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Fire season: Albanese adds petrol

Peter Farmer

Australia is breaking records, but not the sort to be proud of. Some parts of Australia recorded their highest temperatures ever this January. South Australia's Andamooka reached 50 degrees. Hopetoun and Walpeup in Victoria set records of 48.9 degrees. The south east of Australia is facing the worst heatwave since the Black Summer of 2019-2020 when 21 per cent of the continent was burned.

With all this heat there has come more bushfires, first in Victoria, then in neighbouring states. 3,000 hectares has been burnt recently and fires in Victoria's Otways have destroyed properties. Victorian farmers have lost at least $30 million in livestock and more in terms of farmland that can't be used for a long time.

Some of our recent bushfires have been so severe that they make their own weather, making distinctive cloud patterns and causing storms that make the firefighter's jobs even more dangerous.

Experts who study atmosphere and bushfires say that fire-generated thunderstorms were practically unheard of a few decades ago, but seem to be becoming more common.

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

CLIMATE CHANGE

Professors Rachael Helene Nolan and Trent Penman don't beat about the bush. They point out in a recent article that climate change is making 'megafires' both more likely and less predictable. While it's true that Australia has always had fires, climate change is making the really severe fires come far more frequently. The gaps between 'high severity' fires are getting smaller.

While it's sometimes hard to make a simple connection, the overall picture is clear. According to World Weather Attribution, the heatwave experienced by the south east of Australia in January this year was five times more likely to happen now due to global heating.

There's more bad news. This year, there has been a "weak" La Niña weather pattern. La Niña lowers temperatures slightly, in contrast to El Nino, which raises them. This year La Niña wasn't enough to make a difference. There will be more El Ninos.

ACTION, THE WRONG KIND

The Albanese government says it's committed to trying to keep global temperature rises to below 1.5 degrees. Environmental journalist Adam Morton calls their approach "blatantly hypocritical." Albanese has been supporting new gas and coal fields at breakneck speed. One of the latest approvals is in the Otway basin. That's very close to where the bushfires are burning. Australia has been ranked at the top of a list of places where metallurgical coal mining is planned to expand.

Albanese and his environment ministers use a version of the "drug dealer's defence', usually paraphrased as "if I didn't sell this stuff, someone else would." In Albanese's version, Australia is somehow not responsible for what other countries do with the coal and gas they buy from corporations like Woodside.

QUEENSLAND

It's not only Labor governments of course. On 6 February, the Queensland government gave the go-ahead to a coal mine expansion at the Ensham mine, near Emerald in Central Queensland in the face of a decision by the Queensland Land Court to recommend against approval. Ensham is dirty even by coal mine standards.

Ellen Roberts, National Coordinator for Lock the Gate, said that the Minister's unprecedented decision to approve the Ensham mine will lead to more climate disasters for Queenslanders.

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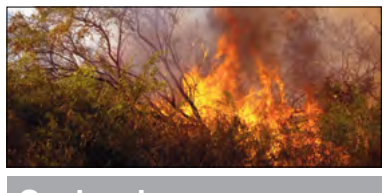
6 
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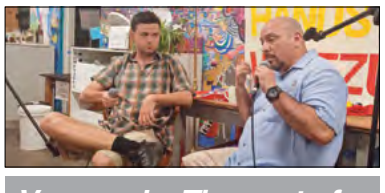
8 
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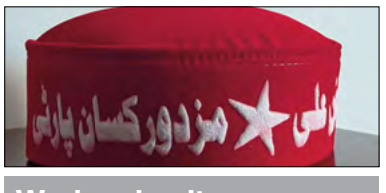
12 
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Guardian

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Let's get real about prejudice

We hear a lot about bigotry and prejudice now. Antisemitism is seldom out of the news. Islamophobia has been given a boost recently by our former unlamented Prime Minister Scott Morrison declaring that Muslims need to have their sermons monitored for dangerous content. Morrison didn't say anything about the culture that produced the Christchurch massacre. Racism is also a hot topic. Morrison and his former Liberal colleagues practice it with dog whistles, and the more blatant One Nation party is apparently doing well in the polls.

There's a lot of bad faith when prejudice is discussed. There are some people who weaponise the fear of prejudice. A prime example is the government's 'Antisemitism Envoy' Jillian Segal who described a peaceful anti-genocide march as equivalent to a mass shooting, but had nothing to say about a public display by actual Nazis apart from an "Of course I'm against that" when she was finally put on the spot. There's the bad faith of those who pretend that white people are somehow persecuted by recognition of Indigenous people. There's a lot of bad faith when prejudice is discussed.

In the face of bad faith, it's tempting to just insist on focussing on real prejudice. We know it when we see, hear or experience it. Let's fight real racism and real bigotry.

The Communist Party of Australia opposes bigotry and prejudice vehemently. This party was the first political organisation after European settlement to support the rights of Indigenous people. We don't take this position because it's nice or because we want to be popular with middle class lefties.

The CPA opposes prejudice because we support *real* democracy, the democracy that comes from working class people who make up the majority controlling the means of production, ie the economy. What we're after is also called "the dictatorship of the proletariat." The word 'dictatorship' sounds nasty, but what we have now is a dictatorship of the people with the most money.

Prejudice is used to distract from this struggle. It provides the big end of town with scapegoats that stop people seeing what's really going on. Minorities of any kind aren't taking what's important to you, capital is. It's not migrants who are stealing your jobs, it's capitalists who will sack, underpay or mistreat anyone if it means they get a higher return on investment. It's not LGBTQIA+ people who are damaging the family, it's capitalist corporations who don't want anyone to have time with their loved ones on the weekend.

It's high time Australia got real about prejudice, but we're not going to do that by giving taxpayers' money to an envoy who thinks the only prejudice worth fighting is criticism of Zionism and/or an ongoing genocide. We're not going to 'protect' our culture or the things we like about our country by wearing a flag around our shoulders and shouting at migrants.

We should fight real prejudice. We also need to fight the causes of real prejudice – the capitalists who use it to distract working people from what's being done to them in the name of higher returns on investment.

Fire season: Albanese adds petrol

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"In approving this climate-polluting mine the LNP government has sold out the Queenslanders who are dealing with the financial impacts of climate change such as intense flooding, which is only set to get worse as climate change worsens.

"By 2030, coal mines are on track to become the biggest source of Queensland's emissions, with this decision today it seems the LNP government is determined to give multinational mining companies a free pass when it comes to reducing their emissions."

The mine is also situated on some of Queensland's best cropping land, putting Queensland's food and water security at risk. 28 coal expansions are currently tabled in Queensland, and if they are all approved would see an estimated 10,614 hectares of wildlife habitat cleared and use a combined 3.7 trillion litres of water.

KIMBERLEY

On 20 January the West Australian Environmental Protection Authority recommended approval of the first fracking project in the state since Labor lifted a moratorium of the practice in 2019. This project would involve 20 initial frack wells in the heart of a National Heritage listed river catchment.

PROPAGANDA

The fossil fuel industry has not been pivoting from its harmful products. Rather it's been trying hard to make sure extraction and profit isn't slowed down by any public outrage or by government regulation. In the last financial year, an astroturf organisation called 'Australians for Prosperity' was funded for the most part by Coal Australia. According to their disclosures to the Australian Electoral Commission, $3.68 million of a total $3.89 million given to Australians for Prosperity came from Coal Australia. The group spent more than $400,000 on online ads attacking the Greens, independents and Labor.

The effort to minimise the role of climate change in our heatwaves and bushfires, and the role of Australia's fossil fuel habit in climate change has also been helped out by a media silence. According to one measure, the term 'climate change' was mentioned much less often in reporting of the fires than in previous bushfires.

REAL ACTION NEEDED

There's a saying that "facts don't care about your feelings." The facts of climate change don't care if the Australian media isn't mentioning climate change as much as it should be when it reports on bushfires. The atmosphere doesn't care if Labor's 'drug dealer' argument – "we just sell coal and gas" is 'working' with the electorate or not.

We need real action.

There's some hope out there. China's coal consumption peaked recently and should start declining. China is making solar power very cheap and is electrifying its economy at a rapid rate. There is good news elsewhere too. South Korea has announced that it will join the 'Powering Past Coal Alliance,' a group of countries that has signed up to phase out coal-fired power by 2040. South Korea is Australia's fourth largest-market for coal.

None of these promising developments elsewhere stopped the recent catastrophic heatwaves and the bushfires they made more likely. Australia needs to take more action. The Albanese government must stop approving fossil fuel developments and get serious about getting this country off fossil fuel use and exports.

The Communist Party of Australia supports a just transition for workers in fossil fuel industries. We know that this country could be a prosperous renewables-rich power.

Making that change won't be easy, and a lot of action will be required. The alternative won't be easy either. Just ask the people who lost properties in the last fires, and the people who got through a 50 degree day.

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.

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

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Attorney-General's double talk on hate speech

Paul Gregoire

Responding to a complaint about the recently enacted 'prohibited hate groups' regime, attorney general Michelle Rowland confirmed to the Australian National Imams Council (ANIC) that the framework and other hate crime measures passed on 20 January 2026 will not impinge upon Muslim religious leaders' ability to criticise foreign governments or political ideologies.

In the lead up to the passing of the laws, a rising concern was whether the listing of groups assessed to be hate groups, which in turn prohibits them and criminalises their members, might be a means to suppress the diverse pro-Palestinian movement that has risen up locally since October 2023, and stamp out valid criticism of Israel and the genocide it's committing in Gaza.

The letter was cosigned by home affairs minister Tony Burke and it addressed ANIC president Imam Shadi Alsuleiman, who'd written to the chief lawmaker concerned that the new laws prevented criticism of Israel and the political doctrine underscoring its settler colonial project, which is Zionism.

But the suggestion that Islamic preachers, and more broadly, the general public, can criticise Israel in the letter, counters what Rowland had previously told the ABC's *7.30*.

Despite Rowland's assurances, the new hate group laws are so broad that they give no guarantee that criticising a political entity is protected if it to be considered by some to be a part of a religious identity.

While federal Labor, Rowland and Burke all remain in power, they might be able to ensure that reading of the law. If politicians with different views take office, this law could easily apply in the manner Alsuleiman is concerned about.

MIXED SIGNALS

Rowland's letter claims that hate crime measures contained in the Combatting Antisemitism, Hate and Extremism (Criminal and Migration Laws) Bill 2026 won't "prevent legitimate, nonviolent criticism of the actions of a foreign country or of particular political ideologies." This suggestion covers hate group laws, the heightening of penalties around hate crimes and tightening of visa rules.

As the title of the bill suggests, these laws are being brought in to primarily "curb antisemitism" in the wake of the 14 December 2025 Bondi Beach mass murder which targeted a Jewish religious event. The news laws have been progressed at the same time as a combating antisemitism plan is being implemented by government.

That plan includes all levels of government and its institutions adopting the IHRA definition of antisemitism, which provides eleven examples of the prejudice. Seven involve Israel. The definition can be weaponised so that criticism of Israel is considered an assault on Jewish identity, and therefore, prejudicial. The Federal Court has recognised that this is a false conflation.

Boorloo/Perth Friday 16th February. 'Is this a crime?'

In response to questions from journalist David Speers on the ABC's *7.30* on 20 January 2026, the day the hate group laws were passed, Rowland said that if someone linked to a group "accuses Israel of genocide or apartheid" and "Jewish Australians do feel intimidated" and the court finds a reasonable person would have this same reaction, then a group can be banned.

THE BROAD NET OF THE HATE GROUP LAWS

A representative from the ANIC has stated that the response from the AG and the home affairs minister has not eased the "heightened anxiety" in the community around what can and can't be said in respect of such matters, and many fear the laws could be weaponised. The spokesperson noted that the language in the laws is exceedingly broad and lacks precise boundaries.

The hate groups regime is designed to protect the community from "social, economic, psychological and physical harm" by banning groups that engage in or promote hate crimes.

Here's how it will work. The head of ASIO assesses a group, then tells the Australian Federal Police minister. If they agree and get Attorney General approval, then the governor general lists the group as banned. ASIO can move to have a group listed based on assessing it has "advocated or engaged in politically motivated violence or engaged in the promotion of communal violence" or that there is a risk that it might do so in the future.

Right now, Rowland and Burke have given their word not to progress a suggestion coming from the ASIO boss to list a group over its criticism of Israel and the nation's policies as a hate group so as to criminalise it, which should provide some brief respite to those fearful of that development. Nothing in the law stops the top spy from trying to criminalise a group.

Yet, if the current attorney general and home affairs minister were replaced there would be nothing to prevent a hate group listing based on the conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism. If a party with a more authoritarian outlook won the next election, there is nothing to stop these laws being turned on pro-Palestinians, or any political opposition for that matter.

Sydney Criminal Lawyers (edited for space)

Extreme heat is killing workers: Unions urge national rules

Australian unions are calling for new national safety rules that require employers to stop work or modify duties when temperatures reach dangerous levels, warning that increasingly frequent heatwaves driven by climate change now pose a major workplace health and safety threat.

Countries like Japan already enforce mandatory occupational health and safety heat requirements, but there are currently no national heat standards in Australia. State and territory workplace health and safety laws do not clearly set out employer obligations to safely manage the risks of working in heat. Unions are urging Safe Work Australia to introduce a heat regulation that requires employers to provide controls such as rest breaks, work scheduling and work stoppages at defined temperature thresholds, and to ensure workers' compensation coverage for heat-related illnesses.

