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Unhinged US – time to close the bases!

Pine Gap, 20 kilometres south-east of Alice Springs, was established in 1968 in conditions of great secrecy. Local people were told it was a space research facility. In fact, it is a satellite ground station dedicated to spying and warfare. Pine Gap is one of the largest and most important United States war-fighting and intelligence bases in the world.

Photo: Schutz – wikimedia.org (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Every branch of the US military as well as the National Reconnaissance Office, National Security Agency and the CIA is stationed at Pine Gap. It employs over 1,000 US and Australian personnel.

Pine Gap's original and still most important function is to serve as the ground control station for US satellites which cover a strategically important third of the globe, encompassing China, southern Russia, and the Middle East oil fields.

US satellites transmitting through Pine Gap monitor missile launches and military, economic, political, and domestic telephone from allies and enemies alike. They provide photographic surveillance of terrain, buildings, troop movements, the results of bombing raids, etc. The satellites can also intercept radar, allowing mapping of air defences, anti-ballistic missile radars and early-warning radars.

Pine Gap was established in the cold war and was part of the United States nuclear war fighting strategy. With the end of the cold war the United States did not downgrade Pine Gap. Instead it intensified its use of the base, adding more and more functions as the years went on.

US bases on Australia's soil contribute to the US war fighting strategy. The bases assist the US to prosecute wars in our region and beyond and help swell the list of Australia's enemies.

It is time to close Pine Gap.

ABORIGINAL LAND

Pine Gap sits on Aboriginal land. The Arrente people were never asked their opinion, let alone their permission, for a huge war-making facility to be located on their traditional lands.

It is time this prior Aboriginal ownership was acknowledged. It is time the traditional owners were given back their right to decide what is done on their land.

Pine Gap ties Australia to US nuclear war planning, specifically via its contribution to missile defence programs that are more offensive than defensive. As a result, Pine Gap is contributing to nuclear proliferation with destabilising consequences.

Pine Gap involves Australia in planning for and perhaps even starting a nuclear war, and makes us a nuclear target as a consequence.

Pine Gap contributes crucial tracking and targeting information for US drone strikes across the globe. The Pine Gap drone program makes Australia complicit in war crimes.

Australia is a crucial part of the US-led "Five-Eyes" intelligence club (US, UK, Canada, Australia, NZ) who work together to gather intelligence material across the entire globe.

Pine Gap is a physical manifestation of Australia's lack of independence. It involves our country, without permission, agreement or even notification, in US foreign policy disasters and crimes.

Pine Gap is a US base and not a "joint-facility" as successive Australian governments have falsely asserted. Although Australia has some access, Pine Gap was built by the US, its core facilities are paid for and maintained by the US and it would not exist but for American strategic purposes.

Pine Gap is so central to the US military that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for Canberra to disentangle itself from any future US conflict, including a US-China war. In any major contest in the Pacific, our relationship with the US would make Australia a strategic target.

Continued on page 2

Marles and Albanese have sold out the Australian people. They have become agents of a foreign power.

4

A Fundraiser by Cumberland Branch

5

Heatwaves: Silent killers

8

Peace is union business

13

Gaza aid groups forced to scavenge

Guardian

Issue 2176 26 January 2026

Mind your language

When is a kidnapping not a kidnapping? It's not a riddle. The answer is "when the famously impartial British Broadcasting Corporation is reporting it and the kidnapped person is Venezuelan President Nicholas Maduro." The BBC has apparently sent out a directive that the kidnapping is to be referred to as "seizing" or "capture." 'Seized' is neutral, while 'capture' suggests that Maduro was on the run. Maybe he deserved it?

The facts are that the USA has invaded a country and kidnapped its leader. One hundred people were murdered during the attack.

A quick look at Australian media shows outlets here are going with 'seizure' or 'capture' too. Maybe they don't know how to spell 'kidnap.' No amount of seizing and capturing will change that. Calling the attack 'audacious' doesn't make it not a kidnapping.

It's tempting to say that this is just language, but these choices are important for several reasons. Australia's leadership, always subservient to the US, is facing a difficult truth just now. For decades it has been the policy of both major parties that 'the alliance' with the US was the best thing for Australia and must be preserved. Ordinary Australians don't get a vote on this, and it's not up for discussion, whatever the US does. After Venezuela, and considering that the US is directly threatening another US ally, Denmark, it's become harder for the government to pretend that the US cares about Australia's interests.

So language that suggests that a murderous kidnapping was a bit of an adventure and that Maduro deserved to be kidnapped matters because it keeps us from the truth about our so-called ally. If Australian people were really confronted with the plain truth about what happened, they might start questioning AUKUS, whereby this country is spending more than it has ever spent on anything to make us even more integrated with the US military.

Another misuse of language is the word 'antisemitism.' The word itself describes a real thing that the Communist Party of Australia wholeheartedly opposes, racism and bigotry towards Jewish people.

The misuse comes when 'antisemitism' is used to describe support for Palestine or opposition to actions taken by the state of Israel. Almost every week in Australian cities large numbers of people march in the streets because they oppose an ongoing genocide and an unjust occupation. That's not antisemitism. Misuse of the term reached some kind of pinnacle when the Australian government's 'antisemitism envoy' equated a peaceful march over the Sydney Harbour Bridge in opposition to the Israeli attacks on Gaza with the Bondi shootings.

The misuse looks set to continue with the planned Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion. The terms of reference clearly state that the government "has adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of antisemitism." That's a working definition that conflates criticism of Israel and its actions with antisemitism. Commentator Osman Faruqi has called the Royal Commission "a de facto Royal Commission into Israel critics."

Misuse of the term 'antisemitism' matters because it cheapens our understanding of what is a real and dangerous phenomenon. As an example, the government's 'antisemitism envoy' was quiet about a public demonstration by actual Nazis holding signs about Jews, but has plenty of time to criticise protestors who oppose a genocide.

At a time when even trusted media sources like the ABC and the BBC are sugar-coating a murderous US attack on a sovereign country, and a government envoy and a lot of the media are painting opposition to an apartheid state as antisemitism, the Communist Party of Australia does its best to show the working class the world as it actually is. If you support us in that, consider joining or supporting our efforts through a donation to the Press Fund.

Unhinged US – time to close the bases!

Continued from page 1

The corporate presence at Pine Gap has expanded substantially since the 1990s. It includes some of the major US aerospace and defence companies, such as Raytheon, Boeing, Northrop Grumman and General Dynamics, as well as major technology companies, such as IBM and Hewlett-Packard. Raytheon is by far the largest contractor at Pine Gap.

Pine Gap functions within the larger context of Australia's long-standing subservience to US foreign policy interests. Australia is the only nation to have joined the US in every one of its major military interventions in the past century, including Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

We must demand that the base be closed down.

AUKUS

The Albanese Labor government's decision to sign up to the AUKUS war alliance is potentially the most costly and dangerous decisions of any government since federation. It is not just costly in dollar terms and in the harm it will do the Australian people through austerity measures to foot the bill. It fuels an arms race that could result in nuclear war. To top it off, the $368 billion plus bill for nuclear submarines surrenders what remains of Australia's independence and sovereignty.

From whichever angle you look at it, AUKUS must be cancelled.

We are told there is not enough money to adequately fund Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, let alone including dental care under Medicare. We are told we cannot afford the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Public education is starved of funding. As for public housing, it has all but been dismantled. JobSeeker for the unemployed, the age pension and other social payments are below the poverty line. We are told we cannot afford to increase them.

Defence Minister Richard Marles and PM Anthony Albanese have sold out the Australian people and for what? They have shattered their claims to be addressing climate change. They have become agents of a foreign power.

The planet is close to dangerous tipping points as climate change targets fall far short of what is required. But where is the funding for a speedy transition to renewables? You need a magnifying glass to see it when compared with the $368 billion plus being allocated towards escalating Australia's war-fighting capability.

Australia does not have an enemy. The only threat to its security is from the US war machine which is targeting the People's Republic of China. Neither Australia nor the US can win a war against China. The only winner is the military-industrial complex.

The expanded US bases with additional US military; the purchase of hypersonic missiles; the offensive (not defensive) nuclear-powered submarines; the enhancement of our cyberwarfare capability; and other aspects of the AUKUS agreement are aimed at China and Russia.

Australian forces, already largely integrated into the US's war machine, will be under the command of the US. Parliament will not be informed in advance let alone have a say in whether we go to war. So much for the claims of democratic values.

War against China would be a massive own goal. China is our largest trading partner, taking one third of our exports.

It is time for us to join together and call on governments around the world to cut military spending, and instead invest in the true needs of the people and the planet to build a just and sustainable peace.

We must unite and mobilise to force the Australian government off this path to war.

Write to PM Albanese, War Minister Marles, and Foreign Minister Penny Wong to tell them that you reject Australia becoming a proxy to US wars and bearing the terrible consequences.

Congress Appeal

From 27 February to 1 March 2026, elected delegates representing Communist Party organisations from all over Australia will gather in Melbourne for the 15th National Congress of the Party. There will be an opening on the Friday night, 27 February, to which all *Guardian* readers, their families and friends are invited. (Details will be provided in a future issue of the *Guardian*.)

Over three days, delegates will discuss the work of the Party, make any amendments to and adopt a Political Resolution. In the lead-up to the Congress, Party members are discussing and submitting amendments to the draft Political Resolution. In January 2026 the Central Committee will consider these amendments and finalise the draft to be put to Congress.

Congress will elect a new Central Committee to lead the work of the Party until the next National Congress. As the highest body of the Party, it can also amend the Party's Program and Constitution and adopt other resolutions as its delegates may determine.

The CPA has launched a Special Appeal to help defray the costs associated with holding a National Congress. These are considerable with delegates coming from as far away as Perth, the printing of documents, etc.

We are appealing to Party members, organisations, and all friends and supporters of the Party, including *Guardian* readers, to help us reach our $10,000 target as soon as possible.

To contribute, please fill in the form below or write your details on a separate piece of paper to send with your contribution. Payment by credit card can also be phoned in on 02 9699 8844 or use the direct credit details.

All contributions will be acknowledged in the *Guardian*, with the names of contributors unless otherwise requested. We look forward to your support for this important occasion.

Direct credit details

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or use the QR code.

Include "Congress Appeal" with transaction. If you want to be acknowledged in the *Guardian* (give name as it should appear).

15th CPA Congress $10,000 Financial Appeal

I, (Name) .....

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wish to contribute $..... to the above Appeal.

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I agree/disagree to having my name published in the *Guardian* in acknowledgement of my contribution.

Send to 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010 or phone through on 02 9699 8844.

Stamping out hate with draconian laws

When it came time for the Australian home affairs minister to address the press in relation to the omnibus combating antisemitism bill, Tony Burke pointed to a number of key aspects of the legislation. These involve the listing of hate groups, and the ability to refuse to grant or cancel visas in respect of individuals found to be harbouring "racial bigotry".

The broad range of measures contained in the *Combatting Antisemitism, Hate and Extremism Bill 2026* have been drafted in a major rush to respond to the Bondi Beach massacre over the parliamentary holiday period. It's a rush to create laws that would prevent targeted hate in the public sphere leading to extreme acts of violence.

Since the release of the exposure draft of the bill on 13 January, it's caused a stir, due its length and the broad range of laws it seeks to amend, along with further concerns about the reach of the new national security and criminal law measures, with the likely implications of so many laws being drafted in such a hurry is that they capture a range of behaviour that they weren't designed to.

The stamping out of hate is a tall order. Issues stemming from laws attempting to prevent the dissemination of hate necessarily involve encroachments on the right to free speech and the implied right to political communication. With laws that have been drafted on the fly, the risk is that they operate so broadly they capture legitimate speech or that the authorities use them to silence dissent.

The other key issue is that this onslaught of draconian lawmaking is being rolled out in the wake of an earlier round of "enacting the worst hate crime laws ever" in February 2025. Taken together with the over 100 pieces of national security/counterterrorism legislation enacted since the 2001 9/11 New York terror attacks, this legislation means that if an authoritarian government does take power, it will have a field day.

CRACKING DOWN TO PROMOTE HARMONY

A coalition of rights groups – the NSW Council for Civil Liberties, Liberty Victoria and the Queensland Council for Civil Liberties – released a statement outlining that the Combating Antisemitism Bill serves to combine "practical reforms such as the creation of a national gun buyback scheme with radical and unprecedented reforms to our democratic rights and liberties."

The 13 January statement further underscores that the listing of prohibited hate groups provides "extraordinary powers" to the minister, allowing them to make broad classifications about groups, without the need of any procedural fairness, which is a legal principle requiring fairness and the right of appeal in administrative matters.

The Coalition further suggests that many of the measures in the bill "go far beyond what's required to address the horrific events at Bondi". The example given is the expansion of the prohibited symbols offences, under sections 80.2H and 80.2HA of the Code, as the onus of proof is being shifted to the defendant, for crimes that carry mandatory minimum sentences of 12 months.

The liberties experts also point to an issue with the Migration Act amendments, as the minister is being given the power to determine to cancel or not issue visas based on whether individuals "might" sow discord in the community, whereas right now, there has to be a determination that they "would" engage in such conduct to warrant deportation.

ABSURD

"The federal government is not undertaking this inquiry in good faith. Two days for submissions on legislation that potentially cuts across our democratic rights is absurd. We do not get to social cohesion with a government playing fast and loose with the community's freedom of speech, association and religion," NSWCCL president Timothy Roberts said.

"If the Albanese government was serious about the purported aim of this bill, then surely, they would be trying to take the community with them. At the current rate, they are not even taking the time to listen to them," the respected lawyer said in conclusion.

"The federal government is driving division in seeking to extend criminal laws in such an ill-considered way. Criminal laws must be able to be clearly understood by the community to prevent miscarriages of justice."

Sydney Criminal Lawyers

2025: Federally approved 'deforestation doom'

The Federal government gave the green light to more than 57,000 hectares of threatened species habitat destruction last year, making it the worst 12-month period in 15 years.

