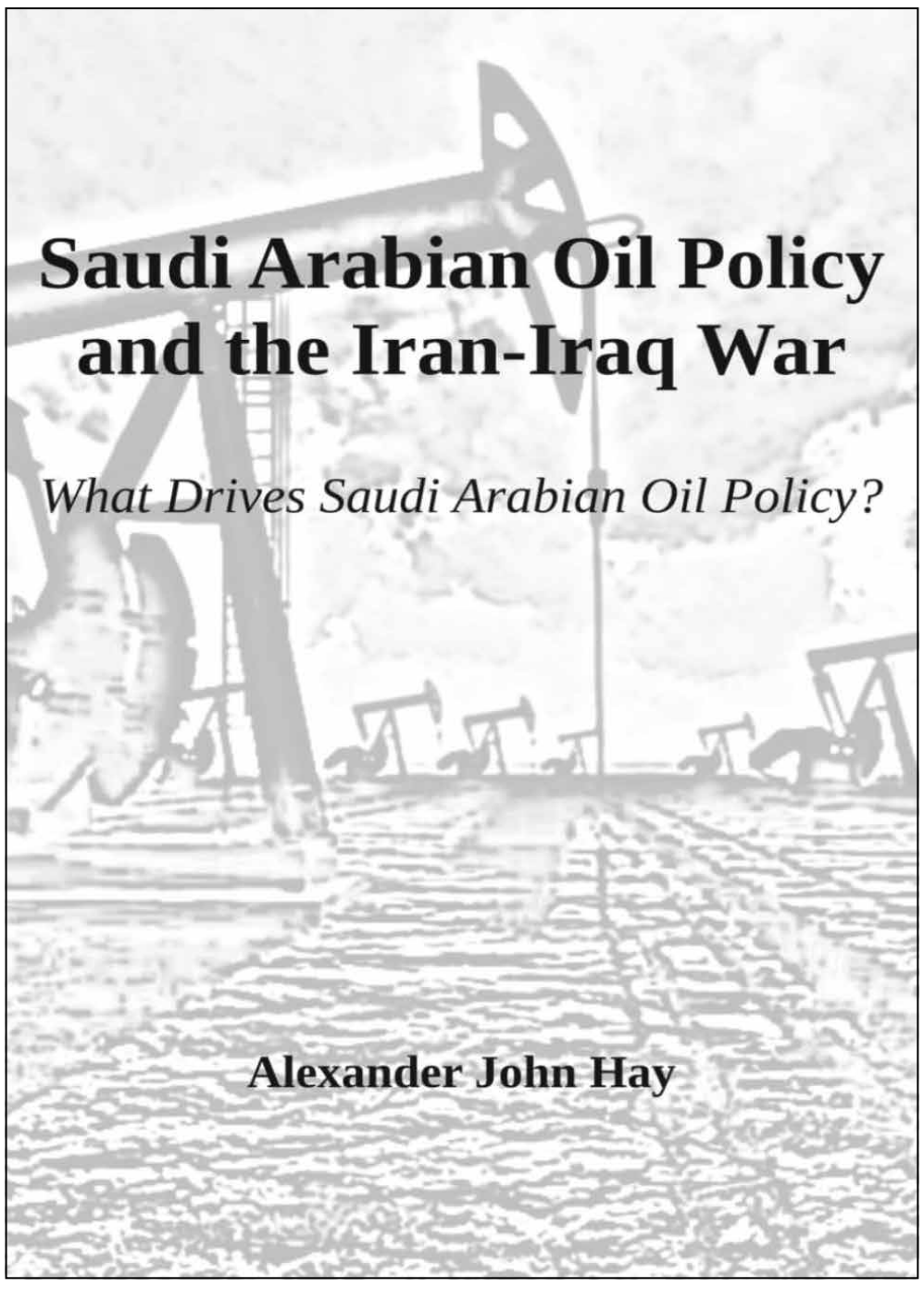
Saudi oil policy was inseparable from Gulf states' politics and economics. Iraq's failure to defeat Iran left the Gulf states vulnerable to what they saw as the unpredictable Iranian regime. Saudi Arabia increased oil production to make up for the reduced oil production from Iraq and Iran. By August 1981 Saudi Arabia produced 50 per cent of total OPEC oil production, an increase of 20 percent in one year.

By 1982 Iraq's finances were almost exhausted from the prolonged war with Iraq. The Gulf states were concerned that Iran would occupy Iraq. Egypt sent in troops to support Iraq and the UAE showed signs of conciliation to the Iranian government. After Iran had forced Iraqi troops out of occupied areas, it gave assurances it would not occupy Iraq. OPEC then pressured Saudi Arabia to cut oil production.

By March 1982 the Saudis once again defended the OPEC oil price at US$34 per barrel, down from a high of US$41 per barrel in 1980. Despite Saudi Arabia having annual deficit of US$25 billion, it remained the "swing producer." In 1984 Saudi Arabia began filling a flotilla of oil tankers to produce strategic oil reserves. By 1985 OPEC influence on oil pricing was on the verge of collapse as the international oil glut grew. When Saudi Arabia's GDP fell by 40 per cent it adopted a policy of 'netbacking,' linking oil sales to the market price of refined products, guaranteeing the buyer a profit.

By 1986 Iran had virtually taken control of OPEC. The US sold arms to Iran to support its regime. Saudi Arabia was forced to cease its oil price war and cooperate with Iran, after radical political pressure was applied in the Middle East and OPEC. Hay's study shows that Saudi Arabia could and did forego its economic self-interest, and even go against US oil policy and US direct political pressure in the region, when pressured by regional politics.

It's an interesting recent history, and shows that, as in other areas, Trump's oil policy for the Middle East will not necessarily go his way. ✪



Sam Shafiishuna Nujoma 1929 – 2025

A tribute from the South African Communist Party

The South African Communist Party (SACP) dips its red flag and pays tribute to Namibian liberation struggle stalwart, President Sam Shafiishuna Nujoma.