The push came ahead of Extreme Heat Awareness Day on 4 February, with the ACTU joining the Australian Medical Association (AMA), Australian Red Cross, the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) and Sweltering Cities to call for coordinated national action to protect workers and communities from escalating heat hazards driven by climate change.

Australia's housing standards are also forcing millions of workers, particularly renters, to endure unsafe temperatures at home. Unions are urging the federal government to update the National Construction Code to include climate-resilience measures so new homes maintain safe indoor temperatures, and to work with states and territories to introduce minimum energy-efficiency standards for rental properties.

The Commonwealth's 2025 National Climate Risk Assessment projects heat-related deaths in major cities will more than quadruple without change – rising 444 per cent in Sydney, 423 per cent in Darwin, 312 per cent in Perth, and 259 per cent in Melbourne.

Safe Work Australia data shows workers currently carry 74 per cent of the financial burden of heat-related injuries and illnesses, while employers bear just 5 per cent.

Australian Council of Trade Unions President Michele O'Neil has said, "No worker should be told to push through the brutal heat and risk their own life. When it's dangerously hot, your boss should either change your work or stop your work.

"A rest break or work stoppage in extreme heat can be the difference between a worker going home safe or not going home at all.

"We regulate asbestos and silica because they kill people and devastate families. It's time we treat climate hazards like extreme heat in the same way. There is no excuse for Australia to leave workers exposed without clear, enforceable rules, especially when the government's own reports project heat-related deaths to more than quadruple in our major cities.

"No worker should have to live in a home that becomes unsafe every summer, especially renters who have the least power to demand improvements. Updating the construction code and setting minimum standards for rental homes is basic public safety.

"The science tells us that heatwaves are getting worse, but our regulations haven't caught up. If countries like Japan can introduce national heat standards, surely Australia can too.

"If you get sick from working in extreme heat, it should be treated like any other workplace injury – and that means workers' compensation coverage, so you can focus on getting better, instead of worrying about paying the bills."

ACTU

Homelessness crisis worsens

New data shows Australia's housing and homelessness crisis is worsening, prompting calls to curb property investor tax breaks and build more social homes.

The Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services (ROGS) shows that 41% of people waiting to get into public housing are homeless or at risk of homelessness – up from 26% in 2015.

Analysis by the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) finds the federal government is spending more on tax breaks for property investors than on social housing, homelessness services and rent assistance combined.

ACOSS has called on the federal government to gradually halve the 50% Capital Gains Tax discount and phase out negative gearing over five years. It also should set national social housing targets and substantially boost social housing supply to meet these targets.

"This report today shows housing stress and homelessness are getting worse while absurdly generous tax breaks drive up home prices and supercharge inequality in our society," said ACOSS Acting CEO, Jacqueline Phillips.

"More people are struggling to afford the private rental market, pushing them into homelessness and onto growing social housing waitlists. With new social housing accounting for less than two per cent of homes built each year, the situation is set to worsen, not improve.

"Property investor tax breaks come at a staggering cost of more than $12 billion each year, which could be spent on social housing, social services and supports that benefit everyone."

New ROGS data shows:

- Social housing makes up only 3.6% of all dwellings, down from nearly 5.7% in the 1980s
- 41% of the public housing waitlist is made up of households that are homeless or at risk of homelessness, up from 26% in 2015
- Around 190,000 households are on the public housing waitlist, up from around 169,000 in 2024 and around 141,000 in 2018
- 18.3% of Commonwealth Rent Assistance households are in severe rental stress (paying more than 50% of income on rent), up from 8.1% in 2004
- 27.4% of people using homelessness services are experiencing persistent homelessness (experiencing homelessness for more than 7 months in a 2-year period), up from 22% in 2019.

Separate ACOSS analysis shows:

- Social housing now makes up less than 2% of dwellings built annually (down from 22% in the 1950s and 15% in the 1970s)
- Federal government spends more on housing investor tax breaks ($12.3bn in 2025) than on social housing, homelessness services and rent assistance combined ($9.6bn in 2025)

Australian Council of Social Service

The Communist Party of Australia supports expansion of public housing over 'social and affordable.'

Homeless people, Chatswood, Sydney. Photo: Sardaka – wikimedia.org (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Interest rate hikes unjustified

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) has responded to ABS data showing consumer prices rose by 0.2% in December 2025 (seasonally adjusted).

"Today's inflation figures do not justify further interest rate increases that would threaten thousands of jobs and increase financial stress," ACOSS Acting CEO Jacqui Philips said.

"The living standards of people on low and modest incomes have been decimated over the past few years due to inflation, higher unemployment, weak growth in incomes, and higher interest rates.

"Lifting interest rates ... would worsen the pain and pose a greater threat than temporary inflation fluctuations.

"Inflation has eased significantly since its peak and the impact of previous rate hikes continues to be felt right across the country."

"Higher interest rates lead to increased unemployment and are too great a price to pay. We remind the RBA that it has a dual mandate – to promote employment as well as curb inflation.

"Inflation should be tackled through direct support and targeted measures that address price rises at their source."

ACOSS is calling for action to protect people doing it toughest, with a lift to JobSeeker and related payments to keep people out of poverty and investment in energy efficiency for households to cut bills.

Australian Council of Social Service

www.cpa.org.au

Australian public school teachers are spending more than $175 million of their own money each year on basic classroom supplies, exposing the personal impact of chronic underfunding of public schools, according to new data from the Australian Education Union (AEU).

The AEU's 2025 *State of Our Schools* survey of more than 10,000 public school teachers found that more than 86 per cent of teachers are using their own money to purchase supplies for their classrooms, spending an average of almost $1,000 each year. Nationally, this amounts to nearly $177 million, with teachers in primary, special and very remote schools spending even more.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said the findings revealed an "unacceptable reality" for the teaching profession. "Teachers are spending significant amounts of their own money on the basic necessities needed to run a classroom.

"We're not talking about nice-to-haves or personal touches. Teachers are paying for basic items like stationery, books, classroom equipment, and materials to support individual students. These are critical items necessary for teachers to do their jobs properly, but they have been forced to pay for them out of their own pockets."

Teachers in remote areas face the highest average out-of-pocket costs.

Haythorpe said teachers' commitment to their students was being taken for granted by governments. "Teachers do this because they care deeply about their students, but their goodwill is being exploited. When more than 85 per cent of public school teachers are spending nearly $1,000 a year of their own money, that's not generosity, that's a system failure."

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: is ANZ bank. The Finance Sector Union (FSU) has condemned ANZ's decision to cut jobs across multiple Suncorp Bank divisions, including Business Banking and Home Lending, warning the move appears to directly contradict the commitments made to workers and communities when the sale was approved.

ANZ has confirmed that 197 Suncorp Bank roles are being impacted, with 66 staff expected to lose their jobs. The majority of the jobs impacted are in Brisbane.

At the time the takeover of Suncorp was approved, ANZ gave clear undertakings that for three years there would be no regional ANZ or Suncorp bank closures, no changes to the number of Suncorp branches in Queensland, and no net job losses across Australia as a result of the acquisition.

The FSU says these cuts are an insult to those conditions and are a disgrace for workers who rely on secure jobs in the finance sector. The union is concerned the cuts do not comply with ANZ's obligations. Workers and communities were promised stability and security, and that hasn't happened.

FSU National President Wendy Streets says ANZ's actions represent a profound breach of trust. The union has called on the federal government to intervene and ensure ANZ is held accountable for the commitments it made as part of the acquisition, saying this is another example of CEO Nuno Matos being out of control.

"ANZ made big promises to secure approval for the Suncorp acquisition, including commitments to protect jobs and invest in Queensland.

"Now we are seeing workers pay the price. ANZ has said it is complying with its obligations; however, we have not seen the evidence to support that claim. These are empty promises. ANZ told staff and communities they would be looked after. Instead, jobs are being cut.

"The government cannot allow a major bank to make binding promises to secure approval and then walk away from them. This situation is completely unacceptable. The government must step in and take control."

Australian brutality exposed in Perth

C Bartholomew

The attempted terror attack on the Invasion Day rally in Boorloo (Perth) has laid bare the racism at the heart of Australian media and politics. The blatant hypocrisy and cowardice from Australia's leadership and talking heads expose a bitter truth: Indigenous lives do not matter.

The Invasion Day rally was ordered to disperse by police after a homemade bomb containing explosive liquid, nails, and ball bearings was thrown into the crowd of 2,500 people. Well-known and respected elders were speaking on stage at the time. Police have confirmed that, if the bomb had successfully detonated, the result would likely have been a mass casualty event.

One article from the *Australian Financial Review* spent as much time talking about how the "crowd barely noticed" the bomb as it did discussing community criticism of the response from police, media, and politicians. A handful of articles from other news sources have slowly come out, some finally coming around to using the word "terror." It should not have taken public outcry for corporate media to finally talk seriously about the attack. Their coverage is still lacklustre. The white nationalist March for Australia crowds have had far more sympathy from media and politicians.

At time of writing, the alleged perpetrator has still not been charged with a terrorism offence, reportedly because police investigations have failed to identify a motive. The 31-year-old white man's name has been suppressed by the court out of fear for his safety in detention.

Compare this response to that of the Bondi shooting. Every corporate news channel immediately began talking about the attack. Every detail of the alleged perpetrators were the subjects of analysis and speculation. Politicians and media labelled the attack an incident of antisemitism straight away. The Albanese and Minns governments, Antisemitism Envoy Jillian Segal, and the Coalition seized the chance to include the shooting in their campaigns against Palestine advocacy. A Royal Commission has been called for. Now the government has the power to label anyone a hate group without oversight, with an amendment proposed by senator Lidia Thorpe to distinguish between antisemitism and criticism of Israel roundly rejected.

Police and politicians pretending to have no clue why a white man might be motivated to throw a bomb at protesting Indigenous people is an insult. Courts hiding the attacker's identity out of safety concerns, while Indigenous people including children die in custody and are assaulted by police, is an insult. The fact that the two charges currently laid against the attacker carry maximum sentences of two years and three years imprisonment, while members of organisations arbitrarily labelled hate groups under new legislation can face up to 15 years, is an insult.

The handling of this attempted terror attack exposes the government's new hate crime laws for what they are. Opposition leader Sussan Ley couldn't be bothered to comment. PM Albanese stated that authorities "should throw the book" at the suspect, yet there are currently no hate crime charges of any sort laid against the attacker. These draconian new laws are not meant to protect communities such as Indigenous peoples. They are meant to give governments unchecked power to crack down on anti-Zionism and advocacy for Palestine. The response to this attack, like the response to the neo-Nazi raid on Camp Sovereignty, shows that Albanese has no interest in any hate crime he can't spin into support for apartheid and genocide.

... unchecked power to crack down on advocacy for Palestine

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commission's National Anti-Racism Framework has not been implemented. The recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody have not been implemented. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has not been implemented. Annual Closing the Gap reports indicate year after year that next to no action is being taken to address discrimination and inequalities.

AI-generated content commodifying or attacking Indigenous people, sometimes supported by groups like Advance Australia (backed by Jillian Segal's husband), has not prompted any government or legislative intervention.

Indigenous patients are still being turned away or denied care by public hospitals. Indigenous people are still dying by preventable diseases of poverty, like rheumatic heart disease. Indigenous children are still assaulted, raped, put in spit hoods, and killed in detention. Indigenous people are still being attacked by police on the streets, even when they themselves were the victims of the crime that was reported. Indigenous culture is still smeared by social and corporate media, insulted by One Nation and Coalition politicians, and used as a political prop by Labor.

Perhaps corporate media and politicians are not asking how this attack could have happened because they, better than anyone, know that this is the reality of Australia. Their complicity in the everyday brutalisation of Indigenous people is hidden behind a culture of institutional and public silence they help construct. Incidents like the attempted Invasion Day bombing show Australia for what it really is. Perhaps that's why there's so much silence.

Call to revoke Isaac Herzog's invitation to visit

At time of writing, the President of Israel, Isaac Herzog, has confirmed that he will visit Australia from 8 to 12 February and meet with members of the Australian Jewish community.

The Jewish Council of Australia has expressed outrage that the Albanese government would fuel the flames of division by inviting Herzog to visit Australia, warning that his trip is completely inappropriate and offensive and will rightly spark mass protests.

President Herzog is directly implicated in Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. He has made public statements, including that an "entire nation is responsible" for 7 October, which have been cited by the International Court of Justice and other international bodies examining breaches of the Genocide Convention.

This should be a moment for collective mourning, reflection and care. It is not a moment to host the head of a state which has been found to have committed a genocide in Gaza.

"By inviting Herzog to visit, Albanese is using Jewish grief as a political prop and diplomatic backdrop," said Sarah Schwartz, Executive Officer of the Jewish Council of Australia.

"Inviting a foreign head of state who is implicated in an ongoing genocide as a representative of the Jewish community is deeply offensive and risks entrenching the dangerous and antisemitic conflation between Jewish identity and the actions of the Israeli state. This does not make Jews safer. It does the opposite."

Instead of proceeding with this visit, the Jewish Council is urging the government to pursue concrete actions that address the root causes of violence, racism and impunity, and that uphold international law. Over 60,000 Australians have signed the Jewish Council's petition about the visit.

"Our safety will not come from aligning with Netanyahu or Trump," said Schwartz. "It will come from dismantling racism, rejecting collective punishment, and standing consistently for human rights and justice for all.

