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Trump's war on Iran: Ecocide

Graham Holton

On 28 February the United States and Israel carried out coordinated airstrikes on Iran during peace talks. Ayatollah Ali Khamanei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, was killed, along with several members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The US and Israel continued strikes on oil storage facilities causing massive fires, towering smoke plumes and streets lit up at night by the flames. In Tehran toxic compounds from burning plastics, fuel, and chemicals filled the air, contaminating soil, water sources and aquifers, important for drinking water.

A teacher in Tehran described the attacks as "Something like a black monster has swallowed the sky... the air is unbreathable." After fifteen minutes outside, she developed headaches, burning lips, and irritated eyes due to the toxic air. One Tehran resident said "The rain is black ... I'm seeing black rain." Another witness described the rainwater was black on his hands, from burning oil mixed with rain. Eyewitnesses said the sky darkened dramatically, "This morning the air was pitch black. It is daytime, but it's dark like night." Smoke plumes from burning oil storage sites blocked the sunlight. Environmentalists have called it a 'catastrophe,' and 'ecocide.'

Shina Ansari, the head of Iran's Department of Environment (DOE), has condemned the airstrikes by the United States and Israel on Iranian oil storage facilities. Ansari said, "The enemies have started environmental war on Iran, endangering people's health. They're targeting oil facilities, particularly in metropolises where a large number of people live. There's no justification." Burning oil facilities release hydrocarbons, sulphur oxides and nitrogen oxides, heavy metals and soot. The air is filled with chemicals that cause respiratory illnesses, skin irritations, and long-term cancer risks.

Harming civilians this way violates international law. Ansari said that Iranians "are confronting an immoral, environmental war. We have to do our best to keep people safe and away from disastrous consequences of toxic pollutants. The department of environment has already warned people."

Ansari sent a letter to UN Secretary-General António Guterres, and other relevant environmental organisations, condemning the US and Israeli attacks, urging them "to respond decisively to these hostile measures." Ansari called the environment "a silent victim" of a war in which the long-term ecological and societal ramifications threaten communities across affected regions. If the US bombs nuclear sites the consequences will be severe, with the release of radioactive contamination.

These large fires and explosions of fuel depots and refineries have released tens of thousands of tonnes of greenhouse gases and hundreds of thousands of kilograms of toxic pollutants. Satellite photos show thick smoke plumes over Tehran, comparable to the pollution caused by the Kuwait Oil Fires in 1991, one of the largest wartime pollution events in history.

Back then the Iraqi military set fire to 700 oil wells during the Gulf War, releasing 1.5 billion barrels of oil into the environment, contaminating soil, groundwater, and marine habitats. Up to 6 million barrels of oil burned, daily emitting 13,700 tonnes of toxic smoke, and 50 million barrels of oil formed "oil lakes." The release of greenhouse gases contributed to global climate concerns. The long-term ecological impact included habitat destruction, loss of biodiversity, and long-term health issues for humans and wildlife. The present destruction of Iran is comparable, although serious pollution is localised so far.

The massive black clouds over Iran have disrupted bird migrations during the spring. Iran sits at the crossroads of the Central Asian, East African, and Black Sea migration corridors, a major feeding centre for migrating birds. It has 558 recorded bird species, sixty-three of which are globally threatened. There are 105 Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas covering 85,000 km². The bombing and military activity has disrupted natural habitats and ecosystems, with wildlife fleeing lost habitats, further damaging biodiversity. Even protected areas are affected by sounds, fires, and pollution far beyond the battle zones.

Tehran. Photo: Avash Media – wikimedia.org (CC BY 4.0)

HORMUZ

Around 500 oil tankers are currently trapped in the Persian Gulf unable to access the Strait of Hormuz. At least sixteen civilian ships have been attacked, with several tankers being set on fire from missile strikes. The sinking of large oil carriers would release a flood of oil destroying the Gulf's delicate ecosystems, destroying coral reefs and large fish stocks so important to local populations for food. Several dangerous pollutants are released from the burning oil tankers, releasing hydrocarbons, benzene, toluene and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. These are carcinogenic chemicals linked to DNA damage.