The SACP conveys its message of heartfelt condolences to his family, particularly his wife Utoni Nujoma, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) and the people of Namibia for the loss.

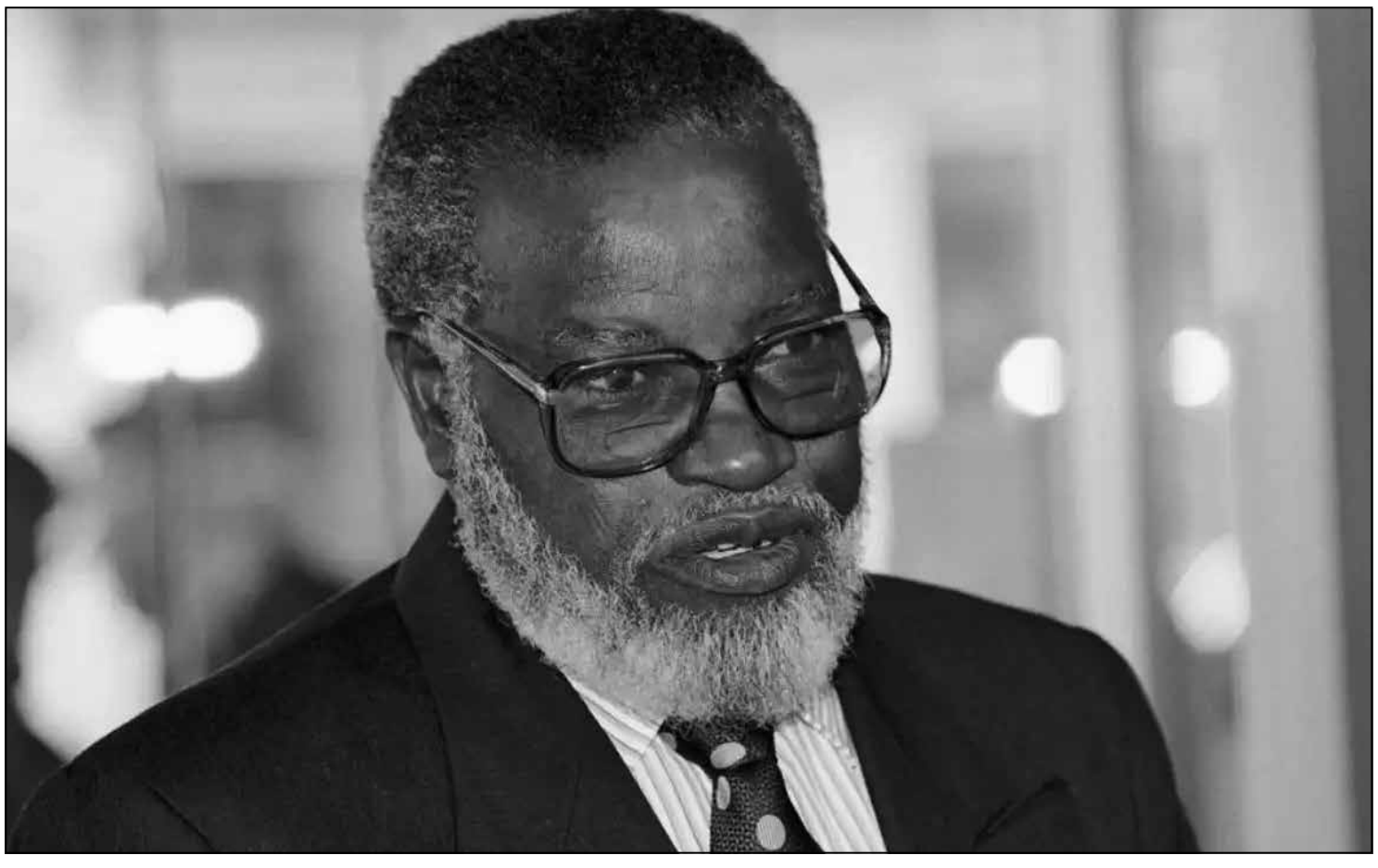
President Nujoma led the people of Namibia during the most difficult moments of their liberation struggle until the country's liberation in 1990. By this time, our struggle, in close co-operation with SWAPO, forced the apartheid regime to concede to negotiations. Paving the way for this and the advanced march to the liberation of Southern Africa was the defeat of the apartheid regime in the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale in Angola, where Cuba played a decisive role.

Nujoma worked tirelessly to unite the Namibian people as they faced the racist apartheid South African regime, establishing SWAPO's military wing, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia, in 1962, and waging a relentless war for the liberation of the Namibian people until they triumphed.

SWAPO was part of the revolutionary forces that made an indelible contribution to the defeat of the apartheid regime, both in South Africa and Namibia, as well as fighting against apartheid influence across the southern African region, and continues to unite the Namibian people in their desire to build their country and eliminate the legacy of apartheid and colonialism.

For his contribution to the struggle for peoples' liberation, President Sam Nujoma was acknowledged in various countries as well as national and international institutions, receiving multiple prestigious awards. These include the Soviet Union, where he was awarded the International Lenin Prize for Strengthening Peace Among Peoples in 1973; Vietnam, where he was honoured with the Ho Chi Minh Peace Prize in 1988; and the Order of José Martí, which he received in Cuba in 1991, among many others.

For his unwavering opposition to the government of apartheid South Africa, President Nujoma was honoured with the Order of the Companions of O. R. Tambo in South Africa.



Sam Shafiishuna Nujoma.

waging a relentless war for the liberation of the Namibian people

In paying tribute to Comrade Sam Nujoma, the SACP reiterates its support for the Namibian people's efforts to develop their country further, grounded in national sovereignty and self-determination. In this respect, the SACP will strengthen its ties with its historical ally, SWAPO.

The SACP calls for the unity of the African peoples in the fight against imperialism, for the right to self-determination. The masses of our people remain impoverished across the board, while a few, both national and foreign exploiters, are becoming richer out of the exploitation. The SACP reiterates its call for African continental unity to continue and deepen the struggle to advance the African Revolution in honour of the exceptional founders and leaders of our national liberation movements, of whom President Sam Nujoma was an indefatigable force.