"Growing numbers of Jews in Australia and globally oppose the actions of the Israeli government and reject its attempts to speak in our name. We refuse to be ignored or silenced.

"Conflating Judaism with the policies of a state accused of genocide and crimes against humanity erases our voice and fuels antisemitism rather than combating it."

Jewish Council of Australia

Coal and gas, fires and floods

As extreme heat grips much of the nation and bushfires continue to pose threats to life and land, Australian Conservation Foundation CEO Adam Bandt has made a direct plea to his former colleagues in Parliament House ahead of its formal return for the 2026 year.

"Coal and gas exports are destroying the great Australian summer," Bandt said. "This Parliament must protect Australians and save our summer by stopping new coal and gas mines.

"I sat in that building for years watching politicians make solemn condolence speeches about fires and floods, then go and approve another coal or gas mine. Will 2026 be another year of cognitive dissonance from Canberra?

"The 2025-26 summer has been one of chaos. We've lost at least one life in the Victorian bushfire disaster and the cost to nature, wildlife, and people's homes is insurmountable.

"Coal and gas sent offshore comes back as heatwaves, fires and floods. No matter where in the world Australian coal and gas is burnt, it fuels extreme heat, bushfires and floods here at home.

"As politicians sit in your air-conditioned offices next week, pay a thought to people who don't share that luxury or are forced to turn off the A/C, during heatwaves fuelled by coal and gas, because their power bills are too high.

"Pay a thought to people making the tough choice to leave behind livestock, their homes and memories, as out of control bushfires get too close for comfort, fuelled by coal and gas exports.

"Pay a thought to volunteer firefighters who are on the frontline of tackling bushfires, made worse by prolonged extreme heat, driven by the government's coal and gas approvals."

One ACF supporter, Jim Billings, who lost his home in the Longwood bushfire in Central Victoria, sums up the hurt – "It kills me", he said, "it kills me because it's gone. It's irretrievably, completely and utterly destroyed."

Said Bandt: "I'm in the rare position of not returning to parliament this year and instead campaigning alongside everyday Australians who want and need climate action.

"We will see the government in court this year over its approval of the NW Shelf climate bomb. But we call for Parliament to act first by stopping new coal and gas exports."

Australian Conservation Foundation

Photo: Eclipse Chasers – pexels.com (CC0)

Joint anti-racism campaign launched

The UTS Centre for Indigenous People and Work (CIPW) and the Australian Education Union (AEU) have joined forces to address the historical and contemporary challenges faced by "Indigenous employment."

This ground-breaking partnership, supported by Maurice Blackburn Lawyers, aims to develop a Leading Practice Bargaining Framework to support the AEU's anti-racism campaign. The collaboration builds on these organisations' long-standing leadership in Indigenous employment reform.

The framework will embed anti-racism measures within industrial and professional conditions, recognising that safe, respectful and inclusive workplaces are fundamental employment rights.

This collaboration builds on the AEU and the UTS (University of Technology Sydney) Jumbunna Institute's earlier joint report, which benchmarked the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members within education facilities and identified practical industrial and organisational reforms, including proposed enterprise bargaining clauses.

The partnership comes at a critical moment following the Fair Work Commission Expert Panel's provisional decision in early 2025, which recognised gender-based undervaluation across several priority awards, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services Award 2020.

The decision confirms that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's work often sits at the intersection of cultural and gendered labour, with cultural knowledge, community responsibilities and relational work being systematically undervalued within industrial frameworks. This finding provides an important foundation for broader reform across other sectors, including education.

AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe said: "Aboriginal teachers and education staff and Torres Strait Islander teachers and education staff bring essential cultural knowledge, leadership and care to our schools, early childhood services and TAFE institutes, yet this work has long been undervalued and overlooked in industrial systems."

"By placing anti-racism and cultural recognition squarely within bargaining frameworks, we are asserting that respect, safety and equity are core employment conditions, not optional extras."

Professor Nareen Young, Director of the UTS Centre for Indigenous People and Work noted: "Placing anti-racism measures strongly in the bargaining framework places them in the employment jurisdiction, where they belong, at long last. We are proud to work alongside employment community partners for recognition of our people's contribution to Australian workplaces and the economy and to strengthen anti-racism provisions in workplaces that our data tells us are sorely needed."

Imogen Szumer, Senior Associate at Maurice Blackburn Lawyers, said that workplace anti-racism measures cannot be limited to employer policies and individual discrimination law claims after the harm has been done, emphasising that enforceable, collectively bargained rights and protections will drive real accountability and change.

"We are proud to support this critical work being led the Australian Education Union and the Centre for Indigenous People and Work."

Australian Education Union

'Throwing money at high schools that don't need it'

As the 2026 school year gets underway, new research by The Australia Institute reveals that Australia is the most expensive place in the developed world for families to send a child to high school.

The soaring cost of educating high school students is driven by the unusually high number of Australian students who go to private schools and the unusually high prices of those private schools.

It costs Australian families $4,967 per year to send a child to high school, almost four times the OECD average. This figure is the average for all families with a child at high school. Families who send their children to private schools are paying even more, with fees now reaching up to $55,000 per child, per year.

KEY FINDINGS:

More than 40% of Australian high school students now attend private schools. If the current trend continues, most Australian high school students will attend private schools by 2055.

Despite increasingly high fees, private schools don't offer a substantially better education than public schools. Research shows gaps in test results are mainly due to differences in the socio-economic background of students, rather than the quality of the teaching.

Private schools that have enough money to build swimming pools and horse stables still receive significant public support. At the same time, public schools face a funding shortfall of over $4 billion.

'CLEARLY NOT HELPING'

"Governments are throwing public money at private schools that clearly don't need it," said Richard Denniss, co-CEO of The Australia Institute.

"Australia's private schools are growing, and their fees keep rising. Yet all this money isn't buying a better education for Australian children. In fact, as private school revenues and enrolments have surged, Australia's performance on international tests has declined.

"Wealthy schools are free to charge parents a fortune while still receiving taxpayer funding. This double-dipping is not allowed in many other countries, and it's clearly not helping Australia's students, the economy or the Commonwealth budget.

"Schools which can afford to build things like indoor swimming pools and rifle ranges should not be receiving taxpayer dollars.

"Diverting money from rich private schools into public schools would help level the playing field and would simultaneously encourage families to send their children to public schools, which would save them a small fortune.

"Government policy has created a two-tier education system and it's not helping Australia. Indeed, it's not even keeping private school fees down. It's time to admit the system needs radical reform rather than more tinkering around the edges."

Australia Institute

CPA Joint Plenary Session in NSW: Branches and State Committee come together

Arthur Martin

On 31 January, the first of a planned quarterly series of plenary sessions in NSW was conducted between the NSW State Committee and the Branch Executives of NSW. The purpose of this series of meetings is to strengthen unity and coordination between the State Committee and the branches of NSW in all aspects of our work.

An open dialogue has occurred that acknowledges areas of weakness while also focusing on strengths in individual branches, as well as producing a plan for the state that will enable us to jointly support each other, with increased visibility and insight into branch activities as well as providing a platform and space to share knowledge and ideas across branches.

Branches each discussed their respective Branch Plans and how they were each supporting the resolution adopted at the 2025 State Conference in NSW regarding the setting of measurable goals, generating exciting discussions around how we can deepen our activism and unite our practice with strong, theoretical guidance.

The need for education was a major theme of these discussions, with comrades agreeing that education needed to be constant and contain both practical and theoretical elements. The unity of theory and practice and the aim of getting branches to notch up wins for the working class in their respective localities and industries was deemed critical.

The newly elected State Committee is embracing an approach of openness and renewed energy as we enter the next two years. This development is exciting and speaks to the capability and enthusiasm of comrades throughout the state, and an important morale boost for the party as we draw closer to our National Congress. ✪

EV loans leave lower income Australians behind

Peter Farmer

Rewiring Australia, an organisation dedicated to promoting electrification as a way of reducing Australia's carbon emissions has warned that new discounted loans for electrical vehicle (EV) purchases don't go far enough and risk leaving low-income households and pensioners behind as more prosperous households switch from internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles to EVs.

The federal government has announced $60 million in discounted EV loans through its Clean Energy Finance Corporation, aimed at reducing upfront costs for popular EV models and accelerating the shift away from petrol-powered transport.

Discounted loans for electric vehicles (EVs) will help Australians ditch petrol cars sooner, but Rewiring Australia says the government must go further if low-income households and pensioners are to share in the savings from lower power bills.

The federal government has announced $60 million in discounted EV loans through its Clean Energy Finance Corporation, aimed at reducing upfront costs for popular EV models and accelerating the shift away from petrol-powered transport.

Rewiring Australia has welcomed the move as good news for Australians in the market for a new car, but says money could still be better spent investing in policies which benefit everyone.

"These discounts are about helping Australians switch to cars that are cheaper to run, better to drive, powered by Australian-made energy, and ultimately better for planet Earth," Rewiring Australia CEO Francis Vierboom said.

"Every new petrol car sold today is effectively a 20-year subscription to imported fossil fuels, locking households into higher costs for decades.

"Transport is on track to become Australia's biggest source of carbon pollution and the solution is a relatively straightforward one in that we just need to make EVs the more favourable option to consumers, which this announcement helps do.

"But we still need to do more for lower-income homes. These kinds of loans work well for upper-middle income folks who can easily make regular repayments but leave behind Australians who need help the most."

Vierboom said without affordable finance to upgrade to fully electric, energy-efficient homes, most Australians will continue to miss out on the full savings of the clean energy transition."If the government is serious about climate targets and household budgets, it needs to move beyond conventional loan models and invest in solutions that can be accessed by homes under the most pressure."

Another thing the government could do to drastically reduce emissions from transport is to make a massive investment in free or very cheap public transport, but that doesn't seem to be on the Labor government's radar. ✪

Check out the official Instagram account of the Communist Party of Australia

www.instagram.com/communist.party.australia/

www.cpa.org.au

GREEN NOTES

Israel's desalination projects: an environmental disaster

Graham Holton

Israel is sometimes portrayed as a global leader in large-scale seawater desalination, but its projects have created significant environmental problems, mainly along the country's coastal ecosystems. The Ashkelon, Hadera, Sorek, Palmachim, and Ashdod plants are increasing ecological damage by increasing salinity along outpour areas, which stresses marine organisms not able to adapt to high salinity. The concentrated brine output is warmer than local seawater, creating thermal pollution. The dumped saline water damages ecosystems by reducing oxygen levels, affecting fish, invertebrates, and seagrass, especially slow-growing species

Much of the fresh water from desalination plants is dumped into the Sea of Galilee (Lake Kinneret) with ecological, chemical, and political consequences. This dilutes the surface salinity of the lake, which interferes with the natural process of adjusting, putting a stress on fish and other animals that have adapted to the lake's conditions.

Desalination plants require extensive chemical treatment using chlorine and chloramines against biofouling, phosphonate-based anti-sealants use acids and coagulants, and heavy metals are leached from the infrastructure. These chemicals disrupt plankton populations, affect larval development of fish and molluscs, and accumulate in marine sediments.

Desalination and recycled water projects solve water scarcity but increase the environmental costs on marine ecosystems and the climate. Recycled water projects contain nitrates and phosphates, organic matter, agricultural runoff, and urban pollutants. This creates algal blooms, oxygen depletion at depth, fish die-offs, and a decline in water quality for drinking. The process Israel uses, reverse osmosis desalination, is energy-intensive. It relies on gas, which increases greenhouse gas emissions.

Israel presents desalination as a technical solution to its water scarcity. The economics of desalination projects rely on engineering, energy markets, finance, and political power. Desalination plants are highly capital-intensive. The typical costs of large-scale seawater reverse osmosis (SWRO) are up to $2,136 per cubic meter per day of installed capacity. The cost of producing what Israel needs each year is around $2 billion per year. Desalination is among the world's most expensive fresh water reclamation systems Desalination in Israel is only viable because the high energy costs are subsidised.

The Sea of Galilee feeds the Jordan River system, which has regional ecological importance and is politically sensitive for Jordan, Palestine, and Syria. From a political-ecology perspective, the impact is significant. Freshwater dumping is functioning as a symbolic fix, creating the appearance of "saving the lake," while avoiding addressing the problems of over-extraction upstream. This masks structural water mismanagement and justifies continued high consumption elsewhere.

Desalination is not a technically neutral problem, for it influences political power, social inequality, and contests nature-society relationships. Political ecology questions: who benefits; who is marginalised; who bears the costs; who decides; and what alternatives there are.

Under Israel's settler-colonialism, desalination is a tool of territorial consolidation, extending extractivism from the Mediterranean to the Sea of Galilee. Desalination reduces incentives for equitable water sharing across borders, as control over water infrastructure reinforces sovereignty claims. Occupied populations are excluded from desalinated supplies and paying higher prices, reinforcing their reliance on degraded natural sources.

What is needed is democratic governance of water infrastructure in Israel, to limit ecological damage from marine discharge, improve energy costs, prioritise fresh water redistribution, and to treat fresh water as a social-ecological right, not a political weapon.

Venezuela: The cost of challenging an Empire

Film night and Q&A report

A Carruthers

Hosted by *Guardian, the Workers' Weekly* under the coordination of comrade MC and the Canberra Branch of the CPA, we were pleased to have filmmakers Rodrigo Acuña and Nic Ford in town for the 31 January screening of the documentary film *Venezuela: the Cost of Challenging an Empire*.