The IRIS *Dena* was an Iranian naval ship torpedoed by a US nuclear powered submarine in the Indian Ocean near Sri Lanka. The pollutants released include diesel and bunker fuel, lubricating oils and hydraulic fluids, paint, solvents, chemicals, and fragments of metal, plastic, and insulation. The war continues.

ESCALATION

At time of writing, the US Embassy in Baghdad has been hit by a missile. Although Trump described the war as a "short term excursion" there's no end in sight to the war he started. His officials have defined the targets of the way so loosely that they can declare victory at any time.

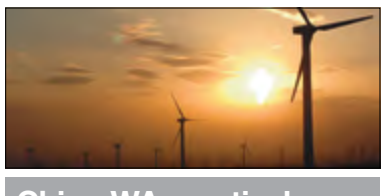
The killing of 160 people, including many children, on a strike on an Iranian primary school has been denied by the US leadership. Trump tried to blame the strike on the Iranians themselves, but backed off when asked how the Iranian military got its hands on a US-made Tomahawk missile.

Up to 3.2 million people have been displaced.

In Southern Lebanon, around 800,000 civilians have had to leave their houses after Israeli evacuation orders.

There is no end in sight.

'Something like a black monster has swallowed the sky...the air is unbreathable'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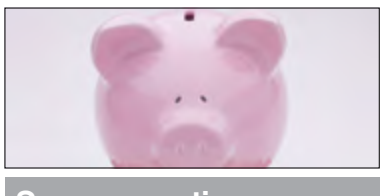
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Guardian

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Boycott Israel – why you should

If the words 'boycott Israel' make you feel numb, you're not alone. Like a lot of people, you've probably seen 'boycott Israel' and 'BDS,' the acronym for Boycott, Divest, Sanction, a million times. If you think about it at all, after all that repetition, you might wonder why you should boycott Israel, or how you should do it. You might think something like "Okay, Israel is bad, but how do I boycott it? Will it do any good? Should I bother?"

The 'why' goes back a long way, to 1948 when the state of Israel was set up on other people's land with a violent act of dispossession Palestinians still call 'the Nakba' or 'catastrophe.' The dispossession and violence continued, with massive encroachments onto more Palestinian land with Israel in control of the West Bank and Gaza. Illegal Israeli settlements are growing in the West Bank and Israeli politicians are talking about taking over all of Gaza in their quest for a 'Greater Israel,' an ethno-state that they see as occupying all the land of 'historic Israel.' Meanwhile Israel runs an apartheid state, with Arab Israelis treated as second class citizens. There are roads in the West Bank that can only be used by Israeli settlers or soldiers.

So that's the why settled, but will boycotting change anything? Before 1994 there was another apartheid settler state called South Africa. A white minority ruled over a Black majority, restricting where Black South Africans could live and work, who they could marry, and denying them the vote. Boycotts and support actions went on for decades. People taking part in the boycotts were scolded for being utopian and impractical and mocked for choosing not to buy South African products. They were accused of being spoil sports for protesting against visiting (white) South African sports teams.

After apartheid ended, the man became South Africa's first Black president, Nelson Mandela did a world tour. In Australia he made a point of addressing unionist-only functions to thank Australian union members for keeping up the pressure on the apartheid regime for all those years when the cause seemed hopeless. Mandela didn't think the support efforts were a waste.

Alright, so boycotts of apartheid regimes aren't a waste, but I'm just one person, you might think. How can I make a difference? If I don't buy a Soda Stream (to name just one product you should boycott) will that bother Israel? It's true that you're just one person. The solution to this is to find other persons and work together.

Your union should be joining in. Many unions do. Other unions have a Palestine support group. Find it and join it. March with them when there's a demo on! Speaking of other people, your government should be boycotting Israel. Making them do it is the work of many people. Call your MP or at least send an email. These calls and emails are monitored and do have an effect. After months of weekly marches in support of Palestine and against genocide, and despite the mass media playing down unprecedented weekly protests, the Labor government finally supported recognition of a Palestinian state. Mass action has an effect.

Dismissing the effectiveness of boycotts plays into the western illusion that we are all isolated individuals who can't achieve anything outside our own lives. Yes, *you* are just one person, but *we* are millions of people. Start boycotting Israel today and make your boycott more effective by getting together with others in your union and in your community.

Tax profiteering gas companies

The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) has called on the federal government to immediately place a 25% war profits tax on all Australian gas exports.