Further, the SACP is committed to the rejuvenation of the African Left Networking Forum to unite the African people in the fight for social emancipation. This is crucial for our African struggle against imperialism. Building the African Left Networking Forum is urgently necessary. Africa is not fully independent yet, because of persisting imperialist domination and exploitation of its resources and people. ✪

Letters to the Editor
The Guardian
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Dear editor,
I was quite impressed to see the reprint of the 1931 Draft Program against Slavery in Issue #2132 (10 February), and I admired comrade Che's introduction to and reproduction of the article. It's a fascinating document and represents a very early example of the militancy of the party with respect to Aboriginal rights.

Whilst the Draft Program was drawn up under the leadership of Herbert Moxon, it actually has its origins in the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA), one of the first dedicated and militant organisations that fought for Aboriginal rights. The organisation was led by Aboriginal people, for Aboriginal people, founded by Worimi man Fred Maynard in 1924. Inspired heavily by Marcus Garvey and his own experience as a unionist on the waterfront, the AAPA was very successful in mobilising and organising Aboriginal people to fight against the discrimination and oppressive policies of the various state Aboriginal protection boards. Unfortunately, the repression of those boards, particularly in New South Wales meant the AAPA ceased operating in 1927.

There is little to suggest that the CPA was aware of the AAPA when it was operating, or that it had aimed to cooperate or collaborate with the organisation in any way. Moxon's 1931 program did however follow a dedicated effort by CPA members to analyse the nature of colonial oppression on the continent. In doing so, they were able to draw heavily upon the manifesto and program of the AAPA. There is much in the 1931 Draft Program that replicates the demands of the AAPA from the years prior.

I would recommend interested comrades read *Fight for Liberty and Freedom* by John Maynard for more about the AAPA It was a very interesting organisation and one who's work should have continued for much longer. Paddy Gibson, a researcher in NSW has also published an excellent thesis on the subject.

My thanks again to the Sunshine Coast comrades for raising this in the *Guardian*.

Yours comradely,

Lachlan
Brisbane/Magandjin

Dear Comrade Editor,
Re "German Election and the march of fascism" by William Briggs *Guardian* page 14
Briggs says that "The ruling centre-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) has been blamed for opportunistically failing to stand against the right (AfD)". It's worth pointing out that before the 2025 election, there was a coalition of the SPD, the Free Democrats and the Greens.

During a visit to Germany in late January and early February 2025, I was able to see for my self what was happening on the ground in one mid sized southern German city, Karlsruhe. Karlsruhe is notable for being the birthplace for the German Greens, but there is little love for the Greens there now, and I saw a number of their placards defaced. Activists had also been busy defacing the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) posters by drawing moustaches on the the CDU candidates – especially as a consequence of the CDU joining forces with the Alternative for Deutschland in the German Parliament to try to force the closure of the German borders and restrict immigration.

The German people took to the streets in a heart beat. I was invited to a rally on attended by over 7,000 people. People of all ages, genders, and ethnic backgrounds flooded the the central square of the city. To chants of "*Nazis Raus*" (Nazis out), "Never again means never again," and *alle Gegen fascismus* (everyone against fascism) people rallied and marched through the city.

What is most important about the current German election campaign is what it leaves out, which is climate change. Summers and winters have become progressively warmer in Germany, it is rare now for many German cities to see snow. But most German political parties have put addressing climate change in the too-hard basket. Even the Greens, seem too busy deal-making with their coalition partner, the Social Democratic Party to address the system changes needed to avoid climate change. Only the Marxist-Leninist Party *Deutschland* and *Die Linke* (The Left) are daring to go there.

My German relatives recently travelled to protest at the Munich Security Conference last weekend which was attended by all leading German politicians and foreign politicians including US Vice President JD Vance and Ukrainian President V Zelensky. The protesters were against the use of weapons to solve conflicts, against the stationing of US missiles in Germany, speeches in support of the Palestinians in Gaza and the Kurds in Syria. The authorities in right wing Munich were not taking any chances with protesters, and the police contingent outnumbered the protesters 2 to 1.

Thank you.

Richard Titelius

USAID and the Non-Profit Industrial Complex

Among a slate of other freezes-via-executive-order to US federal government departments, Trump announced on 28 January that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) would be next in line. Within a week there were reports of mass layoffs and within two weeks there had already been at least one confirmed death due to lack of funding. The relationship that USAID has with the American empire and its interests abroad is complicated.

While much of the humanitarian aid it provides could be seen as benevolent, USAID also directly contributes to a deeper network of propaganda, regime-change, and even international terrorism. This dual function of benevolent aid and lethal aid serves the ultimate purpose of justifying and legitimising western interventionism in foreign countries.

On the surface, USAID is one of many government and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) which exist to save and support the lives of those whose homes and families have been ravaged by war and oppressive governments. It is the single largest donor to humanitarian aid projects in the world and according to the UN it contributed to 42 per cent of all aid tracked.

In 2024, over $6.5 billion was sent to Sub-Saharan Africa into projects such as schooling and food for children and the establishment of clinics combatting the spread of lethal diseases like HIV and AIDS. Women's and LGBTQ+ NGOs in countries such as Kosovo also benefitted from USAID-led projects, which have been used to support the political struggle of these marginalised communities, while providing them safety through domestic abuse shelters and clinics for the victims of abuse. These are demonstrably life saving programs for the victims of capitalism.

Paradoxically, many of the refugees whose lives are saved by USAID programs come from countries which themselves were bombed, invaded, sanctioned, and destabilised by the American government. One could easily argue that most of the funding it has received up until recently would not be necessary if the US had not spent the last 20 years creating those refugees across the Middle East and Northern Africa in the first place.