The Australian Conservation Foundation's Extinction wrapped 2025 finds:

- The northern quoll had more of its habitat approved to be destroyed in 2025 than any other threatened animal.
- Western Australia's Pilbara region is home to all of the 'top' five animal species worst affected by approved habitat destruction: the northern quoll, night parrot, ghost bat, Pilbara leaf-nosed bat and Pilbara olive python (in that order).
- A total of 42 plants and animals were added to Australia's list of species threatened with extinction in 2025.
- The night parrot was moved from 'endangered' to 'critically endangered' and is second on the list of Australian threatened species worst impacted by federally-approved destruction in 2025.
- In January 2025, ACF reported that 2024 was a record-breaking year for the amount of koala habitat consigned to the bulldozers (just over 3,000 ha); 2025 smashes that record, with 4,511ha of koala homes given approval to be destroyed.

"In 2025, the government gave the greenlight to bulldoze more than twice as much habitat for threatened species as it did in 2024," said ACF's CEO Adam Bandt.

"The 57,000 hectares of government-approved destruction last year are just the tip of the iceberg, with countless more hectares of bush and forests being bulldozed unchecked.

"With new nature laws there's great potential for change, but the onus is firmly on the Albanese government to turn words into action.

"Once these species are gone, they're gone forever. As the government finalises the new rules to protect bush and forests and sets up the national EPA, nature needs real protections enforced by a watchdog with real bite."

Australian Conservation Foundation

A northern quoll. Photo: S J Bennett – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

Hands off Venezuela action in Boorloo/Perth, 5 January.

Politics & Picnic in the Park: A Fundraiser by Cumberland Branch

Arthur Martin

On Sunday 11 January, Cumberland Branch hosted a fundraiser at Auburn Botanical Gardens to support the upcoming National Congress of the Communist Party of Australia.

The branch hosted this fundraiser to support the National Congress, with all funds raised from the event being donated to this cause. The event had a small number of speakers who first introduced the branch; the important point was made that Cumberland Branch is not yet 12 months old, with some successful campaigns already and many more planned for the future. The local area was also given a brief history. The gardens had previously been a landfill before reforms converted the area to a protected garden after campaigning by progressive locals. The Congress was also described to attendees as a significant and important event for our party, coming with a number of costs.

The event itself was a relaxed afternoon with discussions ranging from the activities of the branch from the previous year, upcoming issues and how the branch can organise around them going forward, the current political climate in NSW following the Bondi tragedy, anti-protest laws being rushed through by the Labor government, and geopolitics, including our response to the US attack on Venezuela. Branch members brought food for the barbecue and drinks, and some even entertained attendees with live music. Some curious members of the general public approached us and ended up having a good time discussing politics and exchanging contact information to potentially participate in future activism.

All in all, around 30 people attended and the fundraiser was an objective success. The branch expressed sincere thanks to the comrades and their friends and families who attended, and Cumberland Branch is proud to be able to help support our National Congress in a small way.

Community picket prevents unfair eviction

The Renters and Housing Union Western Australia had a short term victory in an ongoing picket of the eviction of a single mother and two daughters by government-funded community housing provider Foundation Housing, after the bailiff left her property without attempting to enforce the eviction.

The bailiff attended the property after Foundation Housing CEO Chris Smith indicated the community housing provider still intended to enforce the eviction, but upon seeing the waiting picketers and media left the property without engaging with the tenant, Nicola Torres.

Advocates for Torres wrote to Foundation Housing requesting an urgent stay in the eviction as they seek further legal advice about her position and potential grounds for a Supreme Court challenge.

A bailiff had been ordered to evict Nicola Torres and her daughters into homelessness after Torres fell into rental arrears last year, which she subsequently repaid in full. Foundation Housing refused to accept the payment, returning the funds to Torres, and are insisting on evicting this family into homelessness with no support. Torres and her family have nowhere else to go.

Torres said, "I'm very grateful for the community turning up and everyone that's been here with us today and shone light on what's going on. There's no way that I could have achieved this on my own."

Media and communications officer for the Renters and Housing Union, William B said,the picket was "a huge success. It's the first residential eviction picket we have tried in Western Australia, and we managed to prevent the eviction from taking place. As a result of our action, a mother and her children are able to sleep in their own home tonight."

"Our message to the government is simple: You're going to see more of this happening if you guys don't step your game up. With every rent increase, unfair eviction, or injustice thrust upon tenants, the more we will organise, the more we will unite and the more evictions we will prevent. Don't be mistaken to think we'll go away."

"My Message to tenants is this: Join us. No one can save us except ourselves. Every government has shown they will not be helping us. Only by us organising and fighting back together can we regain our dignity."

"Renters in Western Australia are sick to death of getting the short end of the stick and it's unacceptable."

"May today stand as a warning to any landlord, real estate agent or community housing provider that thinks it's okay to treat tenants without dignity: We are watching, we are militant and we will protect our homes if necessary. Under no pretext can housing be denied to anyone."

Renters and Housing Union

Dingo bytes

The following appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 15 January: "Australians for Humanity – Demand that the invitation to the President of Israel to visit this country be immediately withdrawn. A call to withdraw President Herzog's invitation, uphold international law, and defend free speech and the right to protest."

This demand is authorised by the journal *Pearls and Irritations* and supported by citizens who are disgusted, outraged and asking, with what values in mind was an invitation issued to a man who presides over ethnic cleansing, massacres, genocide, and famine?

The invitation to the President of Israel as head of a state responsible for genocidal acts is immoral and wrong.

The massacre at Bondi requires a national coming together not a visit from a man who has approved the destruction of a people, who has signed bombs to be dropped on Gaza and following the 7 October 2023 attack said, "It's an entire nation … that's responsible."

How can the Australian Prime Minister fail to understand that he risks social cohesion by associating our nation with a government that includes indicted war criminals?

Instead of Australian governments passing laws to erode free speech and the right to protest, obligations to the Genocide Convention and to the International Court of Justice should be implemented.

State violence can be ended by respecting international law and by achieving justice for Palestine.

If the invitation to President Herzog is not withdrawn, voters should tell their elected members we cannot support such irresponsible action by this government.

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: is the misnamed People First Bank. The Finance Sector Union (FSU) has condemned People First Bank's decision to close a further 15 branches across New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, and South Australia, warning the move will leave regional communities without access to face-to-face banking and place more than 70 jobs at risk.

The closures are due to come into effect in March, following the shutdown of 18 People First Bank branches in April last year, bringing the total number of closures to 36 in just two years.

The FSU says that since the merger of People's Choice Credit Union and Heritage Bank in 2023, People First Bank's branch network has been cut by a massive 40 per cent, despite assurances made to customers that the merger would deliver one of Australia's largest member-owned branch networks.

People First Bank recorded a 7 per cent increase in profits in the last financial year, undermining claims that branch closures are necessary for financial sustainability. The impact of the closures will be felt most acutely in regional and rural communities, with some towns left without any local bank at all.

In Queensland, the towns of Oakey and Pittsworth will be left with no bank branch, forcing residents to travel significant distances to access basic banking services.

The FSU says Queensland has been hit particularly hard, with almost half of the former Heritage Bank branch network set to close since the merger.

Customers in other regional centres will be required to travel up to 150 kilometres to reach their nearest People First Bank branch, including: Goondiwindi - 150km to Stanthorpe, Millmerran - 75km to Toowoomba, Maryborough - 75km to Gympie, Hervey Bank - 70km to Bundaberg, and Millicent - 45km to Mount Gambier.

The union says branch closures across the banking sectors will continue unless the Albanese government implements the recommendations of the banking report and intervenes to protect access to essential banking services, particularly in regional Australia.

Finance Sector Union National Secretary Julia Angrisano said: "This is a bank that says it puts people first, yet it continues to abandon regional towns and local workers. When the merger was sold to customers, they were promised better access and more branches, not fewer.

"Bank branches are not a luxury, they are essential infrastructure. Without government action, we will continue to see towns abandoned and workers paying the price."

Heatwaves: Silent killers

M Santos

"Exposure to high heat is a major threat to human health. More people die in Australia from heatwaves than all other extreme weather events combined. Climate change is increasing the intensity and frequency of hot days and heatwaves."

The 2024-25 Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) *Heat in Homes* survey was conducted to gain a deeper insight into the experiences of people dealing with high temperatures in their homes. ACOSS partnered with the First Nations Clean Energy Network (FNCEN) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association (NATSIHA), enabling it to gain a wider sample of Indigenous Australians.

HOT EARTH

The world is currently on track to heating up by a catastrophic 2.9°C by the end of the century if governments fail to rapidly phase out fossil fuel production and usage. Heatwaves are set to become longer, hotter, and more deadly with each fraction of a degree of warming.

2025 has been ranked the third hottest year on record following the record high temperatures observed in 2023 and 2024. 2024 remains the hottest on record and the first year with an average temperature clearly exceeding 1.5°C above the pre-industrial level – the target adopted at the Paris climate conference in 2015.

European temperatures over land hit a whopping 2.4°C and the Arctic 3.3°C above pre-industrial levels based on last five-year averages. European heat waves have resulted in tens of thousands of deaths.

Researchers have found millions of people are dying every year due to heatwaves. The deaths are not just caused directly by the heat, but also as a result of problems caused by the heat, for example toxic air pollution from wildfires and the spread of diseases such as dengue fever.

Heatwaves kill more Australians than any other natural disaster, including bushfires, cyclones and floods.

VULNERABLE IMPACTED

"People experiencing financial and social disadvantage are worst impacted by these events ... they are more likely to live in poor energy performing homes, face unaffordable energy bills, and often lack the resources or control to implement solutions. First Nations people, people who are on income support, rent, or have a disability or chronic medical condition, are at greater risk," ACOSS found.

In a cost-of-living crisis, people struggling with energy bills reported taking measures to reduce energy usage such as cutting back on the use of cooling, lights, and hot showers; turning off the fridge and other appliances; not having visitors; and going to bed earlier.

ACOSS also found that many of those struggling with energy bills were going without food, medicine, and other essentials, approaching charities for assistance, even selling things; or borrowing money.

Medical and government advice to vulnerable people who lack air conditioning or cannot afford to turn on the air conditioner on extreme heat days is to go somewhere cooler. However many people face barriers to leaving their homes.

One barrier is cost: cinemas and cafés cost, transport to air-conditioned shopping centres costs. Some vulnerable people have caring responsibilities and health and disability limitations that confine them to home.

"For people experiencing financial and social disadvantage, especially those living with disability or a chronic health condition, renting or receiving income support, the situation of hot homes that cannot be cooled remains untenable, putting lives at risk. The situation facing First Nations people surveyed is worse on most indicators and must be prioritised for solutions."

British medical journal *The Lancet* confirms ACOSS's findings: "Global epidemiological studies have demonstrated that impacts of extreme heat are felt disproportionately within society, the most important risk factors beyond age being pre-existing medical conditions, chronic mental disorders, social isolation, low-economic status, homelessness, and strenuous outdoor activities."

The homeless, outdoor workers, and athletes are at particular risk. Trade unions such as the CFMEU construction union have long fought for work to stop during extreme heat. For example, CFMEU enterprise agreements contain provisions such as stopping work when the temperature reaches 35°C and for employers to provide air-conditioned sheds, drinking water, and sunscreen (Australia is the melanoma capital of the world). On-hand first aid is an imperative for workers affected by heat along with regular breaks.

"People are worried about summers getting hotter, and want governments to improve energy performance of homes," ACOSS reported.

HOT EARTH

They have good reason to be worried.

Lancet notes: "Heatwaves are recognised as one of the most important natural hazards to human health ... Heatwaves have increased in frequency and intensity across the globe and in Australia in recent decades, with a concomitant increase in heat-related deaths, a trend projected to continue ..."

Photo: rawpixel

The Grantham Institute's Dr Garyfallos Konstantinoudis calls heatwaves silent killers, "the vast majority of heat deaths happen in homes and hospitals, where people with existing health conditions are pushed to their limit, but heat is rarely mentioned on death certificates.

"Despite being the deadliest type of extreme weather, heat has long been underestimated as a public health risk. No one would expect someone to risk their life working in torrential rain or hurricane winds, but dangerous heat is still treated too casually."

Dr Marina Romanello, of University College London said: "We're seeing millions of deaths occurring needlessly every year because of our delay in mitigating climate change and our delay in adapting to the climate change that cannot be avoided. We're seeing key leaders, governments and corporations backsliding on climate commitments and putting people increasingly in harm's way."

Globally governments subsidise fossil fuel corporations to the tune of more than AU$1.5 trillion each year. Compare this to the unmet commitment made to support the most vulnerable countries including the Pacific Islands of US$300 million (AU$450m) at the COP29 summit in 2024.

PREVENTABLE

"The negative health impacts of heat are predictable and largely preventable with specific public health and multi-sectoral policies and interventions. WHO has issued guidance for public health institutions to identify and manage extreme heat risks. Action on climate change combined with comprehensive preparedness and risk management can save lives now and in the future," the World Health Organisation points out.

Governments, including Australia's, have a responsibility to rapidly phase out the production and use of fossil fuels.

At the same time building regulations need to undergo significant changes to ensure all new buildings are as close to energy neutral as possible with solar panels, electricity storage, insulation, and electricity the sole source of energy.

Air conditioning is a must for all households in Australia. Fossil fuel subsidies should be replaced by subsidies to bring households, including rentals, up to the necessary standards.

Governments can reduce risks of heat-related deaths and illness, including hospitalisations, through massive public housing programs with buildings built to the highest environmental standards that are serviced with solar panels and batteries.

At the same time gas and electricity companies should be nationalised to cut costs to consumers by slashing the billions of dollars in profits and facilitate the rapid phasing out of fossil fuels.