The horrifying attacks on people and mass disruption in the Strait of Hormuz are causing extreme volatility in global energy markets – and Australian gas corporations are, shockingly, reaping huge rewards.

Australia's second-biggest oil and gas producer, Santos, is reportedly making deals with commodities traders for a single cargo worth as much as $121 million – that's roughly $70 million more than before the war in Iran.

"People are being killed, maimed and displaced, water sources poisoned and landscapes torn apart, but oil and gas companies are profiteering off misery by jacking up prices," said ACF CEO Adam Bandt.

"This sick and twisted tactic in a time of mass human misery is also hurting Australians and the federal government has both an opportunity and responsibility to stop it.

"Australians filling up at the bowser and checking out at the supermarket to feed their families need urgent relief – let's do that by reining in big gas greed.

"During the Ukraine war, the global energy shock enabled gas exporters to more than double their profits from Australian operations, making an eyewatering $92.8 billion in 2022.

"Research shows that a 25% super profits tax would have captured and redirected around $23 billion in additional revenue in 2022.

"As the Reserve Bank gears up for another likely rate rise this afternoon, driven largely by gas war profiteering, the cost of living will soon become unbearable for many Australians.

"We need to free ourselves from greedy multinational corporations by giving people energy independence, with cars, homes and industry powered by the sun and the wind.

"Wind and solar farms in Australia, built in the right places for nature, with consent from Traditional Owners, are the cheapest forms of energy and the price of the electricity they make does not change during the tragic circumstances of war.

"The more energy we make at home from renewables, the less exposed we are."

ACF

Dampier to Bunbury Natural Gas Pipeline, near Dampier, Western Australia.
Photo: Glen Dillon – wikimedia.org (CC BY 3.0

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China-Western Australia practical cooperation ushers in new opportunities

Fu Lihua
Consul General of the People's Republic of China in Perth

Wind power plants in Xinjiang, China. Photo: Chris Lim – wikimedia.org (CC BY-SA 2.0)

A few days ago, the Fourth Session of the 14th National People's Congress and the Fourth Session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference concluded in Beijing. As 2026 marks the opening year of China's 15th Five-Year Plan period, the "Two Sessions" this year have drawn significant attention. Which reviewed the major achievements in China's economic and social development during the 14th Five-Year Plan period and adopted the Outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development, mapping out a strategic blueprint for the next five years. As its largest trading partner, China's continued growth and strategic planning will bring more opportunities to Western Australia.

The fundamental trend of China's long-term economic improvement remains unchanged, and the outlook for high-quality development is even brighter. Over the past five years, China's economy has achieved remarkable progress, with GDP growth at an average rate of 5.4% annually, significantly outpacing the global average. The value added of its manufacturing sector has ranked first in the world for 16 consecutive years.

Green and low-carbon transition is being accelerated, while continuous breakthroughs are being made in scientific and technological innovation. In 2025, amid profound and complex changes in both the domestic and international situation, China's economy advanced under pressure, achieving a GDP growth of 5.0% and surpassing 140 trillion Yuan (equivalent to around 29 trillion AUD) in total economic output, demonstrating strong resilience and vitality.

Over the next five years, China will implement the 15th Five-Year plan, comprehensively advancing economic and social progress, creating broad new space for China and Western Australia practical cooperation.

POWERING THE SMART ENGINE

China will continue to upgrade traditional industries such as home appliances, new-energy vehicles, and high-speed rail manufacturing, provide small and medium-sized enterprises with cloud-based digital and intelligent services, helping them in delivering higher-quality, more distinctive products, nurture and expand emerging industries like artificial intelligence and robotics, and improve the modern infrastructure system. This will open up significant cooperation opportunities for Western Australia's mineral and service exports.

GREEN TRANSFORMATION

To ensure the carbon peaking goal is achieved as scheduled, China will leverage the construction of key projects such as the "desert, Gobi, and wasteland" renewable energy bases to build a new-type power system, accelerate the construction of zero-carbon industrial parks and factories, tighten control over energy-intensive and high-emission projects, and support the innovation and application of green technologies and equipment. These initiatives are highly aligned with Western Australia's clean energy vision, creating broad space for collaboration.