The USAID website claims it "supports Libya's transition to a more democratic and peaceful nation" and that it has done so through "assist[ing] communities affected by conflict." Coming from an arm of the US state, this shows a reprehensible lack of self-awareness. Under Obama, the US spent half a decade invading, bombing, and propping up terrorism in order to overthrow what was once a flawed but stable republic, turning it into what is now a destabilised warzone controlled by religious fanatics who run open-air slave markets. The "communities affected by conflict" are affected by none other than conflicts the USA has spearheaded.

While much of USAID's humanitarian aid may appear to support the victims of economic turmoil, the strings attached to such programs often end up causing further economic turmoil in the long-term. In order to receive the 'generous' donations that USAID offers there are frequently stipulations that foreign governments and local NGOs must accept first.

Privatisation of government assets, de-regulation of industries, exorbitant loans that could never feasibly be repaid, requirements to work exclusively with private American contractors, and demands to toe the pro-American line are some of the less publicised parts of these 'benevolent' programs.

Unlock Aid has highlighted that a whopping 90 per cent of funds spent in 2022 by USAID "went to its international contracting partners, most of which are based in or around the Washington, DC area." This "phantom aid" is rife throughout the non-profit industrial complex, with corruption and nepotism running rampant in the NGOs and consulting firms that collaborate to siphon life-saving funds from those that need it most.

Beyond the ordinary capitalist corruption that infests USAID there are also the media and propaganda programs and organisations it funds under the pretence of spreading "pro-democracy values across the world." Some benefactors of this funding include the National Endowment of Democracy (NED), the Victims of Communism Foundation, Falun Gong, and Radio Free Europe/Asia.

All these organisations – and similar ones being propped up via USAID funding – have a long history of spreading atrocity propaganda against legitimate and democratic socialist states and revolutions across the world.

Ghana school under the trees. Photo: A Kauffeld (USAID) – rawpixel.com (CC0)

In 2019, America orchestrated a military coup to undemocratically place their puppet, Juan Guaido, into power as the "legitimate" (yet unelected) president of Venezuela. After years of brave and tireless protests the Venezuelan people were successful in overthrowing his brutal reign, forcing him to flee to the USA in 2023. A recent report has revealed that Guaido personally received $98 million direct from USAID for the express purpose of overthrowing President Maduro.

There is a dark and opaque face beneath the benevolent mask that USAID wears. It exists in a symbiotic and cyclical relationship with the Military Industrial Complex (MIC).

Without the MIC and the brutal wars of imperialism it wages across the world, most of its aid would not be needed in the first place. It then uses this destabilisation of entire countries to justify further US intervention and corruption within them. The very dictatorships it claims to be saving people from, are often ones the US helped create in the first place.

Make no mistake, the freezing of funds to USAID will be tragic for those who benefit from its genuine aid. Others who have who have suffered first hand from US foreign policy may welcome a brief respite.

DC

(see p15 for the 'Half the Sky' perspective on the aid cuts)

NATO exercises begin without US

Nato exercises not involving US troops have begun across Greece, Bulgaria and Romania as European members of the Washington-led alliance reel from a recent address by US Defence Secretary Peter Hegseth.

The Steadfast Dart manoeuvres are led by the British military and involve nine countries, including another nuclear power, France. Commanders billed them as a bid to show NATO is able to effectively deploy force in eastern Europe without the United States, which has signalled under President Donald Trump that it is no longer prepared to contribute financially or militarily to the Ukraine war.

Greek and Spanish marines led an amphibious assault near the Greek city of Volos in the first deployment of NATO's new Allied Reaction Force. The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) staged protests at the deployments.

Addressing a meeting of serving and retired armed forces personnel, KKE general secretary Dimitris Koutsoumpas said Greece should not be dragged into imperialist wars. He listed facilities used to supply wars in Ukraine and Palestine, and warned that they make Greece "a potential target of a generalised war that is increasingly visible," urging that attempts to raise military spending to make up for a reduced US presence should be resisted.

European leaders appeared to contradict Hegseth's address, with British and German defence ministers insisting that "there can be no talks over Ukraine without Ukraine," though Trump suggested negotiations with Russia on ending the war would "start immediately" and that he would "work together, very closely" with Russian President Vladimir Putin to that end. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz warned against any peace being "imposed" on Ukraine.

Hegseth told Nato countries that the US would not pay more towards the Ukraine war, would not contribute any troops to police a ceasefire and would not consider any forces sent on such a mission to be covered by Nato guarantees of mutual defence if they were attacked. He said Nato membership is off the table for Ukraine.

He also said that Ukraine could not hope to regain the borders it had before 2014 (when Russia annexed Crimea and separatist conflicts erupted in the Donbass following the Maidan coup in Kiev). Prior to the meeting, President Trump said that Ukraine "may be Russian some day," hinting Washington could even endorse Russian territorial annexations beyond its current claims to four Ukrainian regions.

Morning Star

Munich university cancels Albanese lecture

Scores of professors, researchers, and staff have signed a petition demanding a German university allow the UN special rapporteur on Palestine, Francesca Albanese, to deliver a scheduled lecture.

Albanese was due to lecture on colonialism, human rights, and international law on 9 February at the Ludwig-Maximilian University of Munich (LMU), but the university promptly cancelled the event after it was made public.

LMU told organisers that the cancellation was down to the "political orientation of the lecture" and security concerns over a "clash of opinions." Francesca Albanese has been outspoken in challenging Israeli violations of international law in the Palestinian territories.

"The cancellation sets a dangerous precedent for universities – one in which shunning international human rights lawyers and UN representatives becomes a reality," the petition reads.

"Cancel culture for political reasons at German universities is taking frightening shape," Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance MP Sevim Dağdelen said, blaming the CDU, SPD, Greens, and AfD for defaming solidarity with Palestine as anti-semitic.

Dağdelen slammed a "serious attack on the autonomy of higher education and academic freedom."

People's World

A visit to Auschwitz Birkenau, February 2025

The 'Selection' point for prisoners arriving at Birkenau.