Extreme heat – five facts

- Heat is an important environmental and occupational health hazard.
- Heat stress is the leading cause of weather-related deaths and can exacerbate underlying illnesses including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, mental health, asthma, and can increase the risk of accidents and transmission of some infectious diseases.
- Heatstroke is a medical emergency with a high-case fatality rate.
- The number of people exposed to extreme heat is growing exponentially due to climate change in all world regions. Heat-related mortality for people over 65 years of age increased by approximately 85% from 2000–2004 and 2017–2021.
- Vulnerability to heat is shaped by both physiological factors, such as age and health status, and exposure factors such as occupation and socio-economic conditions.

heat has long been underestimated as a public health risk

The Global Sumud Flotilla: Interview with an activist

Last year's Global Sumud Flotilla was the largest ever Freedom Flotilla Coalition mission. The flotillas seek to break the decades-long siege of Gaza to deliver aid to the Palestinians of the region.

Last year's flotilla, the third was notable for the dozens of boats involved and the hundreds of participants.

Juliet was one of six Australians on the flotilla, who all arrived back in Australia with stories of the terrible treatment they endured whilst detained in Israel's Ktzi'ot prison.

Juliet was interviewed as she was about to head to Sicily to join the next FFC mission, which is to set sail in the northern hemisphere spring.

So, can you tell us a little about your first experience, and why, given that fact that you did suffer at the hands of the IDF after you were kidnapped off the high seas, you going back for more?

The first thing that lies at the heart of every humanitarian that goes on that mission is they keep having to centre the reality of Palestinian lives – the lives in occupied Palestine under the Israeli Occupation Forces, which is murder, slaughter, starvation, apartheid, and almost erasure.

Those on the flotilla are ordinary people acting on behalf of their governments who should be acting.

So, when you put it in the context of a white privileged settler on stolen land with the ongoing genocide of First Nations, I feel it's just a drop in the ocean, the sacrifice that we have to make.

There is a risk. There might be fatalities. But it is also a moral duty. You have to have the moral courage to put your body on the line for the greater good.

All social change has required that sort of stepping up. It feels like a continuation of that social change and that always means that a small group of people will change laws, and that is how it has always been.

If you centre the reality of Palestinian suffering next to your own, you can stay steadfast.

It is not that it is not terrifying. We have to fear that we might cop it a bit this time. The Israeli government, especially post-Bondi, will probably throw the book at the Australian contingent.

You look at how crazy things are with Trump and Venezuela, and the impunity with which Israel breaks every single international law, but they will feel pretty foolhardy when they realise how big this flotilla is.

It is three times bigger this time. So, I reckon they're going to be butthurt, and who knows what the response will be.

But within the fear, it is the most meaningful, lifechanging experience that I have ever had, and I think I can speak on behalf of all the ordinary people from 46 countries that I met along the way, when saying it is the right thing to do.

You have the moral courage to do the right thing. That is a really inspiring thing.

To get boats ready in a harbour with people you have never met. You get to know them quickly. You are on a common mission.

But every single day, you get closer to an imminent naval blockade, which is the antithesis of that. It is not humanity. It is not love in action. It is pure evil and violence. So, it is a bittersweet experience, but it has to be done. It is complicated but not unmanageable.

I imagine participating in such a flotilla is much different to what you'd expect beforehand.

What would you say you learned about the occupation of the Palestinians and the system that is in place to facilitate the progression of the Israeli settler colonial project by sailing amongst the Global Sumud Flotilla?

When we finally did get to see domestically what the hasbara propaganda unit of the Israeli Zionist colonial project is, it just shows that there has been decades of brainwashing since the establishment of Israel in 1947.

This sort of propaganda enables and bolsters the almost god-given right that they are able to dehumanise Palestinians to the point that they think that they don't deserve equality of life, and they don't deserve access to food, liberty and freedom.

Having met IDF soldiers that would be shy of 18, they really do believe they are acting in a righteous manner: they are the chosen people of that land, and the Indigenous Palestinians need to be erased because that is their homeland.

So, you realise the level of indoctrination and brainwashing that facilitates this incredible evil that they are able to enact on a daily basis.

That is frightening. I didn't expect the level of cultural brainwashing that goes on with people living in Israel. I don't mean all of them. There are anti-genocide people there, but their media machine doesn't let the west see that.

That is the most terrifying thing, looking into the eyes of some of those soldiers. They are tapped out and they truly believe Palestinians are lesser and they deserve to be slaughtered, starved, and completely erased.

They are getting closer to enacting that mission and that is terrifying.

Sydney Criminal Lawyers
(edited for space)

Venezuela: Adelaide rally report

Following the brazen illegal invasion of Venezuela and the kidnapping of President Nicolas Maduro & his wife, Cilia Flores, a coalition led by the CPA and Spirit of Eureka organised a snap rally on Monday 5 January.

Speakers from the Latin American community spoke at beehive corner in Rundle Mall to an audience of 100-150 people against the injustice and violation of Venezuela's sovereignty and encouraged the masses to stand in solidarity with the people of Venezuela against Imperialist aggression.

Queensland says Hands Off Venezuela

The Sunshine Coast and Brisbane branches attended a snap rally for the Hands Off Venezuela! Trump out of Latin America! event in Brisbane's King George Square on Friday 16 January. The United States has bombed Caracas, kidnapped the president and his wife, and is trying to control Venezuela's government, resources, lands and assets. The Albanese government must condemn the actions of the US and break the US-Australia military alliance! Venezuela was never about narcotics, but always about power and oil.

A number of organisations gave speeches, including Uncle Coco on Aboriginal peoples in Australia, the Australia Venezuela Solidarity Network, and others. About 45 people attended with a strong presence by the CPA Qld branches. The CPA supports the Bolivarian Revolution and the Bolivarian government of Venezuela.

Indigenous knowledge can help reduce impacts of bushfires, floods and cyclones

Bushfires on Kangaroo Island, SA. Photo: newmatilda.com – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

Australia is facing devastating weather emergencies across the country, including bushfires, flooding, and tropical cyclones.

Indigenous communities, with a unique connection to the land, are also uniquely affected by environmental disasters and often face greater risks. For example, we know from Black Summer experiences that Indigenous peoples often face extensive physical and spiritual displacement from their Country, and are usually not adequately consulted during evacuation procedures.

This summer has so far seen Aboriginal communities in Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria affected, including Yarrabah, Palm Island, Hope Vale, Wujal Wujal, Cape and Gulf communities in northern Queensland impacted by ex-Tropical Cyclone Koji, and many Aboriginal communities in eastern and northern Victoria and East Gippsland affected by widespread fires. As the season progresses, weather emergencies are likely to spread to other states.

When it comes to keeping all Australian communities safe by reducing hazard risk and managing the environment holistically, Indigenous knowledge of managing the environment should be considered a viable and valuable resource. However, doing this would require investment, resources, and a willingness to support broader aspirations of Indigenous groups.

Professor Bhiamie Williamson, National Indigenous Disaster Resilience program lead at Monash University says that Indigenous peoples "have enormous capacity to make Australia more resilient to the climate crisis, as we have an extraordinary database of cultural knowledge reaching back to ancient climate change events."

"Emergency planning laws have historically been made without regard for the unique interest of Indigenous peoples. This means that in contemporary disasters, Indigenous interests are not known and cannot be accounted for, which creates additional risks for groups."

Monash University

NSW: Aboriginal man sacked over anti-genocide stance

Peter Marino

Jayden Kitchener-Waters, a Gomeroi and Ngiyampaa man working for the NSW Aboriginal Language Trust has been first disciplined and then sacked for slogans on his guitar at a work function.

Kitchener-Waters, a community engagement officer for the Trust, had been pressured by Department staff to take off the pro-Palestine slogans he had written on his guitar before the NSW Premiers Public Service Awards.

The slogans were 'free Gaza', 'No pride in genocide' and 'F** the IDF'.

According to *Deepcut News*, Kitchener-Waters posted a video to Instagram telling the story of the slogans and the pressure he faced. For that, he was suspended without pay. Since then he has gone into detail about the Department's disciplinary process on Instagram and elsewhere.

The Premier's Department has told Kitchener-Waters that he would be terminated for "deep disrespect for the values of the Public Service." The department also warned him "not to disclose information about this confidential disciplinary process" on any media or social media platform.

Kitchener-Waters claims he was told he needed to translate a submission he wrote in Gomeroi into English, and that accusing particular parties "Israel" of genocide was "inflammatory."

NSW Greens justice spokesperson Sue Higginson asked if the Department could explain "precisely how the United Nations and genocide scholars were wrong when they found Israel was committing a genocide in Gaza."

GREEN NOTES

Increased global coal consumption impacts climate change

Graham Holton

Global coal demand rose in 2025, reaching a record high of 8.8 billion tonnes, with an increase of 0.5 per cent expected for 2026. This increase in coal consumption was largely due to the United States, which had higher natural gas prices and slower plant retirements. US coal-fired power generation is set to rebound in the winter months as surging gas prices prompt utilities to switch from gas to using more coal.

Other countries either reduced or had steady coal consumption. Major uncertainties on globally electricity demand, in both advanced and developing economies, will impact coal substitution for heating oil, gas, or renewables.

China consumes 50 per cent of global coal, consuming 122 billion cubic metres of coal annually. India consumes 11 per cent of global coal, 27.35 billion cubic metres per annum, and the United States consumes 8.5 per cent, 20.7 billion cubic metres. The other major coal consumers are Germany, Russia, Japan, South Africa, and South Korea. The good news here is that China's demand for coal power fell in 2025 and seems to have peaked due to the phenomenal growth of clean energy production and use there.

The increase in coal consumption has worsened global warming, air pollution, and slowed the transition to a sustainable energy system. Even a small percentage increase in coal consumption has disproportionately large climate consequences, because of its high CO2 emissions. Burning one tonne of coal produces 2.9 tonnes of CO2. Coal consumption last year added 25 billion tonnes of CO2 to the atmosphere, contributing to higher global greenhouse gas concentrations. Atmospheric CO2 levels in 2025 reached 422.5 parts per million (ppm), more than 50 per cent above pre-industrial levels. This intensifies global warming, pushing the world further away from the Paris Agreement's target of limiting global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Coal combustion also releases methane and other greenhouse gases from mining coal, further worsening climate impacts. These emissions contribute to the total greenhouse effect and accelerate atmospheric warming.

Record global temperatures in 2025, including intense heatwaves in Asia, increased electricity demand for cooling. The increased demand boosted coal use in power generation, which in turn produced additional CO2 emissions, illustrating the reinforcing feedback loop between global warming and fossil fuel consumption.

Coal burning in 2025 produced more smog, respiratory illnesses, and premature deaths, especially in heavily industrialised regions of Asia. High coal usage can delay investment in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and electric grid decarbonisation. The slowdown of reaching net-zero emissions is making long-term climate targets harder to reach. Higher global temperatures accelerate polar ice and permafrost melting, increase sea-level rise, and accentuate extreme weather. The increase makes it harder to achieve short-term emission reduction goals for 2030, and increases the risk of climate tipping points.

Governments need to implement stricter climate policies, carbon pricing, or coal phase-out measures to offset these increases. Recent improvements in energy storage technology bolsters the feasibility of renewables. Bioenergy and geothermal sources are becoming more viable and can seamlessly fit into an energy portfolio to minimise environmental impact.

Understanding coal's multifaceted impacts extends beyond energy production; it needs stewardship of the planet and collective obligations to build a sustainable future. As climate change intensifies, the imperative to transition turns strongly toward renewable energy. Our planet stands at a critical juncture. Armed with the knowledge and innovations necessary to chart a more sustainable path, countries can reshape energy consumption while safeguarding the planet.

Peace is uni

The *Guardian* is pleased to publish this speech given by Comrade **Warren Smith** to the 2025 *Peace is Union Business* conference in Sydney.

Comrades, friends, unionists – Our movement has never just been about wages and conditions in the narrow sense; it has always been about whose lives matter, whose voices count, and what kind of world working people will inherit. Peace is union business because war is always a class question, and working people always pay the highest price in war.

SETTING THE SCENE AND PURPOSE

This conference has been called because the world is sliding into a more dangerous phase of permanent war and militarisation. From Palestine to Venezuela, from Europe to Africa ordinary workers, their families and their communities are the ones being killed, displaced, surveilled and silenced, while corporations and political elites profit. The objectives that brought us here are clear: to rebuild a broad, militant movement of unions for peace and social justice, to reconnect the labour movement with its own proud peace traditions, and to leave here with practical organising plans that mobilise our workplaces, our communities and our unions against war, racism and fascism.

UNIONS ARE MORE THAN "INTEREST GROUPS"

There is a view, pushed hard by employers and conservative politicians, that unions should stick to "bread and butter" issues: a pay rise here, a safety win there, but no "politics" in the union, no place for unions to have "foreign policy" views, no role for unions in questions of "war and peace." That argument is designed to remove the organised working class from the biggest decisions about war, peace and national priorities, and to leave those decisions in the boardrooms, with the generals and the spooks. Unions are the largest democratic organisations of working people in this country; if we accept being confined to a narrow economic role, we abandon the field on the very questions that determine whether our members live, die, are conscripted, are bombed, or see their social services, as well as their wages and conditions gutted to pay for the war machine.

From the beginning, unions have understood this broader role. In the First World War era, labour activists and peace campaigners – including unionists linked to the Australian Peace Alliance and anti-conscription committees – led mass campaigns that defeated conscription twice and asserted that workers should not be blindly fed into imperial slaughter. During the Vietnam era, unions did not just pass resolutions; maritime workers and others placed industrial bans on war-related cargoes and helped build the momentum that led to the massive Moratorium marches and ultimately to the withdrawal of Australian troops.

PEACE IS ALREADY IN OUR HISTORY

"Peace is union business" is not a slogan invented for this conference; it describes what unions in this country have done at some of the most important moments in our history. In 1938, waterside workers at Port Kembla refused to load pig iron onto the *Dalfram*, bound for Japan's war machine, in an action that became known as the Dalfram dispute and earned Robert Menzies the nickname "Pig Iron Bob." Wharfies in other ports followed with bans on scrap iron arguing they would not load cargoes that would be turned into weapons used against civilians and come back as bombs and bullets.