A crowd of about 60 from all walks of the Canberra community. This was also a pleasing coming-together of the community around Venezuela, with people from all walks of life learning more together about the dire situation in Latin America.

MC's opening and closing remarks, Rodrigo's fiery missives against US imperialism and a cheery intro by *Guardian* editor Floyd Kermode were complemented by searching questions from the floor during the Q and A.

The film is raw and genuine investigative documentary work, well worth the watch. Rodrigo takes us back to the beginning of the Chavista revolution, the 2002 coup attempt, the blockade and sanctions, and the attacks from the far-right within Venezuela all the way through the failed CIA-Silvercorp coup of 2020 and into the Maduro era. Rodrigo interviews ordinary Venezuelans, intellectuals and even members of the opposition.

Rodrigo's analysis of the Maduro era is complex. Maduro inherited a difficult situation, which according to Rodrigo was even worse than the Chavez era. The past 5 years have seen an uptick in the Venezuelan economy and a growing confidence in the Bolivarian leadership. The class and race aspect is palpable, the opposition often points to Maduro's job as a former bus driver as a point of shame, and the far-right terrorists operate on an anti-black agenda (most Chavistas are Afro-Venezuelans or mestizos who have African, indigenous and some Spanish heritage).

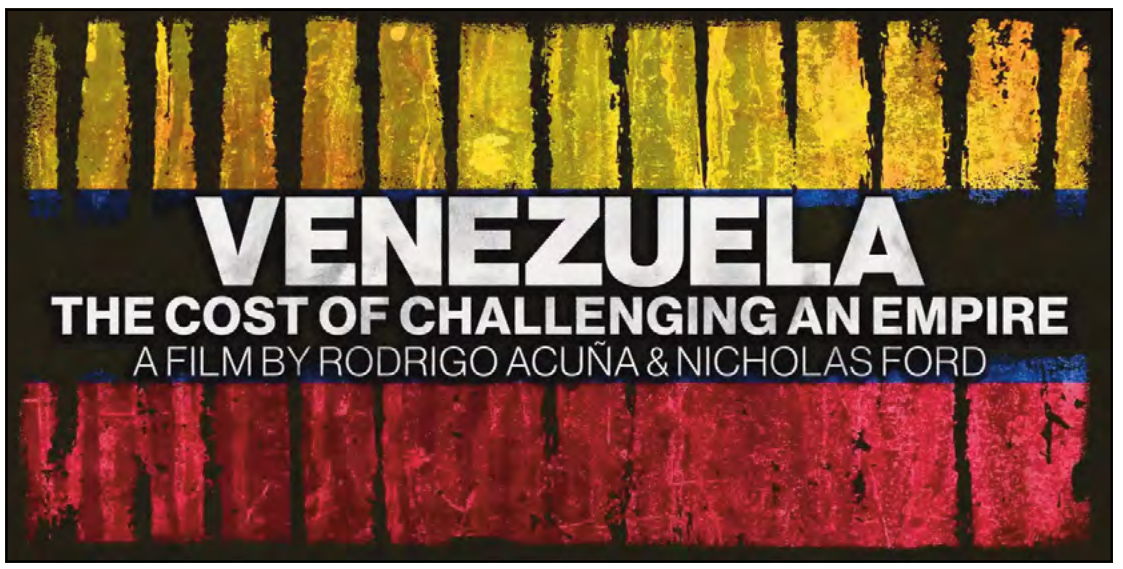
What the film argues is that the attack on Venezuela is ideological and geostrategic, not rational; economic methods complement direct invasions and direct CIA intervention, but we have to recognise that what the US fundamentally does not want is successful models of development in Latin America.

Rodrigo offers a dire prophetic warning at the end of the film, predicting that the Chavistas will one day be ousted from power. We have come close to this, but the Bolivarian government has not yet fallen, despite the despicable and criminal kidnapping of President Maduro and Parliamentarian Flores, the killing of 100 people and destruction of nearly 500 apartments.

The real question is, really, us. What do we do? We have to be revolutionary optimists. No matter the horrors that this film exposes, including graphic killings of chavistas and the sheer brutality of the far-right and the Machadoists and other reactionary forces, international solidarity does make a difference. An Australia that refuses to tow the US line would be a thorn in the side of Western imperialist hegemony. Our silence is their gift. Our words and actions are their nightmare.

Also mentioned was the importance of defending the Cuban revolution now after Trump's escalation there. Communist China's gift of 80,000 tonnes of rice to Cuba was mentioned. China's support for Latin America as a Zone of Peace, and the importance of international solidarity right now, are crucial. The example of China gives us further impetus and strength to keep fighting and defending socialism and national liberation in Latin America.

Many *Guardian*s were sold as well at this wonderful event, testament to the fact that, if we put our mind and spirit to it, we can make a difference. People want alternative news. The uniqueness of the *Guardian* and the Communist viewpoint on the world was made clear. We hope to host more events in this format, under the rubric of the *Guardian, the Workers' Weekly*.



Interview: Rodrigo Acuña and Nic Ford

What makes two first-time film makers chronicle Venezuela's challenge to the US empire? *Guardian* editor Floyd Kermode sat down with film makers Rodrigo Acuña and Nic Ford after the Canberra premiere of their documentary *Venezuela, the cost of challenging an empire* to find out.

FK: So, how did you get into this situation?

Rodrigo: I did my Phd on Venezuela's foreign policy and I've been writing about Latin American politics for about twenty years since then.

Nic: I did journalism. I've written a few articles, but I've always been drawn to the visual side of things. I have a lot of stuff on TikTok and that kind of thing. Rodrigo was my Spanish teacher at uni. We kept in touch. When I started writing about Venezuela, he reached out.

FK: We've just seen your documentary. Venezuela has been under- or misleadingly reported.

Nic: Across the board

Rodrigo: That's part of the reason I've been writing on the country for the past twenty years. But there's only so many articles you can write. I can tell you that the government has handed over 4.5 million new apartments to Venezuelans, and that might not mean anything to you, but if you actually see those apartments as you do in our film, that's different.

Rodrigo: It's an ideological position to just ignore all the programs that were introduced by Chávez and Maduro after him. The government with all its faults, errors, corruption and contradictions has also invested a substantial amount of public funds into health, education, and sports. In the area of sports, that's obvious because Venezuela has obtained more medals during the Bolivarian revolution than in the previous 80 years.

FK: It was good to see that athlete in the movie winning and then jumping for joy.

Rodrigo: She's the current Olympic record-holder for triple jump, and she is a product of the government's programs in health and education. Because she's a Chavista, and because she's always spoken in favour of the Bolivarian revolution, she's ignored and absolutely loathed by the political right.

FK: Can you tell us something about the contrast between before and after the Bolivarian revolution? That's another thing not much reported on.

Rodrigo: The country up until that point had about 132 different police forces. In 2005, when the 'metropolitanos,' the Caracas police force was still in operation, I was warned to avoid them at all costs. I actually saw them robbing someone. The government created the national Bolivarian police force; one standard of training. The new police force were actually approachable. You could ask them for directions. Did they completely get rid of corruption? No. Did they make a serious effort to get rid of corruption in the police force? I think the answer is 'yes.'

Before Chávez came to power in 1999, the country had close to 60 per cent of people living on or below the poverty line. It was around 12 % towards the end of the Chávez presidency.

In the *Open Veins of Latin America* Galeano said that in 1970s Venezuela, you could die of hunger or from indigestion. A very unequal society.

Nic: When I was there, the people I talked to from the upper classes all despised Maduro. In the poor neighbourhoods a lot of people really liked him, or their attitude was "Life is hard because of sanctions, but he's doing the best he can. We know life is better because he's in power."

FK: Did resources make it harder to make the film?

Nic: Well it took about a year and a half to edit. We were both doing other jobs. A lot of Sundays we had to meet up and edit together. It was certainly a challenge putting it together. I learned everything from watching how-to videos.

Rodrigo: Caracas is a very difficult city. In Melbourne or Sydney, no one is going to say "I'm going to be two or three hours late because there's a bus strike, or a train strike. You can plan to meet three people and wind up only meeting one.

FK: And what's next for you?

Nic: I'm working on a documentary about the International Monetary Fund. That's one reason I went to Venezuela. The riots that inspired Chávez and others to try to change the country were the first of the 'IMF riots.'

Rodrigo: I'm doing something on the latest revelations about Australia's role in the overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile.

China: the threat of a good example

Gary Olson

In his recent monumental narrative, *Capitalism: A Global History*, which spans 1,000 years, plus 155 pages of notes, Harvard historian Sven Beckert recounts that on October 25, 1917, Lenin proclaimed, "In Russia we must now set about building a proletarian socialist state." For the first time in its 1,000-year history, a "society explicitly declared itself a socialist society and dedicated itself to destroying capitalism." From that point onward, "... a fear of the Russian Revolution and all forms of socialism would become the polestar of politics in capitalist societies all the way to 1991." Then, suddenly, the communist world imploded, quickly followed by what became known as neoliberal "shock therapy" and "crony capitalism." As another astute analyst wrote, the USSR and Eastern Europe made "a great leap backward," and since 1917, revolutionary struggles have been limited to the Global South – and brutally repressed.

What about China? Concurrently, a transformation was occurring in Beijing. Neoliberal reforms were rejected, but the market was given a larger role, albeit under state control. As Deng Xiaoping said in 1984, "Developing a market economy does not mean practicing capitalism. While maintaining a planned economy can be the mainstream of our economic system, we are also introducing a market economy. But it is a socialist market economy."

China's approach generated a spectacular growth rate of 10 per cent per year over two decades, and Beckert notes that while "observers disagreed about whether this was a way station on the path to communism or a form of capitalism or perhaps both, it was clear that China was a political economy radically at odds with the neoliberal experiment unfolding elsewhere."

I might be wrong, but after careful reading and watching several interviews with Beckert, it's my sense that he does not accord China the same explicit commitment to transcending capitalism or to being a similar "threat" to capitalism as he did for the Russian Revolution. In a footnote, he writes that China's economic development "follows a logic of governance that is distinct from neoliberalism." However, in keeping with his overall thesis, he situates today's China as a site of global capitalism and on the global trajectory of capitalism. (Some on the left maintain that the Communist Party of China (CPC) has abandoned socialism and the "capitalist roaders" are in charge.)

Beckert's book is also a political history that stresses the conjunction between state power and capitalism. Capitalism is state-centric and "is conceptually unimaginable without the state." Further, he asserts that capitalism's future will be determined by political forces. However, he offers no parallel attempt to engage the argument that the state in China is the driver of socialism. I found this a disappointing shortcoming in Beckert's otherwise magisterial, bold, and highly readable chronicling of 1,000 years of global capitalism. In the brief comments that follow, I'll suggest that a strong case can be made that China is indeed on the path toward socialism.

The history of modern China can best be understood by dividing it into three major stages, sometimes referred to as the "three miracles:"

- **Socialism 1.0** (1949 – 1976/80): Marked by the liberation struggle, the initial shaping of the socialist path, the 'Great Leap Forward,' and the Cultural Revolution.
- **Socialism 2.0** (1978 – 2012/14): Shaped by Deng Xiaoping's reforms and opening to the outside as a source of investment and technology. As Ken Hammond has noted, the CPC made a gamble in 1978 that the state could manage the economy in such a way that the country would not slip back into neocolonial status.
- **Socialism 3.0** (2012 – to the present): Characterised by renewed but unavoidable contradictions; expansion of the social system, and the end of the first phase of socialist construction. By 2035, China will have achieved basic modernisation. The evidence suggests that in 2049, with a population of 1.3 billion, China will rank among the "top countries" and at the forefront of the world economic system.

Hong Kong street market. Photo: Bernard Spragg – flickr.com (CC0 1.0)

Here, it must be asked whether mistakes were made during these three phases. Without question, others will occur in the future. Do social inequalities, wealth disparities, market mechanisms, foreign investors, corrupt party officials, and billionaires exist in China? Yes. But this does not mean that China is "state capitalist" or a capitalist country. What it means is that Phase 3.0 is a transitional stage. How could it be otherwise when the "third miracle" remains incomplete and contradictions remain.

What needs to be understood is that the CPC is open about the need to resolve the primary contradiction in Chinese society: the gap between growing aspirations for a better life and the realities of unbalanced, insufficient development. I'm suggesting that the key question should be whether the state is consciously acting as an "instrument of socialist relations." Does the CPC retain centralised control over all strategic sectors of the economy?

What about foreign investments? Perhaps because of their failure to engage in basic due diligence or simply pride, foreign investors refused to believe that the CPC's welcome to the outside was always within the context of the party's commitment to using markets on behalf of deeply held socialist objectives. They harboured the comforting illusion that China would surely adopt a capitalist system and a Western liberal-style government. As such, foreign firms and even domestic ones have been stunned by anti-espionage investigations, detention of staff, and tech sector CEOs vanishing from sight or fleeing the country, perhaps to locales like Seattle.

I specifically highlight the island province of Hainan because in December 2025, China declared it the "world's largest free trade zone, a move consonant with Xi Jinping's New Era policy. This time, at least one prospective foreign investor/consultant was suspicious, saying that Hainan has a "strong whiff of bait and switch."