Richard Titelius

A piece in a recent issue of the *Guardian* (10 February 2025) examined the exploitation through slave labour by the Nazi occupiers of Poland during World War II at Auschwitz – Birkenau. Guests at the recent commemoration of the two camps' anniversary included Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong. Wong was accompanied by the Prime Minister's 'anti-Semitism envoy,' Jillian Segal who in a recent ABC Online report dated 5 February 2025, said that Australia was on the lips of many guests she had spoken with for the wrong reasons – antisemitic incidents in Melbourne and Sydney.

In Australia, Segal is known for being pro-war and for considering all opposition to Israeli attacks on Palestinians to be as antisemitic as recent attacks on synagogues.

If Segal were to take one of the official tours of the Auschwitz – Birkenau State Memorial, as I did in February, she would have heard detailed explanations of genocide perpetrated there very reminiscent of what Israel has been doing to the Palestinian people, and of what the colonisers in Australia did to Aboriginal people. That is, the Nazis tried to humiliate and belittle Jews, they killed women and children, actively tried to destroy their system of education, culture, religion, hospitals, museums, places of worship, used them as slave labour and killed their community leaders.

The tour starts with the barracks which housed the Jewish prisoners – though there were also non-Jewish prisoners such as Soviet POWs and captured Polish resistance fighters. The beds were just straw, later foam mattresses with four or more prisoners made to sleep on one bunk.

We were shown a room containing used 5kg tins of Zyklon B gas used for killing the Jews. Initially they used too little gas and the victims died an agonising death over 2 days. In the interests of efficiency, the dose was increased to ensure death within 15-20 minutes.

There were also disciplinary proceedings for prisoners who were seen as difficult, who were kept in solitary cells for some punishments and taken out and shot for others against the notorious "Death Wall" between blocks 10 and 11. Thousands perished in this way, and a sign in Polish, English, and Hebrew asks for silence in the courtyard where this occurred. A few of the solitary cells had their air holes at the top of their cells facing this courtyard so they would be able to hear everything that went on. These solitary cells were also small and cramped and the three days that prisoners were kept here often killed them.

We also pass the rooms with the many shoes and another with the implements used by handicapped people which were removed from them before cremation. The cruelty took bureaucratic forms: if someone didn't answer their name, the roll call would start again from the beginning. When a prisoner escaped and hence didn't answer the roll call, it kept going for 18 hours. 100 prisoners died. Doctors also conducted experiments on the prisoners including sterilisation trials on women who were dosed with X Rays which made their skin black and later killed them. There were still wreaths at the Death Wall from the previous weeks 80th Anniversary of liberation activities.

We were then taken to what was an electrified barbed wire fence around the gassing and cremation block and which had a sign with signs warning prisoners they would be shot if they approached.

We are then taken through the gas chamber itself and then the Crematorium No I, which in 1944 was converted to an air raid shelter as Allied forces had begun to bomb the factories nearby. Close by is the former residence of the Camp Commander Rudolf Höss who oversaw the establishment of the initial camp and then its massive upscaling. This was the house where the Oscar winning film, *Zone of Interest* was made about the idyllic bourgeois German life he tried to live on the other side of the wall of the concentration camp.

We were bussed to Auschwitz II or Birkenau 2 km away from Auschwitz I. There was a huge white tent still in place over the entrance to Birkenau used for the 80th Anniversary activities for international guests like Penny Wong and Jillian Seagal. We were shown a barracks made of bricks used by women and children. More than 200,000 children were killed here or died of diseases. We were then taken to the 'Selection' point. Here a doctor would assess prisoners to determine whether they would be suitable for slave labour or send them to the gas chambers and crematoriums.

There are photos at the museum in Auschwitz which show this process when it was taking place, shot by one of the guards. We were led to the impressive monument to the extermination taking place here – it is of two people standing with their mouths open gasping for air as they are experiencing the last minutes of their life in the barbaric gas chambers made to exterminate them as a race.

The scale and breadth of the barbarism to be seen here gave impetus to UNESCO designating Auschwitz-Birkinau as a World Heritage listed site, to preserve it so that people will remember and vow "never again."

However, the barbarism inflicted on Palestine not just since 8 October 2023, when the Zionist Israeli government retaliated against the surprise attacks of Hamas, but arguably since 1948 when the state of Israel was created resulting in the displacement or killing of more than 750,000 of the Palestinian people, shows that through propaganda, spin and manipulation of events, a justification can be found for just about any horror thrown up by Western capitalist imperialism. ✪

Global Briefs

BRITAIN: Thousands of pro-Palestinian demonstrators marched through central London to protest US President Trump's proposal to "take over"the Gaza Strip. The placards and banners in the march read, "Hands Off Gaza," "Stand Up to Trump," "Mr Trump, Canada is not your 51st state, Gaza is not your 52nd," "Not Another Child Killed, Not Another Hospital Bombed." The march, organised by the Palestine solidarity Campaign (PSC), was the 24th major pro-Palestinian protest in London since 7 October 2023.

CHINA: China has criticised the deployment of the US Typhoon missile system in the Philippines. A Chinese Defense Ministry spokesperson stressed that this missile system, considered a strategic offensive weapon, poses a significant risk to regional security. The US side said that the move did not establish a permanent presence of the system. In its turn, Manila declared that it would return the missiles to the US if China stops its territorial claims, stops harassing local fishermen and ceases incidents with boats. According to the Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman, the Philippines reneged on its own commitment by allowing the introduction of the US system. He pointed out that the decision to deploy Typhoon not only compromises the nation's national security, but also increases the risks of geo-political confrontation and arms races in the region. China's actions in the disputed maritime areas, he said, including law enforcement operations, are legal, and justified under international law. The territorial boundaries of the Philippines are clearly defined by a series of international treaties, such as the US-Spain Peace Treaty of 1898, the 1900 Treaty of Cession and the 1930 Boundary Delimitation Agreement.

BRAZIL: The BRICS summit of heads of state, a forum of emerging economies, will take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on 6 June and 7, 2025. Brazil assumed the rotating presidency of BRICS on 1 January 2025. This year's summit will discuss US President Trump's threats to impose 100 per cent tariffs on BRICS members for "trying to move away from the dollar," as well as worldwide conflicts and wars. The previous summit was held in the Russian city of Kazan. At that summit Russian President Putin pointed out that the combined annual production of BRICS members exceeds 60 trillion US dollars.