The same spirit ran through the union movement's long campaign against apartheid in South Africa, where the Seamen's Union of Australia and the Waterside Workers' Federation repeatedly banned South African ships and cargo, helped drive an international maritime oil embargo, and later received personal thanks from Nelson Mandela for their role in the freedom struggle. When unions put peace and anti-racism at the centre of their work, they do more than express solidarity; they make exploitation, war and fascism harder to organise.

BEYOND THE WATERFRONT – TEACHERS, BUILDERS, NURSES AND MORE

The peace tradition is not confined to maritime and transport unions. Teachers' unions, including the NSW Teachers Federation represented on the organising committee of this conference, have a long record of opposing war, defending curriculum space for peace education, and resisting attempts to turn schools into recruitment grounds for the military. Health and nurses' unions have campaigned against nuclear weapons and against wars that create mass civilian casualties and refugee crises which then overwhelm public hospitals and health systems.

The builders' labourers' Green Bans are often remembered as an environmental story, but they were also profoundly about peace and social justice: unions using industrial bans to stop socially destructive developments, to defend communities, and to say that workers will not build every project that capital demands. In the same tradition, rail and public transport unions have challenged attempts to militarise infrastructure and have demanded that public money go to socially useful services rather than war preparation. Across sectors, the lesson is consistent: when unions act collectively and politically, they can reshape what is possible, far beyond the immediate workplace.

TODAY'S CONTEXT: AUKUS, PALESTINE AND THE PACIFIC

This conference meets at a time when the Australian government is signing up to AUKUS and committing hundreds of billions of dollars to nuclear-powered submarines and deeper integration into United States and British war-fighting strategies. Those resources are being torn away from health, education, housing, climate transition and public services, at the very moment when inequality is soaring and workers are under intense economic pressure. The labour movement cannot be neutral on whether public money goes to nuclear submarines or to schools, hospitals, public housing and the climate jobs we desperately need. We must reject the false narrative that China is our enemy and is a threat to Australia. The threat to Australia comes from our chosen allies and their perpetual drive to war for corporate profits and expanded markets.

At the same time, the genocidal devastation in Gaza and the broader occupation of Palestine have exposed, in real time, how military alliances, arms deals and diplomatic cover enable the mass killing of civilians. Workers here are already responding: public sector workers taking solidarity actions, health staff speaking out about attacks on medical facilities, education workers refusing to be silent, and unions debating how to turn statements into industrial and political leverage.

In the Pacific, workers' organisations are raising the alarm that their islands are being treated as bases, buffers, and bargaining chips in great-power rivalry, while communities on the front line of climate change still wait for justice. The same Pacific that lives with the legacy of nuclear testing is now expected to host a military build-up in the name of "deterrence."

WHY WAR IS A UNION ISSUE

War is not an unfortunate accident that occasionally interrupts "normal" economic life; it is built into a system that puts private profit and imperialist rivalry above human need. The forces that fight to casualise labour, smash unions, privatise public services and deepen inequality are the same forces that lobby for weapons contracts, foreign bases and new theatres of war. When governments legislate to weaken unions at home and legislate to expand war-making powers abroad, they are pursuing one integrated project – the concentration of wealth and power in fewer hands, backed by the threat and reality of organised ruling class violence.

For workers, this plays out in multiple ways. It means workers, are the ones who fill the ranks of the armed forces, often for lack of other secure opportunities. It means our communities are the ones whose social services are cut to pay for defence spending that now runs into tens of billions of dollars per year and is rising steeply over the coming decade. The Australian government currently spends $191.8 million per day on the military. This is $8 million per hour. It means our workplaces, from ports to universities to research labs, are integrated into military supply chains and weapons development, often via opaque "partnerships" and "security" arrangements that shut down debate. To say "peace is union business" is to say that unions must contest this whole agenda, not just its symptoms.

LEARNING FROM OUR OWN VICTORIES

History shows that when unions take peace seriously, they can change outcomes. The anti-conscription victories in 1916 and 1917 were won by broad alliances of labour, peace organisations, women's groups and churches, using tactics that ranged from mass meetings and street marches to workplace agitation and voting power. The Vietnam Moratoriums were consciously modelled on labour-led protests in the United States, but in Australia they drew enormous strength from union involvement – from bans on troopships and munitions to explicit commitments by the Australian Council of Trade Unions and key unions to oppose the war.

The anti-apartheid movement likewise demonstrates that sustained union action can help delegitimise and economically isolate a regime that many governments were willing to tolerate or even support. When maritime workers, transport workers and others refused to handle South African cargo and sporting tours, they endured legal and political attacks but shifted public opinion and made concrete the idea that racism and oppression abroad were trade union issues here.

Australian unions played a central, often decisive, role in the Australian anti-nuclear movement, from early resistance to French tests and uranium mining through to current opposition to nuclear submarines under AUKUS. From the mid-1970s into the early 1980s, several unions used direct industrial action to disrupt the uranium industry and associated infrastructure shaping ALP and ACTU policies for decades and leaving an anti-nuclear federal government legacy today despite being under constant threat of erosion.

Today, as unions consider their responsibilities on issues like Palestine, AUKUS and far-right mobilisation, these experiences are not just inspiring stories; they are guides to action.

THE FAR RIGHT, RACISM AND WAR

One of the themes of this conference is combating the far right, white supremacist and neo-Nazi movements that are targeting the working class. These forces thrive in conditions of economic insecurity, militarism, and racist fear-mongering, and they are consciously cultivated by sections of capital and the political class that benefit from division and fear. The labour movement has confronted this before: from campaigning against local fascist groups in the 1930s, to opposing racism and apartheid, to challenging the racist Northern Territory Intervention and more recent anti-Muslim and anti-refugee politics.

Today's far right wraps itself in national flags, talks endlessly about "security" and "the West", and tries to turn anger at the cost-of-living crisis into hatred of migrants, Muslims, First Nations people and the organised left. When unions campaign for peace, for an independent foreign policy, for refugee rights and for First Nations justice, they do more than adopt good moral positions; they cut across the recruitment base of the far right and assert a different kind of patriotism – one based on solidarity, equality and collective security.

THE ROLE OF THIS CONFERENCE

This conference has been deliberately framed around key themes that invite unions to see themselves as central forces in the struggle for peace. "Freedom struggles in a world at war," "An independent Australia and Pacific," "Unions for peace and justice – a history of struggle against war, racism and fascism," "Organising for peace," and "Combating the ultra-right" – these are not separate boxes; together they describe a political project to put workers, unions and communities at the heart of an alternative vision. The program reflects that: sessions on Palestine and occupation, on AUKUS and strategic analysis, on organising in union

resources are being torn away from health, education, housing, climate transition and public services, at the very moment when inequality is soaring

ion business

towns, and on linking peace work with social justice and anti-racism.

The aim is not just to listen to experts, but to build connections between unions, between regions, and between sectors that can translate into real campaigns in the months and years ahead. That means mapping where military and security projects intersect with our workplaces; sharing experiences of industrial bans, community campaigning and political lobbying; and identifying concrete national demands that can unite unions around an agenda for peace and justice. We are here to strengthen the links between unions and organisations like the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN), peace groups, faith communities, First Nations organisations and migrant community groups, because a serious peace movement has to be broad, rooted and representative.

FROM ANALYSIS TO MOBILISATION

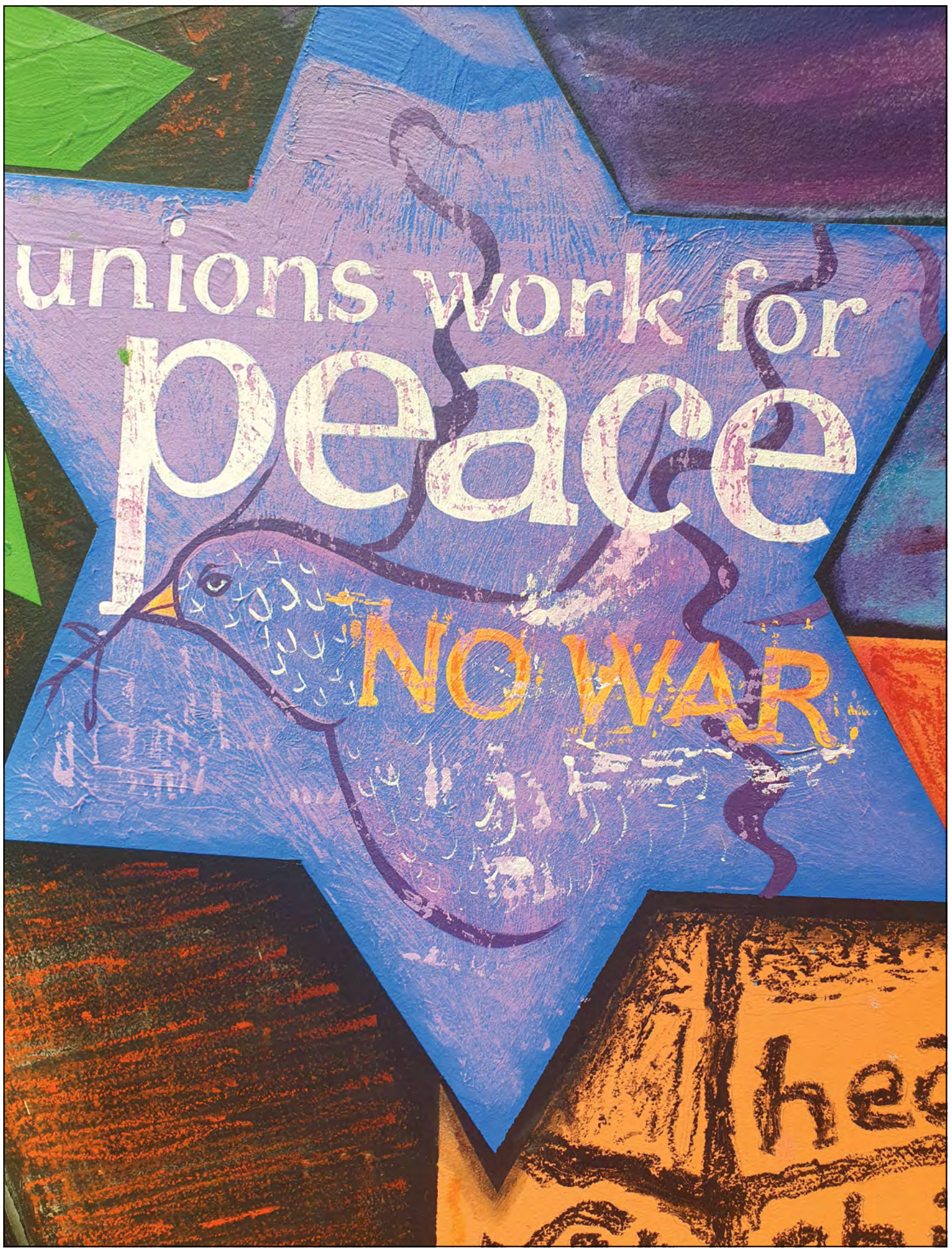
If peace is union business, then every union in this room has to ask: what does that mean for us, in practice, when we leave here? For some, it might mean committing to educate delegates and members about AUKUS, military spending and the alternatives – using workplace meetings, training courses and union communications to make the connections between war budgets and wage theft, between arms corporations and union-busting employers. For others, it might mean reviewing investment policies and superannuation portfolios to identify and challenge ties to arms manufacturers, military contractors and companies profiting from occupation and war.

In strategic industries – ports, logistics, transport, education, health, public services, construction, communications and manufacturing – unions can begin discussing when and how industrial power could be used to oppose specific wars, deployments, weapons systems or contracts, just as earlier generations did with pig iron, apartheid cargoes, and nuclear testing. That does not start with a call for a sudden, isolated action; it starts with building member understanding, democratic mandates, alliances with affected communities, and plans that can withstand legal and political attack. Our movement is already under severe industrial law constraints, and any serious peace strategy has to take that into account, but history shows that when unions are united, prepared and linked to broad social support, they can act in ways that shift what is considered "legal" and "possible."

AN INDEPENDENT, PEACEFUL AUSTRALIA

A thread running through much of this discussion is the question of independence – not in some abstract nationalist sense, but independence from imperialist alliances and war-fighting strategies that are not in the interests of working people here or in our region. For decades, Australia has locked itself into US-led wars – from Korea and Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan – often on false pretences and almost always against the wishes of large parts of the population. US bases and joint facilities on Australian soil help enable drone wars, nuclear targeting and military surveillance, making our communities potential targets while undermining genuine sovereignty.

An independent, peaceful Australia would mean stepping away from the US nuclear alliance, rejecting nuclear weapons and nuclear-armed or nuclear-powered platforms, and signing and implementing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which the Australian government has so far refused to do. It would mean re-orienting foreign policy towards diplomacy, development, climate action and genuine partnership with our neighbours, especially in the Pacific, instead of treating them as strategic chess pieces. And it would mean redirecting defence spending away from offensive capability designed for distant wars, and towards civil defence in the broadest sense: housing, health, education, climate resilience, public transport, and jobs that actually defend and sustain life.



BUILDING A LIVING MOVEMENT, NOT A ONE-OFF EVENT

If this conference is to matter, it has to be the beginning or the deepening of a process, not just a well-attended event with a good agenda. That means leaving here with a plan: a national union peace network or coordinating body; regular cross-union meetings; agreed campaigning possibilities; and mechanisms for sharing resources, research and strategies. It means each union here naming peace as core business in its own constitutional objectives, policies and education programs, and ensuring that peace questions are on the agenda of union meetings and activity.

We also need to consciously bring through new generations of rank-and-file leaders for whom peace work is normal union work, not an optional extra or the hobby of a few. That involves mentoring younger activists, prioritising the leadership of women, First Nations members, and migrant workers, and resourcing them to organise in their workplaces and communities around peace, anti-racism and social justice. The forces that profit from war plan for the long term; our movement must do the same.