OPENING UP AND COOPERATION

China will uphold opening up and cooperation for mutual benefit and win-win outcomes, steadily expand institutional opening-up, build a new, higher-level open economic system, expand international circulation, and drive reform and growth through opening up. China advocates an equal and orderly multipolar world and an inclusive, globally shared economic globalisation – serving as both the world's factory and the world's market, and sharing opportunities and promoting common development with all countries. This will create favourable conditions for Western Australia to expand exports of high-quality products such as lobster and beef.

China and Australia are both located in the Asia-Pacific region, have highly complementary economies and are natural partners. In recent years, bilateral relations have seen a comprehensive recovery, with frequent high-level exchanges injecting strong momentum into cooperation. As China's largest trading partner in Australia, Western Australia has a natural advantage in aligning its economic diversification goals with China's 15th Five-Year Plan. China is willing to deepen and expand mutually beneficial cooperation with Western Australia, enhancing the well being of both peoples.

For an Australian take on the Two Sessions, see page 11

Queensland: super carve-out sees teenagers miss out on $104 million

The Super Members Council is pushing to scrap an outdated law that denies super to most under-18 workers, after new analysis shows it will short change teenagers in Queensland $104 million in 2025/26.

Research shows that 127,000 under-18 workers in Queensland will miss out on an average of $820 in super contributions this year, and about 515,000 teen workers nationally will be excluded from a combined $405 million.

Under current rules, workers under the age of 18 are only legally guaranteed super if they work more than 30 hours a week for one employer.

The outdated exclusion was originally made to prevent fees eroding low-balance super accounts, but that reason no longer stacks up now there are fee protections on small super balances.

The new data comes as a Pyxis survey found 73% of Australians support changing the law so workers get paid super at all ages. Only 7% of Australians do not support such a change.

A recent report by the Council also found axing the 30-hour threshold would help close the gender super gap.

The current age-based minimum-hours rule means most teenage workers, especially young women who are more likely to work part-time, are not yet paid super on their wages. Women currently retire with 25 per cent less super than men, and the gap can start from their very first day at work.

The report found that if all under-18s were guaranteed super, a typical teenage girl could have nearly $2,500 more in her super by age 18, which could grow into $11,000 more by retirement with investment returns.

Teen girls are more likely to work in retail and community service jobs and typically work fewer hours than the current 30-hour super threshold for under-18s.

Teen boys under 18 are more likely to work as tradies and labourers, where full-time hours and apprenticeships are common, giving them guaranteed super.

Scrapping the outdated exclusion would also make legal compliance easier for employers and smooth the start to work for teenagers.

The change has a minimal aggregate impact on the cost to business at about 0.03% of national payroll. The Council supports a phased approach to minimise and manage the impact on business.

Super Council CEO Misha Schubert called on the Australian government to abolish the 30-hour threshold and guarantee all young Australian workers get a super start to work.

"Under-18 workers in Queensland will be shortchanged $104 million in retirement savings this year because of this outdated rule. It's time to fix it," she said.

"The sooner you get super, the more it'll look after you. Missing out on super before 18 can cost some young people $11,000 by retirement."

"A fair go shouldn't be denied until you turn 18. Let's give young workers a better future and pay super to all under-18s."

Super Members Council

NSW: Minns' missing targets

NSW Premier Chris Minns' climate ambitions would be thwarted ahead of next year's state election if coal mine expansions and extensions are approved, new analysis of three of the pending 18 projects shows.

Analysis by the Lock the Gate Alliance shows that three proposed coal mine extensions would generate 1.3 million tonnes of emissions in 2030, making up nearly one fifth (19.8%) of NSW's projected emissions gap.

At the end of last year, a landmark NSW Net Zero Commission report found that more coal mine extensions and expansions in NSW were "not consistent" with the state achieving its legislated climate targets. The gap between legislated targets and expected greenhouse gas pollution levels under current policies is forecast to be 6.6 million tonnes in 2030, rising to 11.6 million tonnes in 2035.

Three of the 18 coal projects that would blow out NSW's emissions targets are:

Hunter Valley Operations Continuation Projects: This – according to the NSW EPA – is the "largest" and "most significant proposal for coal extraction in NSW's history." Yancoal and Glencore plan to extend the coal mine until 2045, which will generate nearly a million (953,900) tonnes of emissions in 2030.