SYRIA: A national dialogue conference will advise on a new constitution and will include representatives of all rebel factions in the civil war – bar the Kurds. Organisers said participants would be selected based on "expertise, public influence, and inclusivity." However, former officials of the Assad government will be excluded, as will representatives of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, which have refused to be incorporated into the new military.

SUDAN: Khartoum and Moscow have agreed on the establishment of a Russian naval base in Sudan. The agreement outlines the creation of logistical support for the Russian navy. It will serve as a hub for ship repairs and resupply. The facility's personnel will be limited to 300, with a maximum of four Russian vessels permitted to be stationed there at the same time. Sudan also plans to sign agreements with Russian companies for industrial, commercial, and oil-related projects, focusing on over 20 oil wells in conflict-free zones such as the Red Sea region and western Sudan.

Aluminium, and beyond

William Briggs

Stockpiling of bauxite ore – a rock with a relatively high aluminium content. Photo: João Ramid – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

When Trump launched his trade war, some nations responded with threats of retaliation. Others sought to find ways to 'deal 'with the most powerful economy on the planet. The European Union's response was 'tough' but it carries, as a trading bloc, more clout. Smaller economies can only hope for the best.

Australia, as one of those smaller capitalist states, is both beholden to the USA and simultaneously relies for its economic life on free trade. There are, as in all readings of capitalism, contradictions. The Australian state appeals to the US state for exemptions on aluminium and steel tariffs, while being accused of effectively breaking an agreement with the USA to keep its exports within a quota. Free trade on one side and regulation on the other.

The current row is more than just a dispute over which state wins or loses by trade. It goes to the very heart of the anarchy of capitalism and of capital's relationship with the state.

The state, it must be remembered, is the state of and for the dominant economic formation. Capital has no allegiance to the state that facilitates its growth.

The aluminium and steel issue is a case in point. While governments dance around each other, individual capitalist concerns are already becoming either winners or losers. Capitalism is not state-controlled. It is not confined by national borders.

Whatever happens, workers in these industries will not be among the winners, whether dealing with capitalism or with a state that serves capitalism.

From BlueScope's perspective, the tariffs will produce greater profits. BlueScope is a major steel producer, but has large steel operations in the USA. Its share value soared on the news of the tariffs.

Alcoa is another that will do rather well. It has big mining operations in Western Australia and a smelter in Victoria, but is based in the United States. Rio Tinto, on the other hand has massive operations in Canada where it is responsible for half of global aluminium production.

Bourgeois economists and political and economic commentators continue to speak of 'Australian' aluminium, steel, iron ore and all the rest. The ore might be mined on land that is notionally 'Australian' but the miners, the companies, the multinational corporations that dig the ore, process the ore, export the product are answerable only to capital and to the extraction of profit. When governments intervene, as is the case with Trump's trade war, some individual capitalists might suffer, but the state intervenes, not from any sense of either empathy nor enmity towards this or that sector, but for the overall health of the system that it supports.

The contradiction lies in the 'defence' of one state and its economic health at the expense of another's. The states that serve capitalism are in a perpetual struggle to maintain profitability. It is this that drove capital to rapidly globalise in the 1970s and 1980s to stave off economic slump. The slump was in capital. Production moved offshore in the quest of profit. Industrial bases of states were torn asunder. Communities were left reeling as jobs and industries moved to cheaper wage regimes.

The cure-all of globalisation stemmed the problem for a time but the same crisis of profit and its tendency to fall continued to haunt capital. Economic nationalism returned and with it the rise of populism, nationalism, and the beggar-thy-neighbour attitudes that prevail. Politicians rode on the back of fears and economic crisis. Trade wars inevitably followed. The state returned to prominence but any welfare-statism has long since died.

What exists today is a state that privileges capital as it always has, a state that squeezes the working class as capitalism squeezes the state.

Trump, under such conditions, appeals to a fearful American population. He promises the working class a return of the industries and jobs that were destroyed by the system he embodies; capitalism.

The big economies, the stronger economic blocs, can compete and wage economic war, even the wars will be self-defeating. The global economy will shrink. Jobs will be destroyed. Poverty will increase as costs soar. Inequality will grow. Governments will denounce governments while ignoring the root cause of the problem.

Capitalism is the cause. It is fighting with itself and against rivals for market share, for sustained and growing profits. Capitalism is the cause and the state is the weapon it is using. The state engages in economic battle for capital and does not care about the cost.

Capital has no allegiance to the state that facilitates its growth

African Union demands colonial reparations and end to resource exploitation

During the 38th Summit of the African Union (AU), held in Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia, member countries prepared a class action lawsuit aimed at dismantling the structures of inequality bequeathed by European colonialism on the continent.

This year's Summit theme was 'Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations'. The Union said on social media that the path to justice and repair is long, but member states, African citizens and the African diaspora are determined to walk it together.

"Reparations are not just about the past-they are about the future. A future where history is acknowledged, justice is served, and Africans and people of African descent can thrive with dignity and equality in fulfilment of the Africa we want," the AU said.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed emphasised during the opening session that "It is not about charity or international handouts. It is a call for historical justice, to restore the dignity taken from millions of people."

In this regard the PM said that reparations must translate into "concrete measures" to eradicate the root causes of poverty, systemic discrimination, and economic dependency that persist decades after independence.

The heads of state and government of the African Union hold their annual summit to address the continent's major challenges, such as the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan, the global cut in humanitarian aid decreed by the United States, and the mpox epidemic that is spreading through several West African countries.

The 38th Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly, the highest decision-making body of the Pan-African organisation made up of leaders of all 55 member states, opened 15 February and concluded 16 February at the institution's headquarters in Addis Ababa.

The opening ceremony also saw the participation of international leaders such as the UN Secretary General, António Guterres, who addressed the opening session, saying that he saw an Africa "brimming with hope and possibility."