A CLEAR MANDATE

Peace has always been union business, because unions exist to defend and advance the lives of working people, and nothing threatens those lives more fundamentally than war, fascism, and the militarisation of society. Our history – from anti-conscription struggles, to pig-iron bans, to Vietnam and apartheid, to nuclear and anti-base campaigns – shows that when unions step up, they can help stop wars, topple racist regimes, and win a different kind of security based on justice, not domination.

Over the next two days, let this conference give itself a clear mandate: to make peace a core industrial, political and cultural priority of the Australian union movement; to map and contest the links between our workplaces and the war machine; to stand with peoples resisting occupation, racism and fascism; and to help build an independent, peaceful Australia in solidarity with workers across the world.

If that is the direction we take, then in years to come, unionists will look back on this gathering as one of those moments when our movement remembered who it is, reclaimed its peace traditions, and chose to act together for a world where the resources, creativity and labour of working people are used to sustain life, not destroy it.

Introducing a Marxist classic

Karl and Eleanor Marx – father and daughter – share the credit for a pamphlet which was widely read as an introduction or alternative to his longer *Capital* and is still relevant today, asserts the Marx Memorial Library and Workers' School

"Value, Price and Profit," also published as "Wages, Price and Profit," is a pamphlet based on Karl Marx's manuscript notes for presentations he gave to the International Working Men's Association (IWMA, also known as the First International) in London in 1865.

The full manuscript was never published during Marx's lifetime. It was later prepared for publication by his daughter, Eleanor Marx and published in 1898.

Already well known for his publications and activism, Karl Marx was elected to the IWMA general council and quickly became a leading figure. Another council member and British trade unionist, John Weston, argued that wage increases were futile because prices would simply rise to cancel them out. This sparked debate about whether workers should organise for higher wages.

Marx responded to Weston with a structured theoretical rebuttal, explaining the relationship between value, wages, prices, profit and labour. However the notes for his speech (in German and English, including speaking prompts) were never prepared for publication; they were circulated only as summaries and reports in IWMA council minutes.

Marx was in the midst of compiling *Capital* (Volume 1 was published two years later in 1867) and it is possible that he preferred that people should read this for a full theoretical treatment of the issues.

Much later, after Karl Marx's death (1883) his daughter Eleanor edited her father's speech as a response to other suggestions on the left that it might be possible to achieve socialism without revolution.

Engels was at this time busy editing Marx's manuscript notes for Volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital* (published respectively in 1885 and 1894) as well as with his own contributions to Marxist theory and practice. He had custody of much of Marx's unpublished material, found the original manuscript and passed it to Eleanor whose initiative, inspiration and effort was responsible for its appearance.

In 15 short chapters (some 20,000 words) "Value, Price and Profit" (VPP) presents many key ideas of Marx's developing analysis of capitalist political economy but in a shorter, more accessible form. It builds on, and develops Mark's earlier analyses of capitalism, presented most particularly in his pamphlet "Wage Labour and Capital."

VPP is effectively a primer – a compact, popular exposition of arguments that are contained in Volume 1 of *Capital*. It starts by challenging Weston's argument (that any benefits of general wage rises are necessarily cancelled out by general price rises) arguing that this is incorrect both logically and empirically and that a scientific analysis of wages and prices is essential.

The pamphlet then summarises the Marxist labour theory of value. It argues that labour is the only source of new value and it distinguishes between labour-power (what the employer "buys") and the (greater) labour that the employer actually "gets." Value is determined by "socially necessary labour time" which ultimately determines prices (though supply and demand can influence fluctuations in price); money is a means of exchange, not itself the source of value or price.

The pamphlet then distinguishes different kinds of "wage." "Nominal" wages are the money paid by the employer to the employee; "real" wages are what that money will buy and "relative" wages are the worker's share of the value produced compared with that of the capitalist.

It explains that capitalists strive to keep relative wages low even if nominal wages rise. Profit arises because workers are paid less than the value they create. This difference is surplus value, and is realised in money terms as profit.

The pamphlet concludes that wage struggles *do* matter, and that there is a constant battle between workers and capitalists – between those who actually do the producing and those who own the means of production. It asserts that trade unions are essential to resist increases in exploitation.

However, lasting emancipation ultimately requires abolishing the wage system, not merely bargaining within it.

Within the First International, Marx's address had some influence. Trade unionists, in particular, valued Marx's defence of wage struggles. But the failure to widely publish it as a standalone text until after Marx's death restricted its potential impact. Moreover, its theoretical analysis, developed and presented in Volume 1 of *Capital*, was initially limited by the latter's much greater length and limited accessibility.

The First International – the IWMA – was effectively dissolved in 1876, following the collapse of the Paris Commune in 1871. A "Second International" – the Socialist International – was founded in 1889 to celebrate the centenary of the French Revolution. This became a forum for major debates within socialism, largely based on Marxist ideas.

On its publication as a pamphlet in 1898, Eleanor Marx's "Value, Price and Profit" became more widely distributed and had a significant impact, alongside other publications of Marx, Engels, and others, used by socialist parties, trade unions, and in workers' education programs as a short, accessible, and clearly written introduction to Marxist economics. It became a reference point for debates on wage struggles, the labour theory of value and the relationship between reform and revolution.

"Value, Price and Profit" today remains a readable, stand-alone introductory text to Marxist political economy, and an accessible gateway to *Capital*, providing a concise explanation of value creation, exploitation, profit and class struggle. It is still hugely relevant to critical issues of the present including debates over the minimum wage, on phoney "self-employment" and the gig economy; and the escalating differentials between remuneration of the owners and managers of large companies and the wages of their workforce.

Eleanor Marx 1870's

VPP challenges today's dominant narrative, whenever monetary policy, the cost-of-living and "wage-price spirals" – the idea that wage increases are inherently inflationary – are discussed in the media. The reality is that both in the capitalist 'core' and in the world economy, the share of labour in the production of value is declining while that of capital (ie its profits) is increasing. "Value, Price and Profit" explains why this is the case.

The pamphlet is one of a number of examples of Eleanor Marx's editing of her father's archive. Without her initiative it would not exist, at least in the clear, concise form in which she produced it. Her defence of Marx's legacy against reformism was followed a couple of years later by the publication of another communist feminist, Rosa Luxemburg's "Reform or Revolution" (1900).

Their struggle – against reformism, gradualism and "utopian" socialism – is as important today as it was then.

The pamphlet's closing argument – that workers and the labour movement as a whole need to fight for better wages and conditions and at the same time need to recognise that true emancipation requires a system beyond wage labour, remains as true today as it did in 1865 and 1898.

Marx Memorial Library (edited for space)

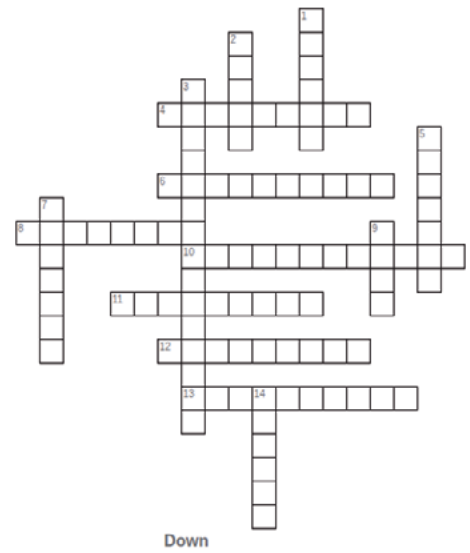
The following poem "Peace Choral" was written by Nattie Seeligson, CPA member and poet who lived from 1907 to 1957. Seeligson remained faithful to the Communist and internationalist cause throughout his life and was close to the long-serving General Secretary of our Party, Lance Sharkey.

PEACE CHORAL

Bells are pealing,
do you hear them
over every land and sea,
glorious bells of peace and freedom
pealing for humanity?

Then come peoples in your millions
with your white doves held on high
in the fight for peace and freedom
justice and fraternity.
With your warm hands linked together,
men of every race and clime
build a world-wide chain of friendship
none can break by war's foul crime.

News Crossword



Across

4 Trump makes a lot of noise about wanting it
6 What the South Australian Premier is being sued for
8 kind of letter Trump Loves to use
10 the US has 800, China has one
11 Israel has one but doesn't keep it
12 US city being terrorised by US government
13 what South Australia has had a lot of since last year

Down

1 what the media doesn't call Trump's attack
2 what Victoria has had a lot of lately
3 What Adelaide has not had thanks to the pro-Israel lobby
5 spouse, fellow lawyer or doctor, what the US pretends to be with Australia
7 Europe's punishment for not handing over territory to the US
9 Always was, always will be, Aboriginal
14 what the media sometimes calls Trump's attack on Venezuela

Australia's AI plan: the digital enclosure

JV

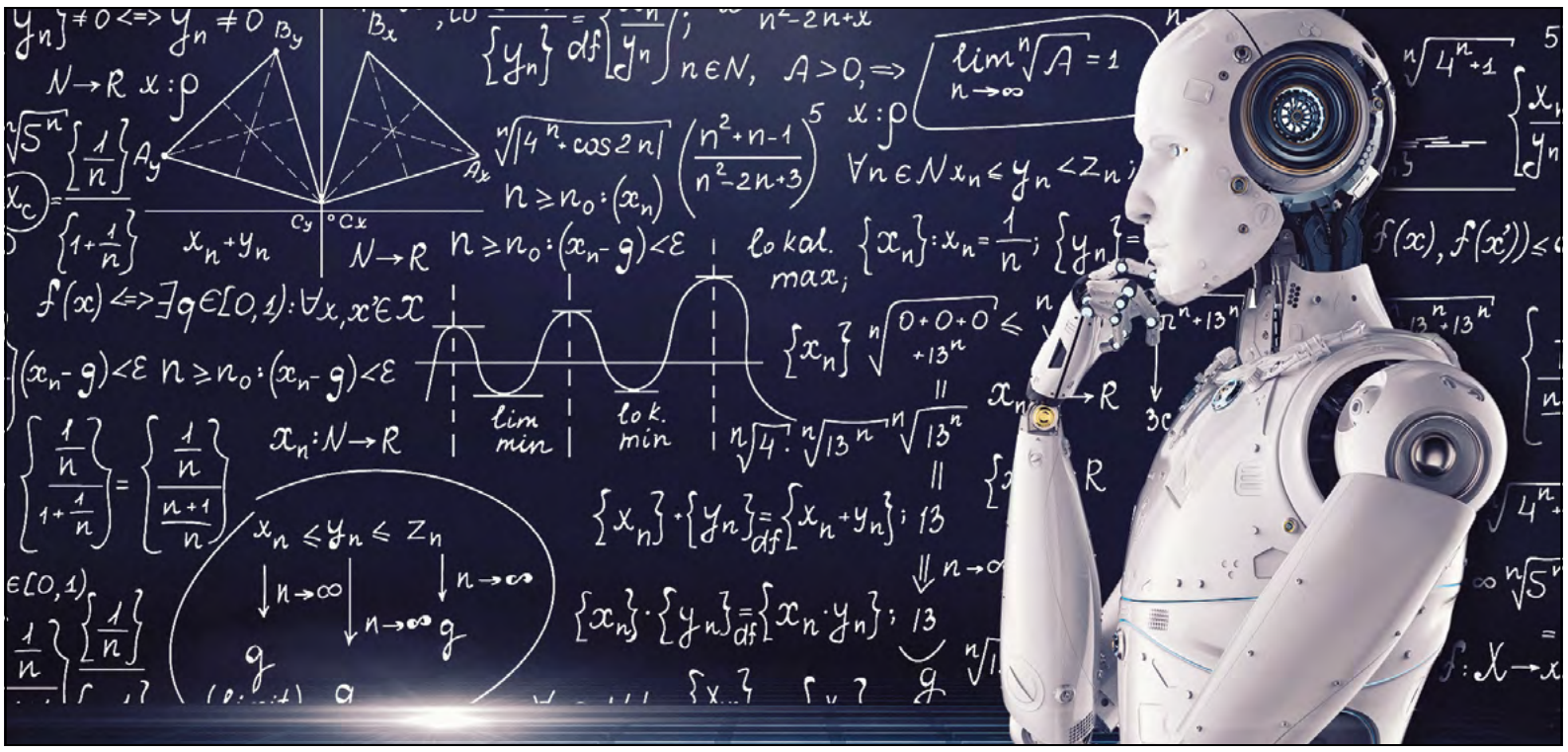


Photo: www.vpnsrus.com – wikimedia.org (CC BY 2.0)

The original enclosures happened when rich landowners in Britain 'enclosed' and made private land that had been available for common use, thus making ordinary people dependent on the landowners for survival.

The Australian government's 2026 National AI Plan is being marketed as a high-tech gateway to prosperity, but for the working class majority it represents a "digital enclosure" of the economy. While corporate leaders celebrate "sovereign capability," billions from superannuation funds are being funnelled into infrastructure that consolidates the dominance of multinational tech giants. Despite claims of a $112 billion GDP boost by 2030, the public mood is one of deep suspicion. Recent polling reveals that 65% of Australians believe AI creates more problems than it solves, with 78% expressing concern about negative outcomes.

The promise of "sovereign AI" was further hollowed out by the wreckage of 2025, a year rich in AI mismanagement headlines. A glaring example was the Deloitte scandal. The consulting giant was forced to refund around $60,000 to the federal government after delivering a $440,000 welfare compliance report riddled with AI 'hallucinations' including fabricated court quotes and fake academic citations.

These high-level failures are mirrored by a recruitment crisis. Qualified Australians with diverse accents or disabilities are being systematically excluded by biased automated filters. These are not mere technical glitches; they are the intentional byproduct of a system that prioritises algorithmic 'efficiency' over the complexities of human life.