Mount Pleasant six-year extension (Mod 8): Last year, a landmark court ruling found that local climate impacts must be considered when assessing the Mount Pleasant mine. Mach Energy is appealing that decision (in the first-ever climate case to go to the High Court), but has meanwhile applied for a separate project to expand the same mine. If approved, it will produce 320,932 tonnes of emissions in 2030. The NSW Department of Planning closed public submissions on the proposal this week.

Moolarben OC3: Yancoal's proposed 10-year extension to the coal project near Mudgee would generate 23,748 tonnes of emissions in 2030. The IPC will determine the project this year.

Lock the Gate Alliance NSW Community Coordinator Nic Clyde said: "To protect the people of New South Wales from the rising costs of climate change, the NSW government needs to listen to its own Commission's advice and stop approving coal mine expansions and extensions. Every additional tonne of greenhouse pollution is taking New South Wales in the wrong direction, away from safety and security and into escalating costs.

"With one year to go until the state election and 18 coal mine projects in the planning pipeline, the Premier must act to ensure planning approvals are not sabotaging his promise to the people of New South Wales, written into the Climate Change Act, for 'effective action on climate change to ensure a sustainable and fair future for the people, economy and environment of New South Wales.'

"Climate change is already driving up the cost of living and affecting housing security in NSW. NSW cannot afford the cost of more greenhouse gas pollution from expanding coal mines and must instead wholeheartedly support the Hunter region in navigating the closure and rehabilitation of mines.

"The next 12 months will be a real test of the Premier's leadership. He must keep his government's climate promises, prevent coal mining companies from escalating the burden of climate costs for NSW and support coal mining communities as mines close."

Lock the Gate

DFAT travel advice regarding Iran says, "We continue to advise do not travel to Iran and leave Iran as soon as possible ...." But last month Border Force officers seized an Afghan asylum seeker, "Nadim" (not his real name), and took him to Sydney airport in an attempt to force him back to Iran.

Nadim, who had travelled on an Afghan passport, with a sponsored visa, arrived in Australia from Iran on Sunday 22 February. His brother (an Afghan refugee and an Australian citizen) waited for him at the arrivals gate, but he never emerged.

Inside the airport Border Force officers had cancelled Nadim's visa. Nadim was then detained and taken to 'a designated place of detention' at a hotel in Parramatta.

Only desperate last minute legal intervention prevented his deportation to danger. He was returned to Villawood detention centre in Sydney.

"These airport visa cancellations must stop," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition, "Just like boat turn-arounds at sea, Labor is trying to turn asylum seekers around at airports. Labor is trashing their human rights. Asylum seekers have a right to make a protection claim.

"The idea that it was safe to send Nadim is farcical. It is to Labor's eternal shame that they are blindly following Donald Trump who, despite his military threats against Iran, has deported around 120 Iranians since September last year. It is well-known that Afghans are not safe in Iran or Afghanistan. Labor has an obligation under the Refugee Convention to properly consider all asylum claims. It must end the turn-arounds and also end its policy of indefinite offshore detention."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: Westpac. The big bank is fuelling deep uncertainty among workers, with roles cut or outsourced across technology, lending, treasury, call centres and retail. At least 200 jobs have already been cut in the last month, with many more workers being moved into larger teams with fewer managers as the bank rolls out job cuts across multiple divisions.

More job cuts are expected across Westpac in the coming months as the Finance Sector Union warns the scale and spread of the changes means no part of the bank feels secure for workers.

The FSU says the latest changes come after an internal Westpac leak last year showing the bank intended to cut 1500 jobs.

When challenged, Westpac refused to confirm or deny this and instead notified the union of job cuts in a piecemeal way, just prior to them taking effect.

The latest job cuts have included the outsourcing of work to third-party contractors.

This involves outsourcing sensitive work, including details of customers experiencing hardship, reigniting concerns about offshoring and the loss of experienced, local staff. Workers report the changes are leading to frustration from customers, which is placing workers in increasingly difficult situations.

The cuts are also affecting customers, particularly in retail banking where new operating arrangements mean some branches will close earlier and limit certain services during the morning.