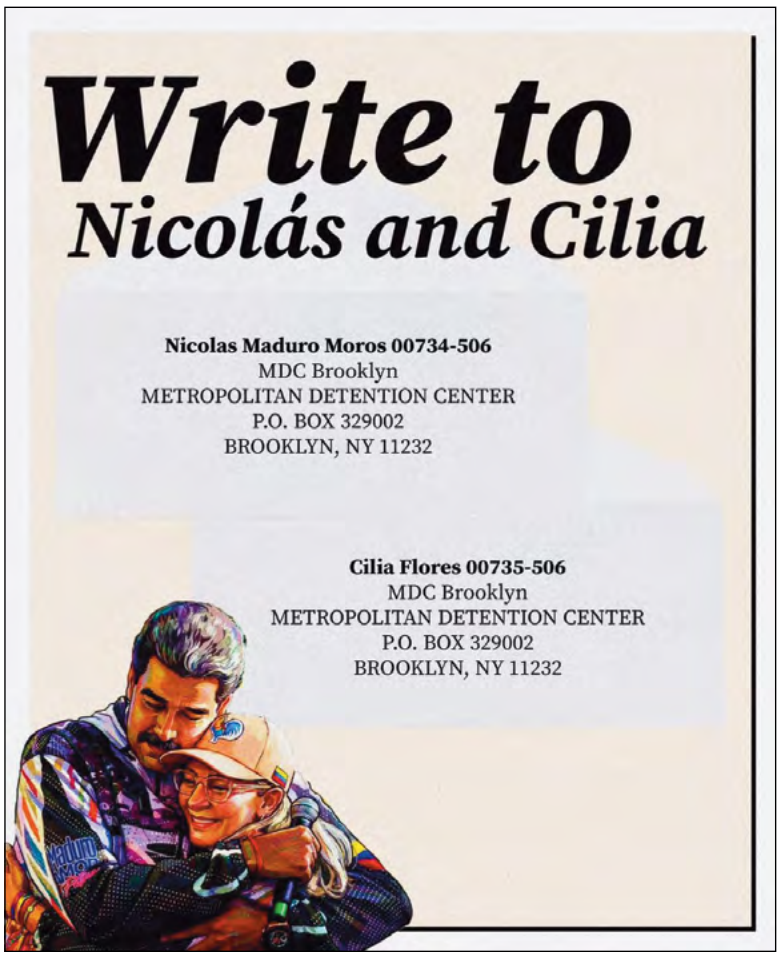
Further evidence of state-centric control began in 2017, when the CPC began acquiring "special management shares" or "golden shares" in the internet news sector, and subsequently extended the practice to major tech firms. These shares can be as small as 1% and give the state special veto rights over decisions, hiring, and control over the corporation's strategic direction. Notably, Tencent and Alibaba have pledged multibillion-dollar sums on behalf of Xi's "common prosperity" goal for China.

Another promising turn is that Xi has made boosting domestic consumption a political priority and has said that, "The most fundamental way to expand consumption is to promote employment, improve social security, optimise the distribution structure and expand the middle-income group." It's sometimes forgotten that prior to COVID, consumption accounted for 64% of China's GDP growth. Families have accumulated massive sums of savings but lack confidence, and this suggests that when confidence slowly returns, a considerable spending rebound is there for the world's fastest-growing consumer market.

Finally, one highly influential examination of Xi Jinping's New Era concludes that the political and economic strategy of the CPC remains to gradually overcome capitalist elements and create a modern, developed socialist mode of production. This process is explicitly characterized by a shift from a "quantitative" development strategy to a "qualitative" one, corresponding to a higher stage of socialist development. Thus, socialist principles and a non-Western path to modernisation will be evident in increased investment in education, health, and other sectors vital to lifting human capital. This means significant progress toward socialist modernization by 2035 and building a 'modern socialist society' by the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic.

I'll conclude by noting that our mainstream media constantly regales us with disparaging commentaries about China, often replete with at least implicit messages about the "Chinese threat" to our "national security." In truth, the "threat" is the existence of an alternative model, a people-centred, non-Western model of how social progress might be achieved. Is it plausible to suggest that not only are people across the Global South seeking to engage with and emulate China, but that ordinary Western citizens will begin asking themselves if they've been well served by actually existing capitalism?

Dissident Voice



Film Review: *Iron Lung*

Reviewer: C Bartholomew

Potential viewers of *Iron Lung* may be discouraged to learn that the film's first-time director, Mark Fischbach also known as Markiplier, is a YouTuber. I went in curious and fearful of amateurism, but came out impressed with innovative horror on a low budget.

The movie is based on a 2022 horror game of the same title by developer David Szymanski. The gameplay is relatively simple: the player pilots a sub to different checkpoints on a map. The player cannot see the ocean around them. Their only means of navigation are a coordinate system and a camera which takes one photograph of the submarine's surroundings at a time. These limitations create a genuine sense of claustrophobia and, at times, desperation.

A well-designed game, but what made Iron Lung catch people's attention was the story. In a future where humanity has spread across space, a mysterious, apocalyptic event called the 'Quiet Rapture' causes every star and habitable planet in the universe to disappear. The few humans to survive are those who were on space stations and starships, left to navigate a darkening universe. The ocean the player has been sent to navigate is located on a strange moon. The ocean, an ocean of human blood, could hold resources which might sustain human life. The ocean holds many secrets and the player might not be alone down there.

Iron Lung, the movie, stays true to the game's story. There are a few glimpses of a world beyond that of the game, as well as a few extra elements to our protagonist's backstory. What the movie does best is adapt the elements present in the game. With very few moments outside the restricted world of the submarine, *Iron Lung* perfectly captures the game's feeling of claustrophobia. Excellent use of practical effects, camera angles, and sound design bring the submarine to life.

Mark Fischbach is no stranger to acting or film production, having worked on several series for YouTube including *A Heist* with Markiplier and *In Space* with Markiplier. This experience no doubt contributed to the quality of Fischbach's theatrical debut, as his acting and directorial skill have never been better. Self-financed, and low budget, *Iron Lung* achieves a professional quality that many of its big studio horror contemporaries fail to meet.

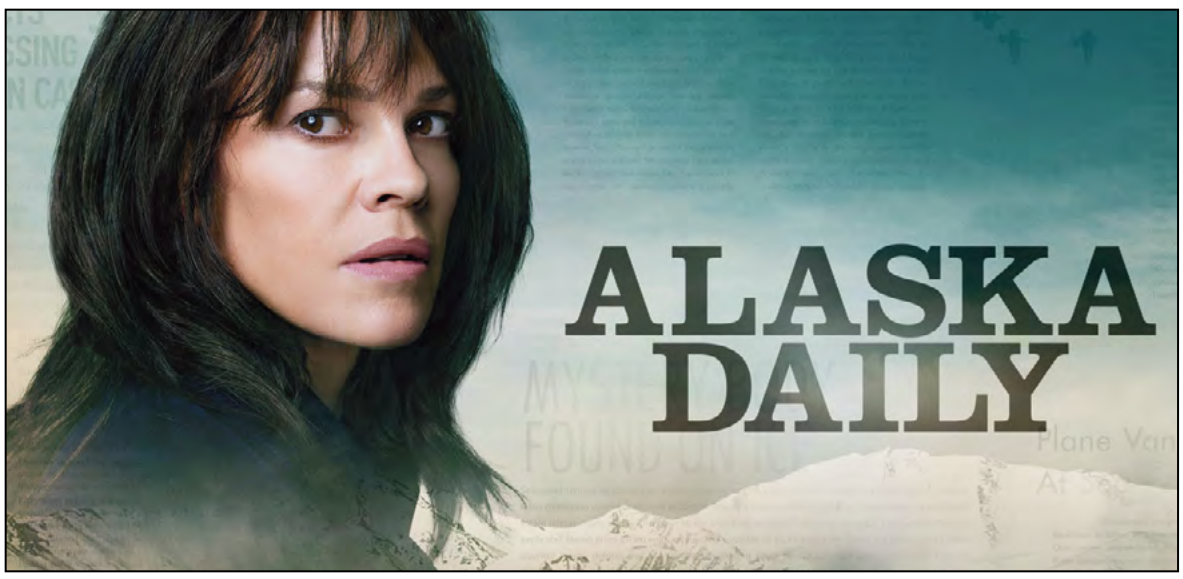
While *Iron Lung* is often described as a thriller, the word which perhaps best fits is 'Lovecraftian.' While audiences have so far generally had positive reviews, some critics have accused the film of being boring or slow-paced. As a fan of many of H P Lovecraft's works, however, I could not disagree more.

Iron Lung builds its horror in ways comparable to classic Lovecraft titles like *The Call of Cthulhu*, *The Whisperer in Darkness*, or *The Colour Out of Space*. The secrets of the ocean start to be revealed as the protagonist's mind and body and the submarine itself, begin falling apart. What is at first a struggle for survival, as the pilot seeks to return home while avoiding whatever lurks beyond his vessel's hull, evolves into cosmic horror which reaches its peak in a truly stand out scene. Even the claustrophobia of the submarine is, for a moment, ripped from the audience, making the encounter with the unknowable so much more impactful. In this way, the film also ties together the individual horror of Iron Lung's gameplay with the universal horror of its story.

What worried me most going into *Iron Lung* was that it would be amateur. Though I was familiar with the quality of Fischbach's work on YouTube, I feared that he wouldn't quite be able to transfer that quality to the movie screen. Instead, Fischbach manages to get the most out of his limited resources. It's not your standard blockbuster horror flick, but fans of the game and of creative horror will find much to enjoy in *Iron Lung*'s quality and passion.

Eight out of ten red stars. ✪

Worth Streaming: *Alaska Daily*



Reviewer: Graham Holton

***Alaska Daily* stars Hilary Swank as Eileen Fitzgerald, a disgraced New York journalist hired by a small newspaper in Anchorage, Alaska. The series is based on the real problem of hundreds of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls suffering a significantly higher homicide rate than other ethnic populations.**

The show uses investigative journalism to uncover the systemic cover up by the police and politicians of dozens of missing and murdered indigenous women. It explores the culture of corruption, incompetence and lack of caring by authorities and hits hard on the Alaska political system. The series was inspired by a joint investigative journalism series by the *Anchorage Daily* and *ProPublica* into the under investigated problem of murdered indigenous women.

Only one season of eleven episodes was done after numerous attacks by the press on Swank who was co-executive producer, and its portrayal of modern Alaska. The portrayal of journalists seems realistic, although Swank's character has been frequently slated for being unlikeable. This might reflect the 'liberal' demand that the protagonists on the side of truth be good and likeable people. There's also a lot of discomfort in the US with depictions of US racism against Indigenous people.

However likeable or unlikable the viewer finds Swank, the series does a good job of presenting a serious issue. As *Alaska Daily* says, no one knows the exact number of indigenous women murdered each year, due to under-reporting, inconsistent ethnic classification, and incomplete law enforcement records. Many cases go unrecorded, or misclassified, being coded as accidents or undetermined death. Law enforcement databases do not consistently track indigenous identity, so homicide numbers of Native Alaskan women could be underestimated. State and federal systems use different definitions and reporting standards, making annual comparisons difficult.

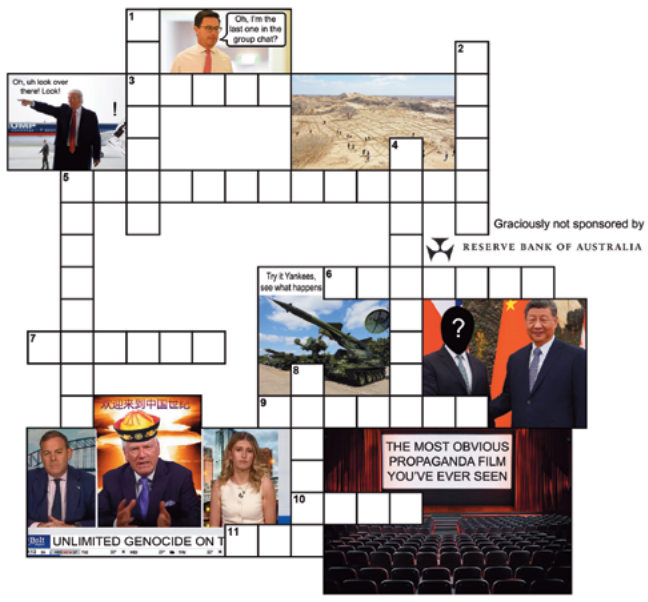
A study by the Urban Indian Health Institute shows Alaska has hundreds of documented cases of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. In one decades-long study there are 229 cases identifying 80 murdered and 149 missing. In 2020 the homicide rate for Alaska Native women killed by men was 12.6 per 100,000 women, far higher than other groups in the state. The Urban Indian Health Institute identifies 506 cases involving Alaska Native and Native American people, of which 56 per cent were murder cases and 25 per cent were missing persons. National research shows that four in five Indigenous women experience violence in their lifetime, and two-thirds experience sexual violence.

The US Department of Justice has said that it's working to the accuracy of data collection in this area, but far more needs to be done – now – to keep indigenous women safe, and the culprits convicted. The systemic disregard for the issue is shocking, especially as it is only now that it is being tackled.

To maintain these investigations is very difficult under the Trump administration. A groundbreaking report on missing and murdered women was released during the first Trump administration, and now has been pulled from its home website in keeping with the government's war on any mention of people of colour – either achievements or persecution.