In response, the government launched the AI Safety Institute (AISI) in early 2026 with $29.9 million in funding to 'red-team' and test high-risk models. Additionally, the *Privacy and Other Legislation Amendment Act*, coming into full effect by December 2026, promises transparency by forcing companies to disclose when personal information is used in automated decision-making. The plan also attempts to address the "digital divide" through the First Nations Digital Support Hub and a network of digital mentors. A key feature is the formal recognition of Indigenous Data Sovereignty, highlighted by projects like the AI-driven drone monitoring in Kakadu National Park, where Traditional Owners govern the data collected on their country.

However, these measures appear more performative than protective. We are being presented with a Safety Institute that possesses no enforcement capability and transparency laws that effectively require citizens to monitor their own marginalisation. Rather than preventing automated harm, the current framework places the burden on the individual to challenge decisions after the damage is done. This is not robust regulation; it is a corporate shield. Even the "green" data centre mandates appear superficial when energy experts warn that, despite efficiency ratings, total data centre load could triple by 2030, threatening grid stability and local water security. Data centres already consume roughly 3.9 terrawatts per hour of electricity annually, diverting resources to sustain server farms for labour-displacing algorithms.

The labour struggle remains the most volatile front of this technological capture. While the state pours funds into "reskilling," many fear a future that has no place for them. Even where jobs remain, the economic reality is grim. Recent reports from the Productivity Commission and industry analysts suggest that while AI may not lead to immediate mass unemployment, it is being used to devalue existing roles right now. For the 26% of Australian jobs classified as "high risk" for automation, the result is a systemic depression of wages as human labour is forced to compete with low-cost algorithmic alternatives. The influx of displaced workers into the "low-skill" pool is already driving down conditions across the precarious service economy.

Until the people who perform the labour actually own and control these digital tools, AI will remain a source of exploitation and social damage rather than a tool for collective liberation.

AI Blackface: an exercise in cannibalistic colonialism

C Bartholomew

Keagan John Mason, a South African online content creator based in New Zealand, has created channels across Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram using an AI-generated caricature of an Indigenous man. This AI avatar named 'Jarren,' often covered in an imitation of ochre markings or addressing the audience in a Steve Irwin pose, is the digital host of 'Bush Legend.'

The show is entirely AI-generated, featuring the 'Jarren' caricature discussing various animals with fabricated didgeridoo in the background. Despite rightfully being called out for digital blackface, Keagan Mason has dismissed criticisms as he continues to encourage his hundreds of thousands of followers to support Bush Legend's reach and profitability.

BLACK CLADDING

The term 'black cladding' refers to businesses and products fraudulently marketed as Indigenous in origin or ownership. It is often little more than a greedy attempt to cash in on First Nations cultures and identities as a marketing ploy without any genuine connection with communities. While there are current regulations and consumer protections which could theoretically be used to punish and prevent misleading and exploitative conduct, enforcement at least continues to be insufficient and ineffective.

COLONIAL ORIGINS

Colonisation is a cannibalistic practice. Such a phrase is likely to conjure up images of the post-Napoleon 'Egyptomania,' a fad which saw Europe's elite travelling to Egypt and plundering mummies. These stolen bodies were used in popular trends such as Victorian 'unwrapping parties' or the revived practice of 'medical cannibalism.' There were also the cannibalistic practices of slavery and lynching in the United States. Beyond the commodification of bodies inherent to chattel slavery, pieces of African and African American bodies were also at times made into products such as shoes and purses. Sexual exploitation is also common to all examples of European colonialism.

Australia is no stranger to these things. First Nations Australians have been utilised as slave labour. Our bodies have been kept as trophies by explorers, frontier invaders, and colonial institutions. Pieces of the bodies of thousands of ancestors are still hoarded across the world. It should not be surprising that the Australian military is guilty of sexual violence and carceral torture abroad when First Nations peoples at home are subject to the same treatment.

Colonisers have also long claimed authority and entitlement over First Nations cultures. Spears, boomerangs, shields, coolamons (bowls), instruments, even people have been trafficked for research and entertainment in collections and zoos. Then there are the forgeries. Fake art and wellness products claiming connection to First Nations traditions are a multi-million-dollar industry

AI-ENABLED VIOLENCE

It may seem excessive to compare generative AI and black cladding to colonial violence. However, not only do these practices share the same patterns of exploitation and entitlement, they are also all examples of the objectification and commodification of First Nations bodies.

AI tools are increasingly used to generate pornographic materials based on real women and children, including pictures of deceased people and even dead bodies. For Indigenous communities, still subjected to disproportionate levels of sexual exploitation and violence, such AI tools represent a particular threat. Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women make up a significant number of femicide victims in Australia, similar to Indigenous communities in other settler-colonial countries.

The caricature created to 'host' Bush Legends would itself have been generated using a dataset of thousands of images which likely included photos of deceased First Nations individuals. This blatantly disregards cultural protocols, as many Indigenous communities restrict the use of images of the deceased during periods of mourning. Like colonial museums hoarding ancestral remains, AI blackface reflects an attitude that non-Indigenous people are entitled to the use, ownership, and commodification of First Nations bodies.

Generative AI is currently being used to carry out mass theft of Indigenous art and culture both by corporations and individual opportunists. Bush Legend creator Keagan Mason has defended his theft by claiming he is "not here to represent any culture or group." That is part of the problem.

AI depictions of First Nations peoples and cultures are not just theft; they are acts of dispossession. They create approximations of culture stripped from any connection to Country, land, community, or ancestry. Keagan Mason's sick and shameless profiteering off the image of Black bodies and fabricated cultural authority must be a wake-up call. Governments and communities must take action against the proliferation of AI blackface and black cladding.

Chronicle of a shared Nobel prize

Elson Concepción Pérez

She entered through the back door of the White House. The media did not have access to the ceremony, even though, according to Trump, this is the country of true freedom of the press. In addition to the Republican president, the only other attendee was his lapdog, Marco Rubio.

Thus was consummated another of the most cynical and deplorable acts of our time: Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado presented her idol Donald Trump, with the Nobel Peace Prize medal, which she "earned" for her incitement to war, terrorism against Venezuela, and everything the Trump administration has done, including the recent military action and the kidnapping of President Nicolás Maduro and Congresswoman Cilia Flores on 3 January.

At the secret ceremony, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio applauded, perhaps revelling in the idea of being, like Trump, deserving of such a hypocritical and unethical gesture.

Let us remember that the "Nobels," with their latest nomination – that of Corina – have received a "coup de grâce" that makes them increasingly less credible.

Trump, who has always considered himself deserving of the prize for "the great merits" he alone claims, declared this time that "it was a great honour for me to meet María Corina Machado of Venezuela today."

He wrote on his Truth Social account: "María gave me her Nobel Peace Prize for the work I have done. A wonderful gesture of mutual respect. Thank you, María!"

Machado still euphoric from having shared a private lunch with Trump and Marco Rubio and having given the Nobel Medal to the US president, did not hide her satisfaction at feeling "blessed" by the man who had just bombed Venezuela, murdered more than a hundred people, and – as if that were not enough – kidnapped its legitimate president, Nicolás Maduro, and his partner and deputy, Cilia Flores.

In response to this audacity, the Nobel Committee categorically clarified that the Prize cannot, even symbolically, be transferred or distributed after it has been awarded, so whether they like it or not, the act has no value.

Granma

María Corina Machado during a Nobel Peace Prize press conference in Oslo, December 2025.
Photo: Kevin Payravi – wikimedia.org (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Japanese Communist Party condemns US invasion of Venezuela

Japanese Communist Party (JCP) Secretariat Head Koike Akira, in a street speech urgently held near Tokyo's Ikebukuro Station condemned the Trump administration's military operation that kidnapped Venezuelan President Maduro and his wife. Koike said, "Let us raise our voices, together with people around the world, declaring that we will never tolerate any move aiming for the return to a world ruled by force." He also criticised Japan's far-right Takaichi administration for failing to lodge an objection against the US invasion.

Koike stressed the significance of the international order which was built based on the UN Charter and international law by putting sovereign equality and the prohibition of the use of force as core principles. The JCP has previously condemned US 'gunboat diplomacy' towards Venezuela as well as the extrajudicial killings of civilians based on unproven allegations of drug smuggling.

Koike said that it is unacceptable to dislodge a sovereign country's leader by force, which constitutes an invasion trampling on the UN Charter and international law. He demanded that the US government release the president of Venezuela and the First Lady of Venezuela and bring an end to any invasion plans without delay.

Koike pointed out that President Trump, while showing no interest in establishing an international order, expressed his intent to control Venezuela's oil, the world's largest proven reserves. The JCP Secretariat Head described Trump's actions as "a revival of imperialism." Koike warned that if an attempt to change the status quo by lawless military actions is tolerated, this will turn the world into one controlled by the law of the jungle.

Koike pointed out that the Trump administration's invasion of Venezuela has come under fire from the UN, the EU, multiple Latin American countries, and from US legislators. He said that despite this, the Japanese government led by Prime Minister Takaichi has not voiced any objections. He stressed, "The Takaichi government regards the Japan-US alliance as absolute and seeks to follow the 'America First' Trump regime no matter what happens, which is extremely dangerous. Now is the time to put an end to Japan's foreign policy subservience to the United States."

Japan Press Weekly

All India strike on the way

Peter Farmer

A joint platform of trade unions and civil society organisations is calling for an all-India strike on 12 February in opposition to the Modi government's four labour codes, the government's privatisation agenda, and assaults on democracy and secular society.

The four labour codes replace 29 existing laws. The codes recognise gig work, but also make it easier for companies to lay off or casualise workers.

Unions say the government produced the codes in order to contain and weaken unions, without any legitimate exercise of consultations with stake holders or holding Indian labour conference. The unions have already organised 5 major strikes, accusing the government of ignoring International Labour Standards to which India as a nation state is signatory.

The last general strike was held on 9 July 2025. Unions say about 25 million people took part. That strike also addressed issues of farmers and workers. Since then, unions say, the government has continued to assault unions and working people in the interests of corporate cronies. Government is abdicating its role of regulator of labour conditions into that of an "employment facilitator."

Recent government legislation has angered unions. The government has passed a bill allowing foreign and private players to enter the nuclear power market and has withdrawn the liability of foreign equipment suppliers in case of accidents. It has banned the rights-based rural employment guarantee from operating during harvesting season.

The Central Trade Unions group are calling on the entire Indian working class to gear up for the ensuing General Strike, start campaigning widely, and prepare their organisations for a heightened struggle.

3CR RADICAL RADIO

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‘Impossible by design’

Gaza aid groups forced to scavenge under illegal blockade

Despite months of severely restricted aid inflows, amidst power disruptions, access shutdowns and repeated rejection of essential materials, work has continued. Oxfam has worked around the clock with experts from local partner organisations, to restore vital water wells – even sifting through rubble to salvage and repurpose damaged materials, including sheet metal.

According to assessments carried out by Oxfam’s partner, the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility (CMWU), the total cost to rebuild all of the water and sanitation facilities, systems and infrastructure which have been destroyed or damaged by Israel in Gaza will be around $800 million. However, the figure could be even higher, since parts of Gaza remain inaccessible and construction costs have also doubled, due to the lack of materials being allowed in.

The wells restored by Oxfam and partners are located in Gaza City and Khan Younis, and are now providing at least 156,000 people with a life-saving and sustainable water supply. Work continues on a further eight wells and two water pumping stations, which should be working again by February, providing continuous fresh water for 175,000 more people.

Wassem Mushtaha, Oxfam Gaza Response lead, said: “We did not just re-open these wells. We have been solving a moving puzzle under the siege and restrictions to make the wells operational – salvaging parts, repurposing equipment, and paying inflated prices to get critical components, all while trying to keep our teams safe.

“For as long as systematic policies and practices preventing aid agencies from getting essential supplies into Gaza persist, we will have to keep finding a way to reach people in need. It’s not an acceptable situation, but as humanitarians, we can never give up trying to save lives.

“So much more could have been achieved if our efforts had not been undermined at every turn – which continues to this day. Oxfam alone has over 2 million dollars’ worth of aid and water and sanitation equipment ready to enter Gaza, but these supplies have been repeatedly rejected since March 2025.”

Israeli authorities have made a meaningful humanitarian response impossible by design. Israel defends threats to deregister up to 37 international NGOs – claiming humanitarian organisations’ impacts have been “inconsequential.” But NGOs have repeatedly appealed to Israel to be allowed to do their jobs, calling on Israel to lift restrictions undermining civilian survival. In reality, Israel continues to block effective relief efforts and the restoration of essential infrastructure.

In response to the challenges, Oxfam has increased its procurement of aid from local markets where possible, and continues to expand services in areas such as social-psychological support and health promotion, WASH, emergency livelihoods, multi-purpose cash transfer, food voucher distribution, and public health promotion – essential areas, with less reliance on materials that Israel continues to systematically reject.

Monther Shoblaq, Director General of CMWU, said aid agencies should not have to operate in a way that is needlessly time consuming and exhausting:

“While it’s commendable that dedicated staff are going to such lengths to bring water access to those who need it so desperately, the equipment needed is just across the border, blocked from entry. Agencies are having to resort to salvaging materials from the rubble of bombed water infrastructure and the remains of people’s homes, repurposing parts, and paying inflated prices. This is the direct result of Israeli restrictions, last-resort measures forced by siege conditions.

Needs in Gaza exceed far beyond the aid and reconstruction materials Israel is allowing in and the situation will worsen if Israel’s collective punishment and illegal blockade continues. Water deprivation is just one of the many human rights violations Israel has undertaken with impunity. Oxfam and other organisations who have operated in Gaza for decades must be allowed to respond at the scale.