The FSU is demanding that Westpac provide greater transparency of any proposed changes, consult with workers before any restructure is finalised, prioritise redeployment before outsourcing work and protect customer services.

Finance Sector Union National Secretary Julia Angrisano said: "These cuts are happening right across the bank, from technology to lending, treasury, call centres and branches – workers are being told their jobs are at risk of their roles disappearing.

"There is enormous anxiety among workers because they simply don't know where the next restructure will hit. These decisions are not just about job cuts – they are about outsourcing Australian banking work and hollowing out the skills and experience inside the bank.

"Westpac needs to stop treating workers as disposable and start working with them to identify solutions that protect jobs, service quality and long-term capability."

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Superannuation: Cooking the tax system

M Santos

On 10 March Parliament passed its *Building a Stronger and Fairer Super System* bills. The legislation is posed as reforming super tax concessions, "so that they are better targeted for large balances." It might be better targeted, but the superannuation system is still skewed in favour of the super wealthy.

According to The Australia Institute the richest 10 per cent rort the super system to the tune of $22 billion a year.

When introduced 32 years ago by the Keating Labor government the compulsory Superannuation Guarantee scheme had several aims. One was to be in a position to phase out the age pension as super savings surpassed the assets test for the pension.

Another was to provide a large and ever-growing pool of capital for the financial sector and corporations to profit from. It has served this aim well, but as for retirement incomes millions of workers have been short-changed. Instead it has become yet another tax slashing scheme for multimillionaires and billionaires.

MINOR CHANGES

At present the tax rate on earnings in all superannuation funds is 15% – a massive tax concession for the wealthy who would be paying a marginal tax rate of 45 cents on each $1 of income over $190,000.

At present, someone with up to $10 million **in their fund** and an income of $1 million would only pay **$150,000** in tax on their earnings. Outside of super, the same $1 million would incur income tax of **$416,138**. That's almost three times more.

The government's "better targeted" reforms increase the tax paid on income between $3 million and $10 million of assets to 30 per cent.

The "**better targeted**" legislation would see **$235,000** tax paid on that same $1 million in income. So that multi-millionaire's tax on income in their super would rise by $85,000. That's still a super rort to the tune of $181,138. Not bad for not lifting a finger.

The concessional tax rate applying to future earnings on balances above $10 million will be 40 per cent, and both the $3 million and $10 million thresholds will be indexed.

Why should someone with more than $3 million, let alone $10 million, in their super account receive a tax concession? This is outrageous. Let's not forget they still pay only 15% on the income on the earnings derived from the first $3 million.

Earnings corresponding to balances below $3 million will continue to be taxed at 15 per cent in the accumulation phase. In addition, superannuation will remain tax free in the retirement phase when income is withdrawn.

The not-so-super superannuation reform is a slight improvement but falls far short of any sense of decency or fairness.

MISDIRECTED

Compare those tax rates to those imposed on the income of shop assistants, hospitality workers, nurses, other workers on the minimum wage, and part-time workers.

They earn a fraction of what the wealthy are receiving in tax concessions.

While the reform is a tiny step in the right direction it does little to redress the growing gap between the wealthy and workers.

The wealthiest 10 per cent of Australians are still rorting the system for $22 billion. Meanwhile, millions of families are struggling, charities are inundated, and housing is unaffordable. How does someone pay $600-$800 rent for a family when their income is less than $50,000?

Families, not just individuals are house-sharing. Imagine how much public housing could be built with $22 billion. Imagine the benefits of transferring some of that money to fund an increase in social security payments for the unemployed, age pensioners and carers.

99.5% of workers currently in the workforce will never see $3 million in their super fund. Yet listening to the uproar you could be forgiven for thinking that the multimillionaires would be impoverished.

LISTO

Legislation to increase the low-income superannuation tax offset (LISTO) is due to come into effect on 1 July 2027. LISTO was established in 2017 in response to the Henry Tax Review.

It was established to provide a refund of up to $500 paid into a person's superannuation account if they paid higher taxes on their income than on their superannuation and earned a taxable income of $37,000 or less per annum.

Since then the income test has been frozen at $37,000, resulting in many on low incomes becoming ineligible. After lobbying by superannuation and other groups the government agreed to lift the eligibility threshold to $45,000 and the maximum payment to $810. The threshold will be indexed annually.