Alaska Daily can be seen on 7-plus ✪

News Crossword



Across

[3] Something the Liberals and Nationals do a lot of lately
[5] Factor in recent fires, played down by media
[6] High-profile UK visitor to China
[7] War-crime lover, head of state and visitor to Australia
[9] Possibly the world's least-watched documentary
[10] Socialist nation persecuted but not bombed yet by US
[11] Allowed to shoot people in the US after 47 days training

Down

[1] Topic Trump avoids a lot
[2] Mouse-themed company that makes $1 billion in Australia
[4] More important to the Reserve Bank than unemployment
[5] Important and infrequent communist meeting
[8] What the media calls a bomb when thrown at Indigenous People

Something to say?

Write to the Editor!

editor@cpa.org.au

World mourns Michael Parenti

Janna Kadri

Born in 1933 in New York City to a working-class Italian American family, Michael Parenti often said that his political commitments were grounded not in abstraction, but in lived experience. Class was not something he discovered in theory; it was something he grew up inside.

He earned a PhD and taught political science and history, but his outspoken Marxism and anti-imperialism meant he was steadily pushed to the margins of academia. Rather than retreat or conform, Parenti chose independence: lecturing widely, writing prolifically, and speaking directly to union halls, community centres, activist spaces, and international audiences.

He lived modestly, avoided think-tank careers and corporate funding, and kept his private life largely out of the public eye. He was a husband and a father, including to journalist and political analyst Christian Parenti, but he never cultivated a public persona rooted in biography. What mattered to him was the work.

CAPITALISM AND IMPERIALISM UNMASKED

Parenti's most enduring academic contribution was his systematic critique of liberal democracy under capitalism. He argued that capitalist democracies are not neutral systems open equally to all, but class-structured states in which economic power overwhelmingly determines political outcomes. He showed how elections, courts, media, and state institutions consistently serve the interests of capital, while popular demands are managed, diluted, or suppressed. Democracy, he argued, is tolerated only so long as it does not threaten property relations.

Parenti was equally influential for his work on imperialism and US foreign policy. He dismantled the idea that Western wars are motivated by humanitarian concern or democratic ideals. Instead, he traced intervention, sanctions, and regime change to material interests: control over resources, labour, strategic territory, and global markets. He showed how human rights discourse is selectively deployed, how compliant client states are shielded from scrutiny, and how resistance is pathologised as extremism.

Parenti confronted Cold War anticommunism as an ideology rather than an analysis. He did not deny repression or failure in socialist states, but he exposed how capitalist violence is normalised while socialist experiments are judged by impossible moral standards. He insisted on historical comparison: asking why fascism is treated as an aberration while capitalism's own mass violence, including colonialism, slavery, sanctions, structural deprivation, is rendered invisible or inevitable.

Parenti reopened serious discussion of socialism's achievements in literacy, healthcare, women's participation, and social welfare, at a time when such discussions were considered politically taboo.

He laid bare the structural bias of corporate media and explained how ownership, advertising, sourcing, and elite consensus shape what is reported, how it is framed, and which voices are excluded. He stressed that propaganda does not require overt censorship. It works through repetition, omission, ridicule, and selective outrage, teaching audiences what to ignore as much as what to believe. This work made Parenti a cornerstone of critical media studies, especially among activists seeking to challenge war narratives and economic myths.

AN ENDURING LEGACY

Michael Parenti did not found a school or cultivate disciples. His influence travelled differently: through dog-eared books, shared lectures, study circles, movement spaces, and quiet moments of recognition when the world suddenly made sense.

At a time of renewed imperial violence, deepening inequality, and ideological confusion, his work remains unsettlingly relevant.

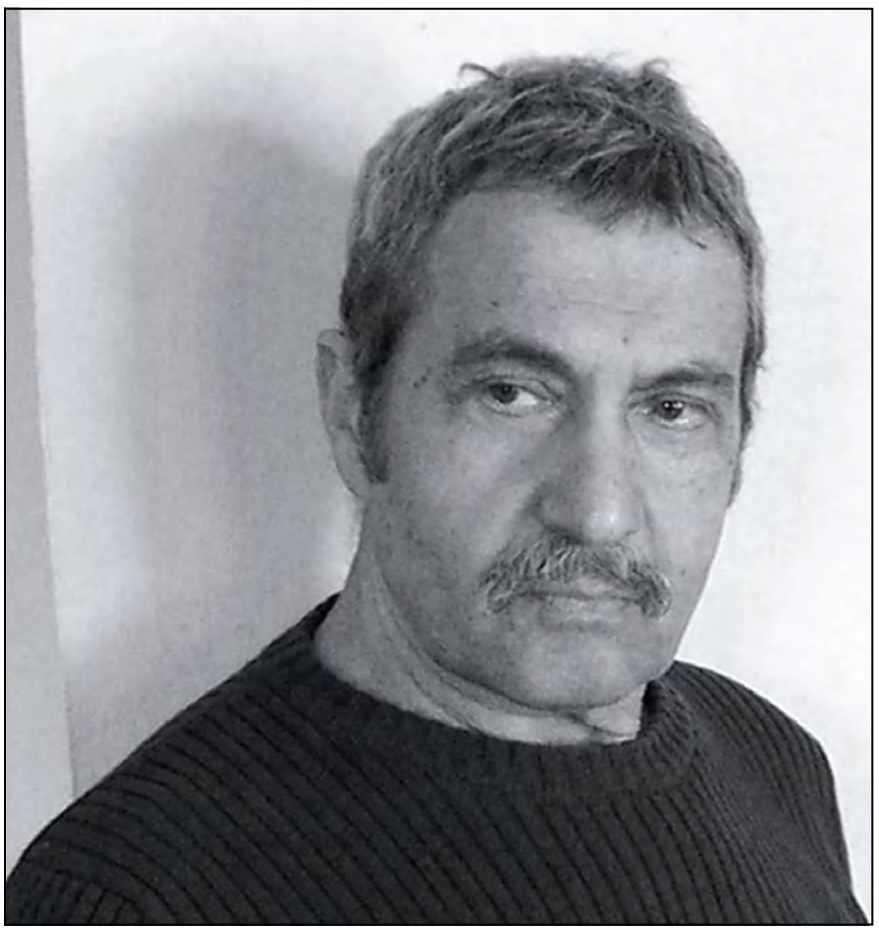
He once wrote:

"The first step in the struggle for social justice is to understand the nature of the system we are up against."

For generations of working-class intellectuals, organisers, and scholars across the world, Michael Parenti helped make that understanding possible.

His voice is gone. His clarity remains.

Monthly Review (edited for space)



The first step ... is to understand the nature of the system we are up against.

Vale Michael Parenti

Callum K

Michael Parenti, Phd, economist, prolific author, and unyielding educator whose orthodox Marxist-Leninist analyses illuminated the hidden workings of imperialist power for generations, died on the 24 January 2026 at the age of ninety-two. His lifelong struggle against bourgeois ideology leaving an indelible mark on the worker's movement.

Born in 1933 in New York City to Italian immigrant parents, Parenti's working-class roots forged his materialist perspective. He earned his PhD in Political Science from Yale University, arming himself with the scholarly tools he would relentlessly use to expose the contradictions of capitalism and the crimes of empire.

Parenti stood as a bulwark against revisionism, which he saw as a dilution of revolutionary theory and a concession to ruling-class hegemony. He rigorously defended a classical Marxist-Leninist framework, challenging not only the overt apologists for capitalism but also those on the left who, in his view, retreated into liberalism, post-modern ambiguity, or social-democratic reformism. His battle was on two fronts: against the overt propaganda of the powerful, and against subtle accommodations within the opposition itself.

A professor who taught at universities across the United States and Canada, he was a public intellectual who brought fierce clarity to complex issues. His legendary lectures and more than twenty books, including *Blackshirts and Reds*, *Democracy for the Few*, *Against Empire*, and *The Culture Struggle* were weapons in this fight. He dedicated himself to exposing "dirty truths," providing a materialist analysis of history, politics, and culture that served as a vital corrective to mainstream narratives. Parenti remained steadfast in this struggle, despite facing pressure and hostilities from many academic institutions.

More than a critic, he was an educator committed to arming the working class with a coherent, uncompromising analysis. He believed a robust understanding of class struggle, state power, and imperialist dynamics was the necessary foundation for genuine liberation. Generations of communists and anti-imperialists have been energised and inspirted by his efforts. The Communist Party of Australia also benefited from Parenti's commitment and generosity, distributing recordings of some of his lectures on cassette tape.

He is survived by his spouse Susan Parenti, and son, Christian Parenti.

Those wishing to honour Michael Parenti's memory are encouraged to support organisations dedicated to class-struggle unionism, anti-imperialist action, and Marxist-Leninist political education, thereby continuing the fight against capitalism he so diligently upheld.

Parenti's work: A sampler

Callum K and C Bartholomew

***Blackshirts and Reds*:**

Michael Parenti's *Blackshirts and Reds* remains his most popular and unyielding work. It frames the rise of fascism as a reaction to Marxist-Leninist workers' movements, offering a materialist history that is both accessible and uncompromising. Crucially, this analysis of fascist reaction runs parallel to Parenti's critique of contemporary socialist models, where he posits that exhaustion and siege are tools used by capitalist nations to force ideological revision and concession. A vital, polemical work, it provokes necessary reflection for modern movements and any practicing theoretician.

***Against Empire*:**

Against Empire is, in many ways, a complement to Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. It investigates US imperialism as a product and tool of finance capital, demonstrating how the working-class pays for the enrichment of transnational corporations and the empowerment of the surveillance state. Parenti also asserts that democracy, progressive change, and the gains fought for by the working-class are not fixed, nor are they protected by institutions or legal checks and balances. To endure and develop, they must be fought for.

***Democracy for the Few*:**

As a textbook, *Democracy for the Few* may be less accessible than many of Parenti's other writings. Despite some minor flaws, however, this book remains one of the most comprehensive analyses of how American government and institutions function. It exposes the class reality of political power in so-called liberal democracies, revealing the many ways in which the US system is designed to serve the interests of capital and imperialism while suppressing the needs and demands of the working-class."

***US Interventionism, the Third World, and the USSR*:**

This 1986 lecture, given at the University of Colorado, is popularly known online as "the yellow Parenti video." The infamous video quality of this nevertheless well-loved upload aside, Parenti's lecture showcases many of the features that have made his voice enduring. For one, his endless war with podium microphones. More substantially, this roughly 90-minute lecture is an excellent analysis and takedown of US imperialism from the Western invasion against the Bolshevik Revolution all the way up to the Reagan administration. The lecture concludes with a commentary on Cuba which, while succinct, remains beautiful and inspiring.

Workers' Unity in Pakistan

A report by comrade F Khan

I had the greatest pleasure of spending time amongst comrades from Mazdoor Kisaan Party (MKP), Lahore, this January. MKP comrades organised a seminar at very short notice with impressive efficiency, to include me, their comrade visiting from Australia. The seminar was titled "Empire Unchained: The Rise of Hyper-Imperialism." Other guests included comrade Nasir Gulzar from the All Pakistan Trade Union Federation (APTUF), comrade advocate Ayaz Raza from Bonded Labour Liberation Front (BLLF), and member and ex-vice president of the Lahore High Court Bar Association, and comrade Rabiya Bajwa. The event was capably compered by comrade Fatima of the MKP.

The first speaker was MKP labour secretary, comrade Irfan Ali. An eloquent speaker, comrade Irfan gave a well-rounded speech on the state of imperialism in today's world and the real motives behind the attack on Venezuela and threats to Iran. Comrade Irfan ended his speech with passionate slogans for President Maduro, and the peoples of Venezuela, Palestine and Iran.

Comrade Nasir of APTUF was the next speaker who spoke with zeal about the rights of working-class people and laid bare the class-based exploitation in society. Also a leftist of the Marxist tradition, he correctly stated that the real struggle was not for an improvement here in working conditions, or an improvement there in wages, but the replacement of the capitalist rulers with a democratic working-class government.

This was followed by comrade Faiza of the MKP, womens' organiser and leader, reading her poem dedicated to the working people of Pakistan.

It was an honour to also hear from comrade Ayaz, who was stepping in for his sister, Ghulam Fatima. They are both inspirational champions for the rights of the most down-trodden segment of society, the people in indentured labour. He spoke about the atrociousness and absurdity of the US acts of war against Venezuela.

Next the meeting was addressed by MKP general secretary, Professor Taimur Rahman. Comrade Taimur is an academic par excellence who always delivers a clear, Marxist analysis and perspective, and does so engagingly. He draws young and old alike, who seek to learn from his vast knowledge. He spoke in detail about the bravery shown by President Maduro and his wife and comrade, Cilia Flores, in the face of US thuggery. He also spoke about the courage, steadfastness and preparedness of the people of Venezuela.

Afterwards, comrade Rabiya Bajwa, lawyer and activist, gave a fiery and eloquent speech further raising the morale and spirits of everyone present. She gave her commitment to stand by her comrades in their struggles and to rally the lawyer community behind her too.

At the end I was invited to speak as member of the Communist Party of Australia. I presented the view from Australia, and focused on Australia's role in US imperialism. I followed this up with the anti-imperialist and peace work being undertaken by CPA comrades, as well as other organisations, community groups, unions and working people. I relayed to our Pakistani comrades that we draw inspiration and courage from their struggles, and we hold dear our international solidarity.