Oxfam Australia

Only rubble remains where Hala used to live with her family, Gaza.
Photo: EU/ECHO/Caroline Gluck – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Global Briefs

NIGERIA: Nigeria has contracted an American PR firm for US$9 million to counter disinformation about Christian persecution and manage the relationship with the Trump administration. The move followed controversial airstrikes on Christmas Day that Trump characterised as protecting Christians from Islamic State militants. Nigeria has repeatedly stressed that violence from armed groups affects all communities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed that “terrorist violence in any form, whether directed at Christians, Muslims, or other communities, remains an affront to Nigeria’s values and to international peace and security.” Nigeria has mineral reserves valued at US$700 billion including lithium, cobalt, and rare earth elements essential for energy transition technologies, and represents a key battleground in US’s efforts to counter Chinese Belt and Road investments across the country. Nigeria determination to develop domestic refining capacities rather than export raw minerals, created friction with US resource extraction interests, while China’s position as Nigeria’s largest trading partner and infrastructure financier represents what US policymakers view as unacceptable influence in Africa’s most populous state.

VENEZUELA: The first US sale of stolen Venezuelan crude was made to a company whose senior oil trader donated millions of dollars to President Trump’s re-election campaign. John Addison, a senior trader at Vitol, was involved in securing a $250 million deal for Venezuelan oil that launched Trump’s plan to sell 50 million barrels of crude following the kidnapping of President Maduro. Addison donated roughly $6 million to the political action committee backing Trump, including $5 million to MAGA Inc in October 2024, according to OpenSecrets.

GREENLAND: German servicemen stationed in Greenland have been ordered to urgently leave the island. 15 soldiers and officers were given no explanation for the order by German authorities. All planned activities on the ground have been cancelled. There is speculation that Trump’s threats to impose additional tariffs on Germany and a number of other European countries over Greenland might be the reason for the sudden departure. Earlier Trump announced that the US will begin levying 10% import tariffs on the United Kingdom, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Finland, and Sweden, which will remain in place until the parties reach agreements on the “full and final acquisition” of Greenland by Washington. According to the White House, this decision will take effect on 1 February, and from 1 June the tariff rate will rise to 25%. Trump has criticised Europe’s intention to send its military to Greenland.

SOUTH AFRICA: The South African Communist Party (SACP) has announced plans to organise a conference of left-wing groups and individuals to discuss how to tackle challenges that face the country. The party’s spokesperson said the conference of the left would be held in a few months and will include non-governmental organisations, civil society groups, working class and all other parties and individuals on the left of South African politics.

BRITAIN: RAF Wyton is a top secret spy base. The base is home to Defence Intelligence and the newly formed Military Intelligence Services, designated to counter threats from China, Russia, and Iran. In a highly embarrassing incident for the spooks, thieves got into the base and stole 56 tons of copper cable reels. They used a truck with a crane to take 16 spools. Reports say the thieves smiled and waved at the guards as they drove out through the main gate.

Somaliland: Why has Israel recognised it?

Late last December, Israel became the first country in the world to recognise the independence of Somaliland, the breakaway region of northern Somalia. In 1991, Somaliland unilaterally declared independence from Somalia in a move condemned by Somalia and the African Union and rejected by the international community.

Israel's sudden recognition sent shock waves across the international community. Somalia and the African Union rejected Israel's diplomatic move, calling it destabilising and illegal. The Israeli government claims that its goal is to expand diplomatic relations in the spirit of the so-called Abraham Accords, the diplomatic initiative started by US President Donald Trump to normalise relations between Israel and Arab states.

There is a deep irony in the fact that Israel, a country that has occupied the Palestinian people and suppressed their independence movement – an independence movement recognised by the vast majority of countries in the world – would be the first country to recognise a breakaway state from another country. The sheer absurdity of this act set off alarm bells across the world, leading governments and analysts to the motive for Israel's decision.

So what really is behind this shocking diplomatic move?

Most analysts and many diplomats agree that Israel's primary interest in Somaliland lies in its close proximity to Yemen.

Since the so-called Arab Spring of 2011 and the associated uprisings in Yemen, the country has been divided by various warring factions. One of the most powerful factions is known as Ansar Allah, more commonly called the Houthis. The Houthis, backed by Iran – a country Israel and the US recently fought a short but fierce conflict with – have repeatedly launched ballistic missiles at Israel and disrupted shipping headed to Israel via the Red Sea, claiming these attacks are meant to support the Palestinian resistance to Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Somaliland lies very close to Yemen, sitting on the opposite coast of the Red Sea. According to the Israel Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), this proximity significantly improves Israel's military position for operations against Yemen. While Israel has managed to directly attack Houthi-held cities and bases, these have been expensive, complicated, long-distance operations.

By contrast, Israel is roughly 1,600 kilometres from Yemen, while Somaliland is approximately 322 kilometres away. INSS analysts have argued that a foothold in Somaliland would allow Israel to shorten response times, expand surveillance, and operate at far lower cost – framing the territory as a strategic asset rather than a purely diplomatic partner.

Somaliland's position on the Red Sea also upgrades Israel's ability to secure its shipping routes and resist Houthi attempts to disrupt this vital economic lifeline.

Beyond the direct military advantages to do with Yemen, a number of diplomats have raised other concerns about the motives behind Israel's recognition of Somaliland.

Since Israel's genocidal war in Gaza began in October 2023, more extreme elements in Netanyahu's cabinet have openly spoken about emptying Gaza of its Palestinian population. To do this, they have reached out to a number of countries – primarily in Africa – to see which would be willing to take in expelled Palestinians.

Many members of the international community are concerned that Somaliland and Israel may have come to a *quid pro quo* agreement in which Israel recognises Somaliland's independence in exchange for Somaliland's agreement to take in forcibly displaced residents of the Gaza Strip.

According to Reuters, several diplomats raised concerns at the United Nations that Israel's recognition of Somaliland could be linked to efforts to find destinations for forcibly displaced Gazans, a claim Israel denies.

Taken together, Israel's recognition of Somaliland appears less an act of diplomatic principle and more a cold exercise in power politics. Whether as a potential military foothold near Yemen, a means of tightening control over Red Sea shipping lanes, or a bargaining chip in Israel's broader regional strategy amid its war on Gaza, the move reflects a familiar pattern: International law and national sovereignty are invoked when convenient and discarded when they stand in the way.

For much of the world, the question is no longer why Israel recognised Somaliland – but what price the region will pay for it.

People's World

Seven children dead from cold in Gaza amid storms and collapsing shelters

Three more children have died from extreme cold in Gaza, raising the winter death toll to seven, as officials warn that an incoming polar storm and ongoing aid restrictions threaten millions already living in desperate conditions.

The Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip recently announced that three children have died from extreme cold, bringing the total number of child deaths since the start of winter to seven, as officials warned of catastrophic consequences from an incoming polar weather system threatening around 1.5 million Palestinians.

Civil Defense authorities and Al-Shifa Hospital also reported four additional deaths caused by partial collapses of war-damaged buildings west of Gaza City, triggered by strong winds and heavy rain battering the enclave.

In the central Gaza Strip, thousands of displaced residents in the Nuseirat refugee camp were forced to seek shelter inside mosques and partially destroyed structures after violent winds tore down their tents. Civil Defense spokesperson Mahmoud Basal told Anadolu Agency that a new polar air depression began affecting Gaza, warning that its impact could be devastating for families already living in dire conditions. He said more than 1.5 million people are currently sheltering in tents, many of which are unable to withstand severe weather.

Basal warned that the deteriorating conditions could lead to further casualties, as well as the collapse of unstable buildings and the flooding of displacement camps. He renewed his appeal to the international community and humanitarian organisations to urgently intervene, stressing the need to provide assistance that preserves civilians' dignity and prevents further loss of life.

Palestinian weather forecaster Laith Al-Alami said the Palestinian territories were affected by a deep and stormy low-pressure system accompanied by a very cold polar air mass.

He warned of sharply dropping temperatures, strong winds – particularly along the coast – and heavy rainfall across all governorates, including Gaza, with the possibility of thunderstorms and hail. He cautioned that high wind speeds pose a serious threat to tents housing displaced families.

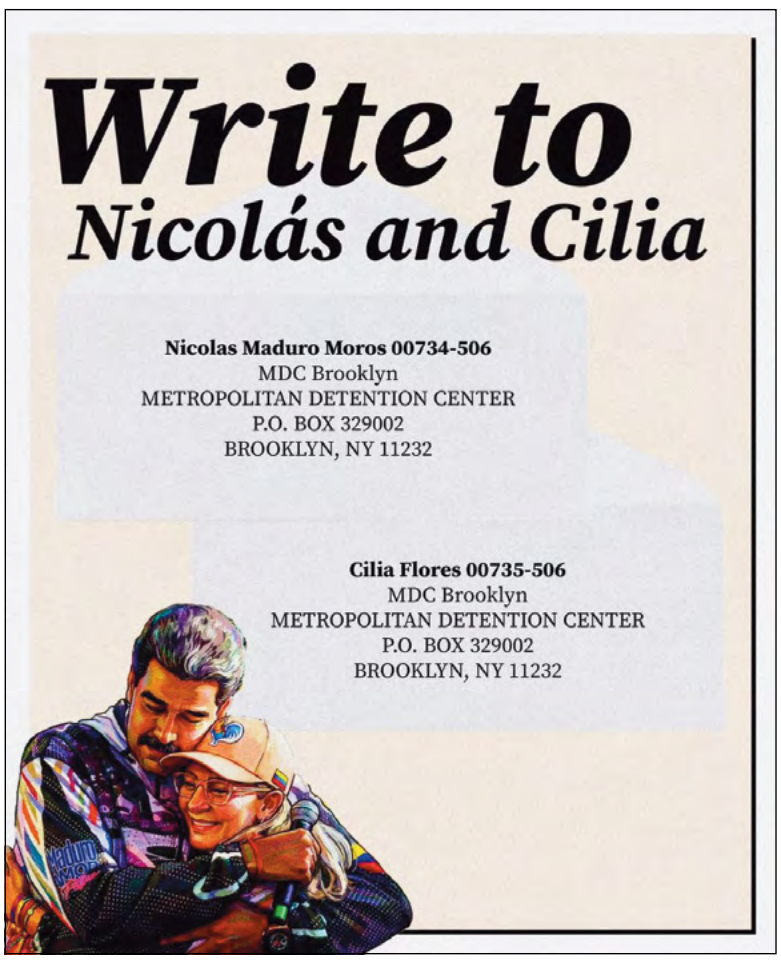
Meanwhile, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said that more than 18,500 people in Gaza, including around 4,000 children, remain in urgent need of medical evacuation.

Ghebreyesus urged additional countries to accept patients from Gaza and called for the resumption of medical evacuations to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. He noted that over the past week, the organisation supported the evacuation of 18 patients and 36 companions to Jordan for specialised treatment, including care for severe injuries and life-threatening illnesses.

With US backing, Israel launched a genocidal war on Gaza on 7 October 2023, which lasted two years and resulted in the killing of more than 71,000 Palestinians and the injury of over 171,000 others, most of them women and children.

Despite the start of the first phase of a ceasefire based on a plan put forward by US President Donald Trump, Israeli authorities continue to severely restrict the entry of food, medicine, medical supplies, and shelter materials into Gaza, where approximately 2.4 million Palestinians are living under catastrophic humanitarian conditions.

Palestine Chronicle



Israel practices 'territorial engineering'

Peter Farmer

Israeli troops have moved a series of yellow concrete blocks, called the yellow line' far beyond the line that defines the Israeli Defence Force's line of control according to the 'ceasefire' signed last October.

A British security expert, Prof Andreas Krieg interviewed by the BBC, has called the movement of the blocks "a tool for territorial engineering", arguing that keeping the blocks hundreds of metres from the 'legal' line on the map "Israel preserves the ability to shift where Gazans may live, move and farm without ever formally announcing a change of border."

Since last October the IDF has fired at people crossing the Yellow Line at least 69 times. In December IDF forces killed five people in a strike on a school during a wedding. An IDF statement the same day said that the Israeli forces had fired at "suspicious individuals" but that the IDF regretted "any harm to uninvolved individuals."

Something to say?

Write to the Editor!

US attacks on Venezuela, the neighbours respond

Graham Holton

The islands of Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) are only 11 km from Venezuela. In 2025 the T&T government allowed the US military access to its airports, following the installation of a sophisticated radar system. In August the US began a military build-up in the southern Caribbean, not far from Venezuelan waters, to eventually include the world's largest aircraft carrier, the *USS Gerald R Ford*, 15,000 troops, dozens of aircraft and a fleet of warships.

In October the US granted T&T permission to negotiate a gas deal with Venezuela without facing US sanctions. The two countries were to jointly develop the Dragon field in Venezuelan waters near the island of Tobago. The gas field holds an estimated 119 billion cubic metres of gas. After Trinidad allowed a US warship to dock at its capital, Port-of-Spain, the Maduro government announced the immediate termination of any "agreement, contract or negotiation" on natural gas supply between the two countries.

In December Venezuela accused Trinidad and Tobago of taking part in a US seizure of tankers holding Venezuelan oil, as part of President Donald Trump's economic campaign against President Nicolás Maduro. Then-vice-president, Delcy Rodríguez, accused T&T prime minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, of turning the Caribbean nation "into an aircraft carrier of the American empire against Venezuela" in an "act of vassalage."

PM Persad-Bissessar praised the US strikes on alleged drug boats in the Caribbean and the Pacific that killed more than 100 people, including Trinidadian citizens. On 21 December Persad-Bissessar accused the Caribbean Community (Caricom) of aligning itself with Maduro, whose administration "has imprisoned or murdered thousands of Venezuelans who oppose him."

On 3 January, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John Daniel "Raizin" Caine said Operation Absolute Resolve attacked Venezuela using 150 aircraft launched from 20 bases across the Western Hemisphere. After the attacks and kidnapping of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife Cillia Flores, Persad-Bissessar backflipped, swiftly distancing Trinidad and Tobago from the US military action. "Trinidad and Tobago is NOT a participant in any of these ongoing military operations. Trinidad and Tobago continues to maintain peaceful relations with the people of Venezuela." Persad-Bissessar added that T&T looks forward to renewed cooperation and strengthening its long-standing friendship with the Venezuelan people.

Cooperation with the US could be key to T&T getting richer. If the US opens up Venezuela's gas fields, T&T could access gas resources to feed its LNG plants and petrochemical industries, reducing its reliance on its declining domestic reserves. T&T would once again become a regional energy hub as it was in the 1970s.