This reform will benefit around one quarter of the current workforce, in particular, working women as around 60% of them qualify.

It only applies to workers on incomes between $28,000 and $45,000. If your taxable or non-taxable income is less than $28,000 then you miss out.

Around 3.1 million workers will gain from LISTO reforms next year. But there are thousands more with incomes below $28,000, in particular young people, women, Indigenous Australians, and people with disability, who don't.

Graphic: Ken Teegardin – flickr.com (CC BY-SA 2.0)

The wealthiest 10 per cent of Australians are still rorting the system for $22 billion.

SERIOUS REFORM OVERDUE

"How cooked is our tax system that the 10 Australians with the biggest superannuation accounts, averaging $423 million, will pay a lower rate of tax than the nearly three million Australians who are going to work and earning the minimum wage," Greens Senator McKim said.

Over past four decades or more there has been a gradual flattening of the tax system, eroding its progressive nature whereby the higher your income the higher the rate in the dollar your tax bill.

The Howard government's introduction of the flat 10% GST made the system even less progressive as the wealthy pay a far smaller proportion of the income on goods and services. The rich don't need to resort to credit cards with exorbitant interest rates to pay bills. Corporations are exempt from the GST.

Much more work needs to be done to eliminate the rorting of superannuation.

The tax concessions should be abolished on super savings over a certain amount along with those on capital gains tax.

ACOSS statement on NACC Robodebt investigation

The findings of the National Anti-Corruption Commission's Robodebt investigation will be devastating to the victims and their loved ones.

The NACC found two public servants engaged in 'serious corrupt conduct'– but will not refer them for criminal prosecution. Four others, including former prime minister Scott Morrison and former secretary Kathryn Campbell, were found to not have engaged in corrupt conduct.

"For the hundreds of thousands of people harmed by Robodebt, these findings will be devastating," said Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) CEO Dr Cassandra Goldie.

"For those who had their lives upended, who lost loved ones, who sold assets or borrowed money to pay phantom debts they never owed – this will be very hard to receive.

"Robodebt destroyed trust in government. With Robodebt, the Coalition government targeted and harmed people on very low incomes. It painted them as criminals and threatened them with jail time if they didn't pay. Some people took their own lives. Others had relationship breakdowns.

"The Coalition government knowingly tore apart so many lives, and despite repeated warnings from ACOSS and many others, continued a scheme that was blatantly unfair, and causing harm. Robodebt was criticised from the beginning by people at Centrelink, by advocates, by community legal centres, and most of all by the hundreds of thousands of people it targeted.

"More than five years after the Federal Court ruled Robodebt unlawful, no criminal proceedings have taken place.

"The lack of ministerial accountability for Robodebt sends a message that people receiving social security are second-class citizens, not worthy of justice. As we have said since 2016 when we first heard of Robodebt, it was wrong and needed to be stopped. Today we stand with all affected by the scheme who still wait for justice."

ACOSS strongly endorses the words of Robodebt Royal Commission Commissioner Catherine Holmes SC, who said: "Politicians need to lead a change in social attitudes to people receiving welfare payments. The evidence before the Commission was that fraud in the welfare system was minuscule, but that is not the impression one would get from what ministers responsible for social security payments have said over the years. Anti-welfare rhetoric is easy populism, useful for campaign purposes. It is not recent, nor is it confined to one side of politics. Those attitudes are set by politicians, who need to abandon for good – in every sense – the narrative of taxpayer versus welfare recipient."

Australian Council of Social Services

Black Cockatoos: Sacrifices for Trump

C Bartholomew

US aluminium giant Alcoa has been granted permission by the federal government to continue clearing Western Australia's Jarrah forests, despite past illegal practices, in part due to the minerals deal signed by Australia and the Trump administration.

Alcoa was fined $55m due to illegal clearing, the largest such penalty in Australian history. The fine applied only to a six-year period, despite documents showing that Alcoa was engaged in illegal land clearing for bauxite mining for fifteen years despite government warnings. Alcoa's revenue for 2025 alone has been reported as over $18b. For corporations such as these, $55m is not a penalty; it is just the cost of doing business.

Environment minister Murray Watt approved further clearing by Alcoa under a "national interest exemption." The statement outlining the reasons for this exemption states that Alcoa has links to the Australia-US minerals deal.