UK: Open letter from Jewish Voice for Labour's co-chairs

We are writing as members of the Jewish community who regularly join the national pro-Palestinian protests in central London. A few of us are observant and members of other synagogues, most of us are secular. What we share is our Jewish heritage and Jewish identity.

There are many differences between our group and Jewish organisations and individuals who are strong supporters of Israel. We do not expect that the divisions between us will narrow on account of this letter.

However, we demand that recognition and empathy be extended towards members of our community who hold pro-Palestinian views.

We assert our rights to hold those views. These rights were enshrined in the laws made in Europe following the Holocaust and the defeat of fascism and include an inalienable right to protest.

States do not have the powers to withdraw from this right, only to impose conditions where necessary.

We recognise that there is a real fear among some Jewish people who have been told again and again that Palestinian protests are anti-semitic and that they are "hate marches." We sympathise with this anxiety because, as Jews, we share a long history of reasons to be fearful.

But anxieties should not obscure reality. Over the last 15 months, there have been 23 national marches for Palestine. Not once has a synagogue been attacked, nor have worshippers experienced any harassment and disruption.

Sure, it is discomfiting to see people with opposing views be vocal. But that is the point of living in an open, democratic society. To co-exist, to be in the realm of the public political space, we need to be able to live alongside, to tolerate, even to listen and to learn, without the need to suppress the "other."

The assertions of the marches being anti-semitic, despite the frequency with which they are made, are wholly evidence-free.

There are always Jewish people on the march, most organised as a Jewish bloc. That these include Jewish Holocaust survivors and descendants of Jewish Holocaust survivors is a point that has been made consistently and has been continually ignored, as has the fact that we are always warmly welcomed and our platform speakers loudly cheered.

The conflation of Jews with Israel and zionism, and conflation of anti-zionism – and even criticism of the actions of the state of Israel – with anti-semitism is false and dangerous on many levels.

We worry that Jews may well, unfairly, be on the receiving end of abuse, as people are told time and time again that Jews support Israel, that those, like us, who do not are "JINOs (Jews in Name Only)" or even more painfully "kapos" (ie collaborators with the Nazis).

The assertion that Jews are upset and frightened by displays of criticism of Israel and/or support for Palestinians, means that, in many people's eyes, to be a real Jew means defending and supporting a state carrying out war crimes and plausible genocide.

It is dangerous to reawaken, without just cause, the understandable real fears many Jewish people feel at the possible consequences of a resurgence in anti-semitism.

Furthermore, those raising fears about anti-semitism from those who support Palestine often support far-right leaders who do support the state of Israel but who are racist, oppose asylum for those fleeing persecution, just as we Jews needed so badly and were tragically denied.

Most importantly, in the current context, this conflation of Jews with Israel, and anti-zionism with anti-semitism is part of the narrative which has enabled the decades of discrimination and oppression of Palestinian people, leading up to the horrors inflicted on the people and places of Gaza and the West Bank, horrors that we know exist.

We cannot stand by in the face of such inhumanity. It is beyond time that the Home Secretary, the Metropolitan Police and the Mayor of London understand that the small Jewish population in the UK is not unified on all issues any more than any other community.

To allow the voices of one part of that population to dominate is not supporting the cause of anti-racism. It is partisan and undermines the pillars of the free society that many of our grandparents fought for.

Leah Levane &
Jenny Manson
Co-Chairs,
Jewish Voice for Labour

Morning Star

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Half the Sky

Impact on USAID shutdown

Women and children are already dying as a result of the Musk/Trump administration shutdown of the US Agency for International Development (USAID). According to Abby Bloom who worked on women's and children's health programs for almost a decade with USAID, the program has been instrumental for nearly 50 years in advancing women's health, economic empowerment, and rights. The US government was the single-largest aid donor in the world, according to the United Nations, accounting for more than 40 per cent of all humanitarian aid 2024.

"People are being turned away from health clinics and hospitals, denied life-saving medications and even abandoned by the doctors and scientists overseeing the clinical trials in which many women courageously volunteered," Bloom said. These programs funded hundreds of not-for-profit organisations in developing countries, in crises, and in conflicts. USAID also funded reproductive health services globally. Its family planning programs have offered contraception, maternal health care, and HIV treatment to millions.

"I had … opportunities to witness firsthand the tenuous lives of women in poor countries ranging from Senegal to Sudan, Bangladesh to Mongolia, the West Bank and Gaza to rural Peru and Honduras. This tragedy is rolling out on multiple fronts but women are worst affected."

Bloom managed women's and children's health programs and water and sanitation projects in rural Panama for four years, and developed USAID's first Women and Development national strategy. Bloom then spent six years working for USAID in the State Department, in charge of USAID's health, water and sanitation policy globally. "I know from firsthand experience what is happening and the toll it will take," Bloom said. "I have seen the dynamics when services are suspended, or medical supplies are only available on a user-pays basis. The blanket closure of critical services for women is already having a dire impact around the world."

Bloom outlines some of the key impacts on women that can be expected. These include:

- Increased maternal mortality, unintended pregnancies, and the spread of sexually transmitted infections
- The embargo on delivering antimalarial mosquito nets means malaria among pregnant women surges, leading to low birthweight babies at long-term risk and preventable child death
- Neonatal and childhood vaccinations defunded means resurgence of lethal diseases almost unknown in Australia, such as measles, polio, and tuberculosis.
- HIV/AIDS medications cut off means new suffering and death among those previously stabilised. The spread of HIV/AIDS will accelerate, orphaning growing numbers of children.
- Prenatal care is cancelled leading to widespread complications in childbirth and preventable maternal deaths
- Food supplies stop causing malnutrition and starvation. Mothers deliver vulnerable underweight infants and are helpless to save their weak and starving children.
- Young women are denied education, limiting their future opportunities, and perpetuating the cycle of poverty
- Research into life-saving therapies and treatments are abruptly halted with a shutdown of USAID-supported development of medications for neglected (meaning not profitable enough) tropical diseases.