Invited guests, including myself, were gifted the traditional MKP red cap. The cap not only has the party name on it, but also the name of the party chairman Salar Fayyaz Ali, who at the time of the seminar was held in jail over false charges (he has since been granted bail). This is nothing but political persecution of a people's leader who has earned the respect and votes of his local community. He has defeated the local landlords in elections, and his jailing is their method of political revenge.

Everyone who spoke did so with visible optimism and clarity for a better future. I felt uplifted and was also deeply touched by my comrades hospitality and love. Despite the troublesome developments on the global scale, empire is in trouble. We must continue to work in our respective areas to chip away at the capitalist system. We must also continue to strengthen our fraternal ties with each other.

Mazdoor ittehad zindabad (Long live workers' unity)!

Global inequality 2026

Sajeev Kumar

In Chapter 25 of *Capital*, 'The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation,' Marx says that "accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery ... at the opposite pole." The World Inequality Report 2026 (WIR) validates this fundamental prediction. Rising inequality is a structural feature of capitalism, and its current scale is obscene.

The report analyses five key areas: the scale of global inequality; gender inequality, including unpaid labour; the structural privilege of rich countries in the international financial system; the limited impact of taxation; and how inequality corrupts democracy.

A GLOBAL SHIFT

Historically, population growth drove economic expansion. After the 19th century, increases in per capita income became the primary driver. Between 1800 and 2025, the global population grew eight-fold (1 to 8 billion), while the average annual income per capita rose sixteen-fold, from €900 to €14,000 ($1515 to $2360 AUD)

The distribution of this new wealth is profoundly unequal.

In 1820, the bottom 50% received 14% of global income. By 2025, their share had fallen to just 8%.

Today, the top 10% (556 million people) captures 53% of all income and holds 75% of all wealth.

The middle 40% (2.2 billion) receives 39% of income and holds 23% of wealth.

The bottom 50% (2.8 billion) are left with a mere 2% of global wealth.

REGIONAL DISPARITY

In 1800, the average income in North America and Oceania (1% of the world's population) was double that of Sub-Saharan Africa (10% of the population). By 2025, the average income in those wealthy regions (5% of the population) was 14 times larger than in Sub-Saharan Africa (16% of the population).

Latin America is the most unequal region nationally, with the top 10% taking 57% of income versus 8% for the bottom 50%.

While China has moved much of its population into the middle-income bracket since 1980, significant inequality persists.

Wealth concentration is even more extreme than income disparity.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the top 10% holds 70% of national wealth, while the bottom 50% holds 1%.

In Europe, the top 10% holds 60%, and the bottom 50% holds just 3%.

WEALTH, GENDER, CLIMATE

Gender inequality remains systemic. Women globally earn only one-third of labour income. When unpaid domestic work is counted, women work longer hours for less pay. Structural barriers like a lack of affordable childcare and occupational segregation sustain this gap. Even in better-performing regions like Europe and North America, women's share of labour income is only 40%, far from a fair 50%.

The WIR identifies the global monetary system as a key driver of inequality. A "structural privilege" for rich countries has replaced formal colonialism. Poorer nations are forced to pay higher interest on debt and hold low-yield assets, creating a continuous wealth drain. The bottom 80% of countries are net debtors, sustaining the positive income flows of the top 20%. This "modern unequal exchange" stifles development and maintains global hierarchy.

Responsibility for the climate crisis is also unjustly shared. The top 10% of emitters contributes 77% of emissions from private capital, while the bottom 50% contributes only 3%. The poorest, who pollute the least, bear the highest cost of climate losses.

The WIR's data is damning, yet its analysis is incomplete. The core drivers – imperialism and neoliberalism – go unmentioned. Its proposed solutions, like progressive taxation, are superficial reforms to a systemic disease.

Inefficiency is the result of a mode of production that offers political democracy but denies economic democracy. As Artificial Intelligence (AI) threatens to accelerate capital accumulation and worsen inequality, the need for radical change is urgent. Only a decisive turn toward socialism can eradicate both the symptom and the disease.

Socialist Voice

Iran warns of 'regional war'

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has warned that any attack by the United States would spark a "regional war" in the Middle East, following US President Donald Trump's threats to strike the country – ostensibly over its brutal crackdown on nationwide protests.

The comments from the 86-year-old ayatollah are the most direct warnings he's given so far.

Though the aircraft carrier *USS Abraham Lincoln* and associated US warships are in the Arabian Sea, it remained unclear today whether Washington will use force. Trump has repeatedly claimed that Iran wants to negotiate and has brought up Tehran's nuclear program as another issue he wants to see resolved.

Ayatollah Khamenei also referred to the recent nationwide protests as "a coup," hardening the government's position as tens of thousands of people have reportedly been detained since the start of the demonstrations.

Sedition charges in Iran can carry the death penalty, which again renews concerns about Tehran carrying out mass executions for those arrested.

Iran also announced a live-fire military drill to take place in the strategic Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which passes a fifth of all oil traded.

The US military's Central Command has warned Iran that the exercise must not threaten its warships or aircraft or disrupting commercial traffic.

Morning Star

President Diaz-Canel slams Trump's bid to 'suffocate' Cuba's economy

Cuba's President Miguel Diaz-Canel has denounced what he called an attempt by his United States counterpart, Donald Trump, to "suffocate" the sanctions-hit country's economy.

Trump has signed an executive order threatening additional tariffs on countries that sell oil to Cuba, the latest move in Washington's campaign of pressure on Havana. The order alleged that the government of communist-run Cuba was an "unusual and extraordinary threat" to US national security.

In a social media post Diaz-Canel said that under "a false and baseless pretext," Trump plans "to suffocate" Cuba's economy by slapping tariffs "on countries that sovereignly trade oil" with it.

"This new measure reveals the fascist, criminal, and genocidal nature of a clique that has hijacked the interests of the American people for purely personal ends," he said, in an apparent allusion to Secretary of State Marco Rubio, a Cuban American and a known anti-Cuban government hawk.

Cuba, which is suffering rolling electricity blackouts blamed on fuel shortages, was cut off from critical supplies of Venezuelan oil after the US abducted Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro and his wife in a bloody military night raid on the capital, Caracas, earlier this month. At least 32 members of Cuba's armed forces and intelligence agencies were killed in the 3 January attack.

The US has since taken effective control of Venezuela's oil sector, and Trump, a Republican, has issued threats against other left-wing governments in the region, promising to stop oil shipments previously sent to Cuba.

Cuba's Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez declared an "international emergency" in response to Trump's move, which he said constitutes "an unusual and extraordinary threat."

Venezuela's government also condemned the measure in a statement saying it violates international law and the principles of global commerce.

Reporting from Cuba's capital, Al Jazeera's Ed Augustin said Trump's announcement "is a massive psychological blow," noting that analysts describe it as the "most powerful economic blow the United States has ever dealt the island."

Days after Maduro's abduction and transfer to the US, Trump urged Cuba to make a deal "before it is too late," without specifying what kind of agreement he was referring to.

In a post on social media, Trump suggested Rubio could become the president of Cuba. "Sounds good to me!" he wrote on his Truth Social platform.

'THERE'S NO SOLUTION'

In Havana, residents expressed anger at Trump's tariff threat, which will only make life harder for Cubans already struggling with an increase in US sanctions.

"My food is going bad. We haven't had electricity since 6am," Yenia Leon told Al Jazeera. "You can't sleep. You have to buy food every day. There's no solution to the power situation," she said.

"This is a war," Lazaro Alfonso, an 89-year-old retired graphic designer, told The Associated Press news agency, describing Trump as the "sheriff of the world" and saying he feels like he is living in the Wild West, where anything goes.

Telesur

Sydney Vigil

STOP USA BLOCKADE ON CUBA

4:15pm till 5:00pm

Tuesday 17 February

USA Consulate, 50 Miller Street North Sydney

Call 0418 270 885

Global Briefs

PALESTINE: The Foreign Press Association expressed disappointment after Israel's Supreme court postponed a ruling on a petition seeking free media access to Gaza. Journalists have been barred from entering the blockaded territory since October 2023. The court cited classified security agreements. The association warned that Gaza remains closed for foreign reporters without justification. It is estimated that 253 journalists and media workers have been killed since October 2023, most by Israel.

USA: A US Federal Appeals Court ruled that the Trump administration acted illegally when it ended Temporary Protected Status (TPS) protections for hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans and Haitians living and working in the USA. The court determined that Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem exceeded her authority in ending TPS for people from Venezuela and Haiti. "The Secretary's actions fundamentally contradict the statutory design of Congress, and her claim to wield absolute and unlimited power to terminate a country's TPS is inconceivable with the clear language of the Statute," the judges said in their decision. Temporary Protected Status (TPS) is a humanitarian program established by congress that allows nationals of countries affected by armed conflict, natural disasters, or other extraordinary circumstances to remain legally in the USA, obtain work permits, and avoid deportation.

INDONESIA: Indonesia has rejected a US demand to buy US-made drones as part of a trade agreement between the two countries. The parties are close to an agreement to reduce US tariffs from 32% to 19%. It's reported that Indonesia intends to ease restrictions on imports of American cars and remove barriers to the supply of technology and medical equipment from the US. Having agreed to a significant number of conditions put forward by the US, including a plan to import fuel from the US instead of Singapore, Indonesia rejected provisions that violate its constitution, including demands to purchase US drones for surveillance in the South China Sea.

SOUTHERN AFRICA: Climate change worsened torrential rains and floods that devastated parts of the region, killing more than 100 people and displacing hundreds of thousands. A study by the World Weather Attribution of the recent heavy rainfall that cause severe flooding in parts of South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe showed that these countries had experienced a year's worth of rain in a period of just 10 days. A specialised emergency team from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) was deployed to Mozambique to assist national authorities to deal with the situation. More than 650,000 people were affected; 71,600 households flooded, 364 schools and 229 health facilities damaged.

CUBA: There will be no repeat of the Venezuelan scenario in Cuba, Russian Ambassador Vasily Nebenzia said in a recent interview. "There has undoubtedly been betrayal in Venezuela, this is being said quite openly. Some high-ranking officials have, in fact, betrayed the president. This scenario will not work in Cuba. I think that the Americans, despite the rhetoric they have been using against Cuba lately, are still just rhetoric because there will be no easy ride in Cuba if they want to repeat something like what happened in Venezuela," Nebenzia said.

CHINA: During a news conference a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said Beijing "firmly supports Cuba in defending its national sovereignty and security." "China resolutely opposes any action and inhumane practice that deprives the Cuban people of their rights to subsistence and development," he said. Earlier, US President Trump signed an Executive Order authorising tariffs on goods from countries that will sell or supply oil to Cuba. This decision was justified on the grounds that the situation on the island represents an "unusual and extraordinary threat to US national security."

Greenland's Inuit caught between Denmark and the USA

Graham Holton

Travelling the Inuit way. Photo: Markus Trienke – flickr.com (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Recent protests and public campaigns in Copenhagen and Nuuk (Greenland's capital), show Greenlanders are standing up against United States aggression, resenting the prospect of their country being bought or controlled by the US. This has united Greenland's political parties, asserting that Greenland's future belongs to Greenlanders, not external powers. The vast majority of Greenlanders – 90 per cent are Indigenous Inuit – strongly reject the US buying, or annexing Greenland.

At the same time, Greenlanders feel caught between Denmark and the US and want to control their own future and political destiny. Greenland has been a Danish colony since the 18th century and now wants independence from the Kingdom of Denmark, because of past human rights injustices and violations. However Greenlanders need Denmark for economic and welfare support. Most businesses in Greenland are publicly owned by the government of Greenland. There are a few rich Danish families, and little is owned by the Inuit.

The Inuit have had a long history of political and human-rights complaints with Denmark over the mistreatment of its population. Statements such as "we are not slaves" are popular with the Inuit, expressing outrage at the undermining of their rights and identity.

The 1951 "Little Danes" program saw Inuit children taken to Denmark for assimilation, causing long-lasting trauma and distrust. In the 1960s and 1970s more than 350 Greenlandic Indigenous women and girls – including 12 years olds and younger – were forcibly given contraception by Danish health authorities. Danish authorities said as many as 4,500 women and girls, half the fertile women in Greenland at the time, were implanted with IUDs between the 1960s and mid-1970s, allegedly to reduce population growth. Some 150 Inuit women have sued Denmark and filed compensation claims against its health ministry, saying Danish health authorities violated their human rights.

Human rights organisations, advocacy groups and the UN Special Rapporteur support the claims of Greenlandic families on civil and human rights. There is outrage at the use of parenting competency tests and discrimination against Inuit parents, many of whose children have been placed in foster care. Psychologists and human-rights advocates argue that these tests often misunderstand Greenlandic culture and disadvantage Inuit parents. These "parenting competency" tests were culturally inappropriate and discriminatory against Inuit parents, who suffered a disproportionately high rate of child removal, in some cases the removal of newborns shortly after birth. Many Greenlandic families living in Denmark had their children taken into care by Danish social services.

In 2025 Denmark finally acknowledged concerns over discrimination and agreed with the Greenland government to stop using standardised psychological tests involving Greenlandic parents. After years of the Inuit fighting for the return of their children from Danish authorities, Danish PM, Mette Frederiksen, apologised to six surviving Greenlandic Inuit who were snatched from families as children, more than seventy years ago. The Inuit face high suicide rates, alcoholism, domestic violence, and housing shortages linked to colonial disruption and enforced dependency.