There are benefits and risks for T&T as it tries to keep the US on side without offending Venezuela more than it has to. If the US opens up Venezuela's gas fields, T&T could access gas resources to feed its LNG plants and petrochemical industries, reducing its reliance on its declining domestic reserves. These benefits are contingent on negotiated deals, regulatory approvals, political stability and the Venezuelan government not cutting off energy cooperation to T&T.

Contrary to US propaganda, the Trump administration is not "running Venezuela," and T&T does not want to attract retaliation from future Venezuelan governments.

Civil society in T&T is more outspoken than its government. A coalition of T&T organisations issued a condemnation of US action, describing it as "an act of imperialism" and "an international crime." The groups accused Washington of pursuing regime change under the guise of counter-narcotics operations and announced plans for a public demonstration outside the Venezuelan Embassy in Port-of-Spain. The statement was signed by All Mansions of Rastafari, Concerned Muslims of Trinidad and Tobago, the Emancipation Support Committee, Fishermen and Friends of the Sea, the Ifa/Orisa Council of Trinidad and Tobago, the Movement for Social Justice, the Network of NGOs for the Advancement of Women, the Trinidad and Tobago Scrap Iron Dealers Association, Trinbago for Palestine, and the Warao Nation of Trinidad and Tobago.

Security

US President Donald Trump has said that owning Greenland, currently part of someone else's country is vital to US security. Perhaps those 'cognitive tests' Trump is so proud of passing don't test for his ability to distinguish security from world domination.

Good faith

'Good faith' and 'bad faith' are meaningful expressions, but often weaselly because they're so hard to disprove. Nobody can look into your mind to see if you sincerely meant something you said. Prime Minister Albanese is in a bit of a huff, as he usually is when faced with criticism. He's said that the legislation he rushed into Parliament mixing up gun restrictions with hate speech bans in a transparent attempt to wedge the Liberal-National Coalition was released "in good faith, asking for comments to come forward." We can't peer into Albo's soul (probably a good thing), but it'd look a lot more like good faith if he'd given everyone else more time to look at the legislation.

Sensible and proportionate

Weaselly because these words sound like good things, but are vague. Sensible to whom? Proportionate to what? A spokesperson for opposition leader Sussan Ley called for a "sensible and proportionate examination of current gun laws" after Bondi. They didn't say what would make that examination sensible or how we'd work out it was proportionate. It took Ley a whole day after the shooting to even timidly say that gun ownership might have to be looked at, so she probably means proportionate to whatever pro-shooting elements in the National Party are happy with.

Purity tests

Although it sounds a bit *Handmaid's Tale*-ish, this expression implies some far-left nightmare whereby people's views are subjected to ideological purity tests. It sounds ultra-left and annoyingly bossy, so who'd want it? Talking about purity tests is also a handy way to avoid talking about what someone's actually done. US Vice President JD Vance, for example tried to calm down Republicans who thought the antisemitism in that party was getting a bit too overt by saying that Trump didn't run his supporters through "endless self-defeating purity tests." What he means is "don't make a fuss over platforming some Nazis."

Welcome

If you're colossally annoyed with someone but you want to still sound like the good guy when interviewed, try to find something to welcome. It's crisis management 101. When actors for the Sydney Theatre Company wore keffiyehs in a show of solidarity with the people of Gaza, the STC put out a statement saying that they welcomed conversation. They also apologised three times to anyone who might have been annoyed by a gesture of solidarity with victims of an ongoing genocide.

Clarity (moral)

Moral things are good and clarity is nice, so who could be against some moral clarity? This nice-sounding but unclear expression often just means "do things my way or you're in the wrong, and no, I'm not explaining it."

Journalist Phil Coorey of the *Australian Financial Review* thinks PM Albanese was lacking when moral clarity was required. Coorey didn't say what Albo could have done to be more morally clear, but he probably meant calling a Royal Commission into Bondi because most of Coorey's mates in the media were calling for one.

Impartiality

The pro-Israel Whatsapp groups are up to their mass-emailing tricks again, trying to get people sacked for daring to support Palestine, however indirectly. Having successfully nagged the board of the Adelaide Writer's Festival into uninviting Randa Abdel-Fattah, thereby tanking the festival, the online Israel-Must-Never-Face-Criticism crowd are going after ABC journalists Laura Tingle and Joe Lyons for withdrawing from the Adelaide Writer's Festival (along with almost everyone else associated with that event). *Deepcut News* uncovered a pro-forma email for Whatsapp group members to send to the ABC asking "where is their [Lyon and Tingle's] impartiality that the ABC boasts about?" Where indeed. What's the public broadcaster coming to if journalists who work for it can choose not to attend a writers' festival?

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Inside the forces driving Iran's nationwide protests

Mohammad Omidvar is a member of the Tudeh Party of Iran's Politburo, a Tudeh spokesperson and the editor of the party's organ, *Nameh Mardom*. He spoke with the UK's *Morning Star*. According to Omidvar, the mass protests in Iran are rooted in poverty, corruption, and neoliberal rule and warns against monarchist revival and US-engineered regime change.

How do you assess the deeper socioeconomic forces that have driven people into the streets, and why do you disagree with the Iranian government's position that this is a foreign plot?

Our hearts and condolences go out to thousands of families who have lost their loved ones during this savage and brutal crackdown, and like all progressive forces in Iran and the world over, we call for the immediate and unconditional release of thousands of detainees and all the political prisoners in Iran.

As per our party statement on 9 January, the popular uprising that began with strikes and peaceful protests and strikes on 28 December, which interestingly included the merchants of the bazaar – who have traditionally been a social base for the regime and have supported them over the past 47 years – rapidly spread to all major cities and towns across Iran and posed a serious challenge to the ruling dictatorship.

The foundation of the bazaar protest was the collapse of Iran's currency, the rial or commonly known as toman, with the exchange rate against the dollar worsening to 146,000 "toman" to one dollar. It is also important to highlight that the value of many basic goods in Iran is closely connected to the dollar exchange rate. Additionally, it should be noted that US imperialism's sanctions against Iran have had a devastating impact on the lives of ordinary Iranian people, while the pro-government parasitic bourgeoisie in Iran has benefited from them.

The worsening economic situation means that, even according to official statistics, nearly 40 million Iranians live below the government's defined poverty line. Rising unemployment, especially among the youth, ongoing repression and attacks upon people's basic human and democratic rights, unprecedented corruption – where the IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] leadership and the regime's leaders, representing the big capital class, control all the key industries in Iran – and the continued suppression of women's rights, particularly following the heroic struggle of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement three years ago, form the foundation of the people's anger and their struggle to end the dictatorship in Iran.

In short, contrary to "Supreme Leader" Khamenei's claim, this popular protest movement is a class struggle and not a product of US imperialism or the genocidal Israeli regime. It is rather the direct consequence of the disastrous neoliberal economic policies of the ruling capitalist regime, as well as widespread corruption, insecurity and sweeping oppression imposed upon the nation by the regime's leaders and their collaborators.

It is also important to note that we are aware that both US imperialism and its allies in the region, especially the criminal government of Netanyahu, and their agents in Iran, have had a vested interest in hijacking the peaceful protest movement and pushing it towards violence – thereby enabling the regime to justify its inhumane savage suppression, killing and injuring thousands of protesters, and arresting thousands more, while imposing an unprecedented total communications blackout on the country.

What is your analysis of the monarchists' social base in Iran?

Over the past 18 days, we have witnessed that most big Western (and generally right-wing) media corporations like the BBC and the "Iran International" television channel (funded by the Israeli government) have overseen an orchestrated campaign to promote Reza Pahlavi as the head of the protest movement and opposition in Iran, ready to return and take charge.

On top of this, we have witnessed a significant social media campaign orchestrated by the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad, setting up numerous social media channels promoting Pahlavi, doctoring video clips from people's demonstrations in Iran, chanting fake slogans in his support, and overall creating a false narrative that the Iranian people want the monarchy back.

It is interesting that, according to several reports, even Trump himself is not convinced the people in Iran want the return of the monarchy.

This reflects the reality that Pahlavi lacks a material social base within Iran. Manifestations of support for him are limited to small social groups, mainly those articulating a nostalgia for pre-Islamic Republic Iran. This cannot and should not be falsely projected as somehow indicating a significant level of support for the monarchy in Iranian society.

What do you see as the consequences of a US-engineered regime change?

Let me start by reminding your readers that US imperialism attempted one of its first regime change interventions in the world in Iran by overthrowing the elected nationalist government of Dr Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953 through a coup d'état orchestrated by the CIA and MI6.

This model was subsequently utilised by US imperialism in over 70 countries around the world. The 1953 coup resulted in the restoration of the monarchy, the suppression of the Iranian people's rights, and the executions of many of our party comrades.

The restored Shah's regime allowed the plunder of Iran's oil for nearly 30 years and turned Iran into a regional hub in the US's sphere of influence and against the neighbouring Soviet Union. In fact, the 1979 Iranian revolution, one of the largest and most popular mass movements in contemporary history, overthrew the Shah's dictatorship with a very clear anti-imperialist vision for Iran's independence and freedom from US subjugation.

Therefore, we have experienced what regime change under imperialism means in practice. Also, recent US imperialist interventions from Afghanistan to Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen – as well as the genocidal war of the Israeli criminal government with the full backing of US imperialism, Britain and the EU against the Palestinian people, killing over 60,000 innocent people and nearly 20,000 children – have shown the true nature of imperialism and its regional lackeys.

Furthermore, the joint US-Israeli military aggression against Iran last June, aimed at regime change in Iran, fostered a patriotic mood within the country, rallying against external hostility. In our party's statement on 22 June, we stated that this criminal attack amounted to military aggression against Iran's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as a clear and flagrant violation of international law as per the United Nations Charter and that our party stood with the people of Iran defending the country against external interference.

Over recent days, we have witnessed the wilful sabotage and derailment of a legitimate and popular protest movement by unrepresentative bad actors, aided by a current within the diaspora and the continual threat of foreign intervention.

This aggression and malign interference in the internal and sovereign affairs of Iran and its people only serve to undermine and set back the genuinely popular protest movements and democratic currents inside Iran, enabling the regime and its repressive apparatus to falsely cast all protesters and dissenters as "rioters" and "foreign agents". The damage this causes to the progressive movement in Iran cannot be overstated.

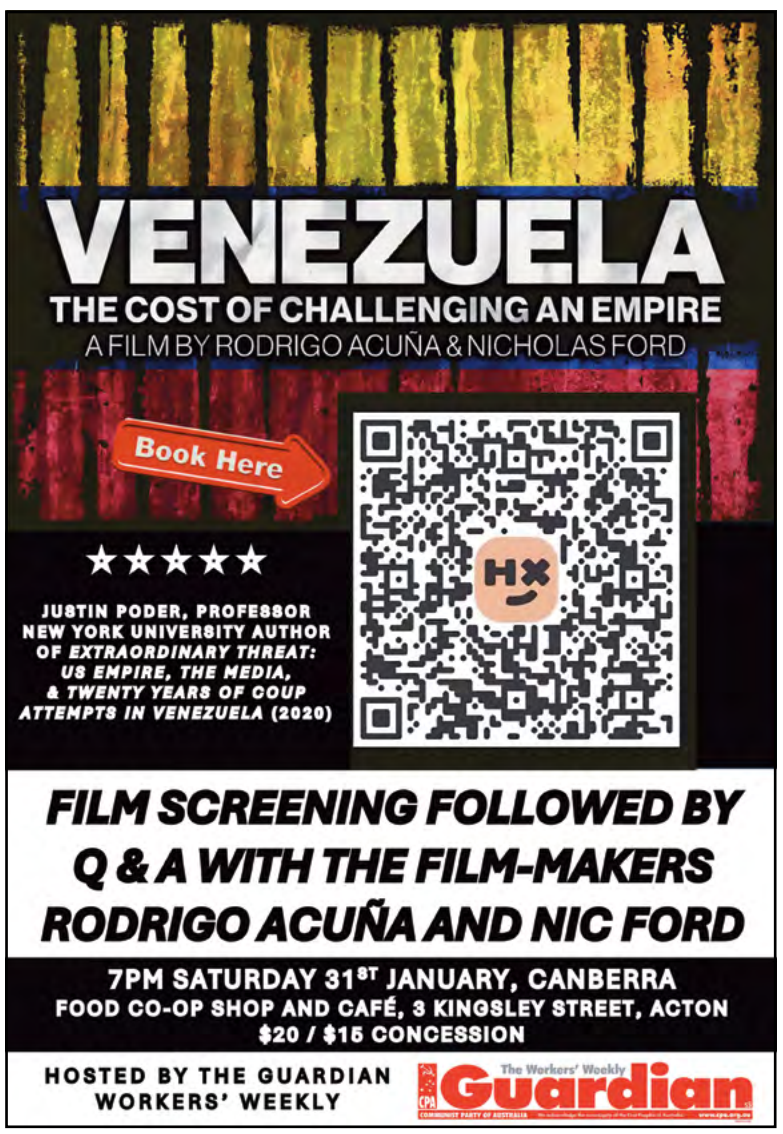
Your party calls for unity among progressive and patriotic forces around a 'Minimum Program.' What concrete steps does the Tudeh Party believe are necessary now to build such a united front?

The Tudeh Party of Iran, through its calls and direct contacts with other progressive and patriotic forces, has repeatedly emphasised the need for constructive dialogue and co-operation around a basic program in the struggle against the ruling dictatorial regime.

Progressive forces must develop a united program to present to the people and prepare the popular movement to face the current critical situation. Via such a programme, there is hope that the movement can be properly oriented towards serving national interests and the people's demands.

Sadly, thus far, this opportunity has not been utilised or progressed to enable a coordinated and concerted campaign against the dictatorship – hence the attempt of the US and its allies to craft a "safe" alternative, either from within the regime or imposed from outside.

Morning Star



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