The shutdown of USAID leaves a huge hole in aid funding. The Australian government should use its 'special relationship' with the US to lobby for restoration of US aid. Australia could also increase its own contribution a lot. ,This could come out of the obscene expenditure on killing machines and nuclear submarines. Australia is a rich country. It should be contributing billions, not millions of dollars.

Guardian readers can do something to help fill that void by donating to Union Aid Abroad (APHEDA) – the trade union program – and UNICEF Australia.

Acknowledgements: Abby Bloom and Women's Agenda

Imperialism and sub-Saharan Africa

William Briggs

Displaced women and children escaping conflict and drought, Somalia. Photo: Tm – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

There are currently 45 million displaced people in sub-Saharan Africa. That is 45 per cent of the total of displaced people on the planet. Lives have been made miserable by war, famine, climate crisis. Colonial rule and its crimes were simply replaced by neo-colonialism and imperialism. The degeneracy of late capitalism is destroying entire states and enslaving populations.

The bourgeois media focus, ever-so-briefly on this or that disaster. Terrible scenes of death and destruction are shown and talked about and then the news crews move on. Out of sight is very much out of mind. The tragedy does not end when the camera are packed away.

Today armed conflicts are being waged in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, and South Sudan. The causes for this and all the depredations of Africa are routinely wheeled out. The lists are long and nobody could deny or downplay any of these 'causes.' The lists that are provided could be so much shorter. The fundamental cause of the crisis of sub-Sahara is capitalism, and imperialism.

Sub-Saharan Africa stands as a stark reminder of what late capitalism has to offer. There are pockets of great wealth and power alongside widespread suffering and want. There is state indebtedness, corruption, climate ruin and refugee crisis, multinational domination of an immensely rich continent and a meanness of spirit from wealthy nations that allows for impoverishment and despair to grow.

While no African state directly mirrors any other, there are similarities in how many of these 46 countries have fared. Africa ought to be the richest continent on Earth. Its natural resources alone make this a fact and yet it remains oppressed and prey to exploitation.

Karl Marx argued that states inevitably conform to the general rules of capitalist development. Capitalism has now spread across the world and states have adopted a common economic and political worldview. The capitalism that Marx referred to once had a positive side. Capitalism revolutionised societies, and while oppressing the working class, provided the basis for education, health, and an overall improvement in living standards. Those days are long past.

Capitalism builds and destroys as it develops. It is unavoidable as it must constantly seek to escape the ever-present threat of a fall in the rate of profit. This quest, as Marx and Engels so put it, "chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere." Africa is a powerful symbol of capitalism's degeneration.

What has been so obvious in capitalism's engagement with Africa has been a failure in any significant way to develop infrastructure, or to build sustaining economies. There remains a cruel reliance on exploitative, extractive industries.

The domination is not as formalised as it was in 1884 at the 'Berlin Conference' when the imperialist powers carved up the continent to serve their various needs. Neo-colonialism is a little more subtle.

What we see in Africa today, the extremes of inequality, of dreadful poverty amid ostentatious wealth, has its genesis in the exploitation begun by colonialism and intensified by neo-colonialism and imperialism. In 1965, Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first independent president, said that "the state is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality, its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside." Nkrumah was deposed in a military coup. He was, after all, describing the operations of the modern state and of its relationship with both domestic and global capitalism.

The latest grab or 'scramble for Africa' is very much a metaphor for the anarchy of capitalism. Imperialism operates by the use and export of capital. This in turn means subservience and increased indebtedness. Today the total debt across all 46 sub-Saharan states is 57 per cent of combined GDP.

All states are in debt. This is just one of the facts of life of global capitalism. Africa suffers especially because it has so little capacity to service debt. Mozambique, Zambia, Cabo Verde, and Angola have debt ratios of 100 per cent of gross national income. For these countries, there is no light at the end of any tunnel. South Africa fares little better with a debt to GDP ratio of 75 per cent.

Global capitalism is in deep crisis and because of its need to find new markets, more resources and at a cheaper rate, Africa suffers.

The total debt of sub-Saharan Africa was US$305 billion in 2010. By 2020 that figure had risen to $702 billion, close to 50 per cent of the combined GDP of all sub-Saharan countries. Today that figure is 57 per cent and the total dollar value of the debt is, according to World Bank figures, $1.14 trillion dollars.

The rapacious nature of capital is most starkly evident when the work of multinational corporations is considered. Every dollar of tax that they pay is paid grudgingly, if at all. Every dollar of profit is celebrated.

An Oxfam report revealed that tax breaks for the six largest foreign mining companies in Sierra Leone equalled 59 per cent of the entire budget of the country. This figure is equal to eight times the country's health budget. Sierra Leone is not exceptional. It simply reveals the contradiction between nation-states and the global nature of capitalism. In this regard, the entrapment of individual African countries is not fundamentally different to the situation facing many Western capitalist states. It is simply in the degree of severity.

The people of sub-Saharan Africa eke out a desperate life. Per capita GDP is just $1,560 per year. Growth has effectively stalled. Forty per cent of the population earn less than $1.90 a day. Poor health, poor life expectancy, and poverty haunt the people of this immensely rich part of the world. At the same time the world is awash with wealth. Total global wealth today stands at $454 trillion.

While climate change threatens us all, the people in sub-Saharan Africa live with its immediate consequences. The continent faces extreme weather events, increased drought, food insecurity, starvation, poor health outcomes, and economic destruction. It doesn't have to be like this.

The populations of the capitalist states of sub-Saharan Africa are doubly exploited; first by their own governments and capitalist class and then by the power of global capitalism. In the 21st century, with capitalism irredeemably locked in crisis, it is an increasingly bleak picture for Africa and for the world.

War, famine, dislocation, inequality, debt, climate destruction, will stalk the people of Africa. Our media will focus on the latest atrocity, for a moment and then move on. The locusts who feed on misery, who increase the debt burden, who exploit and despoil the earth remain free to go about their awful work. ✪

it doesn't have to be like this

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