Under the Self-Government Act of 2009, Greenland gained expanded authority, including over its natural resources. Its citizens were formally recognised as a people under international law, with a right to self-determination, and Greenlandic (Kalaallisut) became the official language. The US has no rights over Greenland. The Inuit are firmly against such interference, no matter what military importance it has to the US.

The US already has the right to set up bases in Greenland and, until recently, very friendly relations with Denmark, nullifying any claim that it "needs" the country for national security. That doesn't stop the US threats being traumatic for the Inuit people. ✪

Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine

Killing, settlement, and forced displacement: Israel's tools to impose the annexation plan in the West Bank

We address you on behalf of the External Relations Department of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and we send you this letter at a time when the Israeli occupation continues its crimes against the Palestinian people, foremost among which is the crime of settlement in the West Bank, which is considered occupied Palestinian territory according to international resolutions.

Despite this, Israel continues to intensify its settlement activities in an unprecedented manner, including the demolition of homes, the displacement of residents, the confiscation of land, killings, and arrests, which are key tools for imposing its annexation plan.

Since the current Israeli government came to power in 2022, there has been no indication of any intention to engage in a serious political process towards a just settlement or regional stability. Rather, the common denominator among its components is to move forward with the project of annexing the West Bank through land confiscation and the displacement of residents by military force. These policies are not isolated, but rather part of a gradual and systematic process, supported by a series of laws and governmental and military decisions that form the practical framework for the annexation plan, in an attempt to impose it gradually and overcome waves of international rejection.

The year 2025 saw the highest rates of settlement expansion, confirming the Israeli government's intention to impose new realities that close any prospect of an independent, sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem. This intersects with the stated strategic goal of eliminating Palestinian camps under security pretexts, as publicly expressed by Israeli officials.

Today, Israel is relying on four main factors to implement its plan:

- Continued political and military support from some international powers, primarily the United States and a number of European countries.
- The weakness of the Arab and Palestinian positions and the inability of the international community to exert effective pressure.
- The almost complete political and partisan support that Netanyahu's government's crimes enjoy internally, which facilitates the acceleration of settlement activity.
- The transformation of settler organisations into organised militias operating under the protection of the Israeli army, with almost absolute immunity from official institutions.

The daily crimes committed by settlers are no longer isolated incidents, but a systematic pattern that complements official policies aimed at forcibly displacing Palestinians and expelling them from their land and homes.

Therefore, defending the land in the face of settlement and theft of Palestinian land is the main headline and fundamental national task at this stage of our people's struggle. This struggle must be integrated with the movement of peoples in their various official and popular forms, by pressuring Western governments that continue to support the Israeli occupation to take punitive measures commensurate with the scale of the crimes committed against the Palestinian people.

Therefore, we address this letter to you in order to place the issue of Israeli settlement in the West Bank at the forefront of your priorities and actions towards your governments and towards companies that continue to supply the occupation with the machinery of daily killing and death. ✪

ICE still arresting Native Americans

Graham Holton

Under US law Native Americans hold dual citizenship. They are US citizens under the Indian Citizenship Act (1924). Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) does not have legal authority to arrest or deport US citizens. That hasn't stopped them from conducting warrantless arrests in Minneapolis, and carrying out racial profiling by unlawfully stopping, questioning and detaining Native Minnesotans solely on based on skin colour and names.

ICE has been detaining Native Americans at Minnesota's historic Fort Snelling, where Native people were confined after the US-Dakota War of 1862. Then, around 1,700 people were interned in this concentration camp, with many dying from starvation, exposure, and disease.

ICE is conducting 'Operation Metro Surge,' a major immigration-enforcement operation in the Minneapolis–Saint Paul area, resulting in thousands of arrests, in what a top official called the "largest immigration raid ever."

Recently four members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe were arrested and detained, with three remaining in federal detention, according to Tribe President Frank Star Comes Out. A member of the Red Lake Nation, was arrested and briefly detained. Jose Roberto "Beto" Ramirez, 20, was forcibly removed from his aunt's car and detained by masked officers in Robbinsdale, Minnesota. Officers pulled him from the car, slammed him on the hood, handcuffed him and hauled him to a detention centre.

Homeland Security claims the agency cannot verify if officers have even "encountered" Native peoples, since they do not list arrests of Native Americans separately. According to ICE, Arizona tribal members were arrested and nearly deported due to an "administrative error." The Native American Rights Fund (NARF) has condemned the agncy's unlawful actions.

Abolish ICE - Protest Sign in Minneapolis, Minnesota.
Photo: Tony Webster – flickr.com (CC BY-SA 2.0)

According to news website *Indian Country Today*, soon after 3,000 ICE agents arrived in Minneapolis, Indigenous residents witnessed agents detain community members. ICE agents attempted to detain Rachel Dionne-Thunder, a Native American community member and co-founder of the Indigenous Protector Movement, when she was sitting in her car near Powwow Grounds coffee shop, not far from 'White Earth,' the first Indigenous community in the city.

Little Crow Bellecourt, a White Earth Ojibwe and director of the Indigenous Peoples Movement, said: "They're just pulling people over at random, if you're Brown. Some of our Native (American) people get mistaken for our relatives south of the border." President Frank Star Comes Out said these detainees are Oglala Sioux Tribal people.

Following recent fatal shootings, Minnesota's Lt Gov Peggy Flanagan, a member of White Earth Nation and the highest-ranking Indigenous woman in the state, said: "The obvious racial profiling happening to our community is disgraceful. My heart breaks to hear about what's happening and it pisses me off." ICE's actions constitute a direct violation of binding treaties, federal law, and constitutional protections. President Star Comes Out said, "Enrolled tribal members are citizens of the United States by statute and citizens of the Oglala Sioux Nation by treaty."

The racist attitudes of ICE are so blatant that Canadian Native Indians are warned of "increased scrutiny" by US federal officials. Canada's Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak said she is "deeply concerned regarding the ongoing harassment and blockage of First Nations people attempting to cross the Canadian-United States border." Such acts are a "violation of inherent rights" and a breach of the Jay Treaty, a 1794 agreement that guaranteed the right of Indigenous people born in Canada to live and work in the United States. Woodhouse Nepinak called on the Trump administration to uphold First Nations' right to "cross the border without harassment or undue hindrance."

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Terrorism

The Weasel Word of the week. We all know what terrorism is, but senior figures in the US Trump administration have redefined it while trying to explain what looks like murder to most people. If you listen to their explanations of the killings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti, those people were 'domestic terrorists' because one tried to drive away from ICE, while the other was watching a protest and holding a phone.

Quiet

Stan Grant, who has moved from being a much-loved broadcaster to a master of waffle, has written a reflective piece of nothing to the effect that other people should be quieter about racism and injustice because it disturbs his sense of deep, meaningful and vague inner peace. "I know I can speak only in the quiet spaces," he writes with the calm confidence of someone who never shuts up. Based on past performance, no space can be truly quiet when it contains Stan Grant.

Abundance

In general abundance sounds like a good thing, with overtones of an abundance of food, money or other nice things. Recently there's an abundance movement, named by a book of the same title, published in the US and lapped up by credulous centrist commentators there, in Australia, and elsewhere. The idea is deceptively simple: if we only cut 'red tape' and stopped making it hard to build things, we'd be up to our ears in housing and renewable energy. It's a massive coincidence that this approach would make the rich richer and the poor poorer, not to mention all the animal habitats that would be destroyed because the 'red tape' that protected them was torn up. But you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs, and you can't have renewables and more houses without giving developers what they want according to the Abundance crowd.

Respecting

This is one of those weasel words politicians kind of have to say even though everyone knows they're untrue. Far-right former SAS member and MP Andrew Hastie was thinking of challenging Sussan Ley for the position of Liberal Party leader. He's backed down, at time of writing, because other Liberals have mostly said they don't want him as leader. Hastie has said he's "respecting" his colleagues' honest feedback, presumably by not challenging Ley because he doesn't have a hope. He has however pulled off the feat of being even less popular than Ley.

Recover

Weaselly because you can't recover something that wasn't yours to begin with. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has announced that the US will "recover" Venezuela. What this means is that the Trump administration will threaten Venezuela while Trump and Rubio talk as though they're in total control of a sovereign nation.

Framework

Weasel Words hasn't read, *The Art of the Deal*, the book written under Donald Trump's name. There's a strong possibility Trump hasn't read it either. From what the US President says, we wonder if it should have been called "The Art of Talking As Though You Have a Deal." It looks like Denmark isn't going to hand Greenland over to the US, and the Greenlanders don't want to be US property. Trump has said that he's got "a framework of a future deal," which sounds like he's got bupkis.

CPA stands in solidarity with socialist Cuba!

The Central Committee condemns in the strongest possible terms the recent attacks by the Trump regime on Cuba, calling a so-called "national emergency" to designate Cuba as an unusual threat to US national security and call for a total blockade. Such a measure was used against Venezuela in 2015, which also suffered a blockade and sanctions well before the kidnapping of President Nicolás Maduro and Parliamentarian Cilia Flores.

The CPA calls on the Australian government to condemn the imperial actions of the Trump regime against Cuba. We condemn the penalisation of countries that trade with Cuba, particularly those that supply oil. We condemn the US for spreading chaos, and destroying peace and sovereignty by terrorising the peoples of Latin America.

Latin America should be a zone of peace, not a continent of death and destruction as the US would wish it to be.

The CPA calls on all its members and supporters to rally in solidarity with Cuba now. We must step up the fight. Cuba is a peace-loving nation, a country which holds the dignity, honour and peace of the people in the highest regard. The Cuban people have struggled through ongoing US imposed difficulties and prevailed. The Revolution continues and will prevail through this period, no matter what the Trump regime tries to do.

Trump's fascist total blockade goes not only against international law, but also all human decency. Cuba will resist these terroristic acts by the United States of America.

The courageous people of Cuba fought a revolutionary war to achieve sovereignty and peace. Any attempt to break the back of Cuba will be faced by the unified force of the revolutionaries in defence of the Homeland.

We stand with the people of Cuba and its government led by President Miguel Díaz-Canel, and the Communist Party of Cuba as they lead the resistance.

Let Cuba live!

Homeland or death!

Communist Party of Australia
Central Committee

1st February 2026

Mexico to keep sending humanitarian aid to Cuba

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has announced that her government plans to send humanitarian aid to Cuba with food and other basic goods, while seeking "through all diplomatic channels" how to resume sending oil to the island, amid restrictions imposed by the United States.

During a tour of the state of Sonora, in the northwest of the country, the president explained that the assistance will be coordinated by the Secretary of the Navy and will include "food and other products" to address immediate needs.

Sheinbaum maintained that the objective is to maintain humanitarian support and, at the same time, channel the issue of fuel through diplomatic means.

"We are planning humanitarian aid to Cuba, it is aid that the Secretary of the Navy will provide in the form of food and other products, while we resolve diplomatically everything that has to do with the shipment of oil for humanitarian reasons," she revealed.

In addition, the Mexican president denied that she had directly addressed the matter with her US counterpart, Donald Trump, who announced the imposition of tariffs on countries that directly or indirectly help Cuba.

"We never spoke with President Trump about the issue of oil with Cuba," she said, and noted that the issue was addressed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a conversation between Foreign Minister Juan Ramón de la Fuente and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

"We are looking for all diplomatic channels because, as we have said, it is a matter of fundamental humanitarian aid for the island, but in the meantime we are going to send other products that are essential for the Cuban people," she insisted.

The announcement comes after Trump publicly stated that he asked Sheinbaum to stop sending oil to Cuba and that the president agreed.

On the same subject, Foreign Minister Juan Ramón de la Fuente assured official deputies that Mexico will not stop humanitarian aid "wherever it is required" and defended that constitutional principles and the framework of international law support the country's position, according to the previous note shared.

Earlier Sheinbaum had affirmed that her government would maintain its multifaceted support for Cuba, extending beyond the current suspension of oil shipments.

The declaration came amidst renewed pressures from US President Donald Trump, who has intensified interference in an attempt to cut off energy supplies to the Caribbean country.

"Humanitarian aid to Cuba, as to other countries, continues …. Mexico has always been in solidarity with the entire world, and these are sovereign decisions," President Sheinbaum stated during a press conference.

Her comments followed media outlets that have reported that a shipment planned in January was called off, aligns with recent pronouncements from President Trump, who asserted that Cuba would no longer receive energy supplies, a move perceived as part of Washington's broader strategy to destabilise governments resistant to its geopolitical agenda.

MEXICO-CUBA MECHANISMS OIL TRANSFERS

President Sheinbaum explained that there are two principal ways through which the vital resource is supplied: "One is through contracts established by PEMEX (Petróleos Mexicanos, in Spanish) with an institution of the Cuban government, and in that contract, PEMEX determines when it is sent," indicating a commercial framework subject to contractual terms and market conditions.

This commercial aspect often faces hurdles due to the extensive and intricate web of financial and trade sanctions imposed by the US blockade against Cuba, which deters international companies from engaging in transactions with the island for fear of punitive measures from Washington.

Furthermore, Sheinbaum highlighted a separate and distinct channel, humanitarian aid. This distinction is crucial, as it separates commercial dealings, which can be easily disrupted by external pressures, from acts of solidarity aimed at alleviating human suffering, a principle deeply ingrained in Mexico's foreign policy on international cooperation.

Telesur

Washington's strategy to destabilise governments resistant to its agenda

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