These links include the development of gallium plants, in partnership with the Japanese government and the Japanese corporation Sojitz, with both US and Australian government funding. Watt decided that Alcoa's exemption from environment protections would serve as a way of "reinforcing and giving confidence" to the US and Japan.

Gallium is crucial for the production of advanced electronic warfare systems, with use in the development of radar, missile guidance systems, satellite communications, drones, and the equipment of fighter jets, submarines, and destroyers.

China has previously imposed bans and limitations on the export of gallium to the US due to these military applications. While the US has reserves of other key minerals such as germanium, it does not have gallium reserves, leaving its defence and semiconductor industries vulnerable.

Australia is also a signatory of Pax Silica, a US-led initiative launched in December 2025, designed to push forward international investment in AI companies and collaboration between countries to secure supply chains of critical minerals and technologies.

In other words, Australia, the US, Japan, Israel, and the other signatories will work more closely with each other and tech companies to develop military and AI technology without reliance on Chinese minerals.

As the US and Japan gear up for war on China and Israel continues its genocide of Palestinians and wars of aggression on Iran, Lebanon, Syria, and elsewhere, Australia's forests and wildlife are to be yet another casualty of our government's eagerness to join in. Western Australia's jarrah, marri, tuart, and banksia forests, facing mass clearing at the hands of Alcoa and other mining companies and property developers.

The forests are home to endangered species, most notably the Carnaby's and Baudin's black cockatoos. These ecosystems, found nowhere else, are also crucial habitats for other threatened animals such as the honey possum, a diverse range of reptiles, thousands of native plants, and many critical insect species.

The population of Carnaby's cockatoos has declined by about 50% over just the past three generations, primarily due to habitat loss. The Baudin's cockatoos face a similarly dire situation. Both species rely on hollows in mature trees for breeding and prefer to return to traditional breeding sites used over many generations. These ecosystems also rely upon unique soil microbiomes dependent upon specific soil chemistry.

Carnaby's Black Cockatoo *Zanda latirostris*. Photo: Jean Hort – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

Replacing or restoring these ecosystems, where possible at all, require long-term rehabilitation plans. Such plans, which need decades of efforts, will be too little too late if numbers of cockatoos and other species continue to plummet at the current rate. Extinct species can't be brought back by planting a few trees.

SPIES

Alcoa getting away with fifteen years of illegal clearing, threatening our animals and our water supplies, is both a return to tradition and a sign of things to come for the Australia government. Woodside was a key partner and beneficiary of the Australia Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) bugging of key government offices of the newly independent Timor-Leste, an illegal scheme which secured Woodside and other corporations' access to the impoverished nation's gas and oil resources.

Woodside is currently backing LNG extraction and pipeline expansions in Canada on the territories of the Wet'suwet'en and Gitxsan nations, who are fighting to defend their lands and waters. These nations and other land defenders are frequently targeted by brutal, militarised police crackdowns.

Labor's environmentalism is a sham. They can bring in as many new regulations as they want, but Labor has shown that they will ignore lawbreaking whenever it benefits imperialist aims.

Fuel security crisis

The Maritime Union of Australia is calling out the deliberate policy settings and economic engineering that have created Australia's perilous fuel security situation. Australians need fuel to get to work and to do their work. Without fuel and oil and the ships that move it, Australia stops.

As anxiety builds up against a backdrop of escalating geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, the need for a strategic fleet of Australian flagged and crewed ships operating in the national interest has never been more urgent.

Conflict in Iran now threatens global shipping routes and constrains crude oil flows through one of the world's most critical energy chokepoints, but Australia has for a long time been dangerously exposed to these risks.

The union points to ten years of betrayal during the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison government, a period defined by political spin and empty assurances. The reality is Australia no longer has the ships, the refineries or the national planning capacity required to guarantee our own fuel supply.

The crisis has not emerged overnight nor in the last four years. It is the direct result of deliberate policy choices by neoliberal governments that dismantled Australia's maritime capability and allowed our domestic refining capacity to collapse.

In quick succession around a decade ago, Australia lost every Australian flagged coastal petroleum tanker under the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison government's deliberate policy of undermining Australian shipping.

In 2014 the *Tandara Spirit* was also removed from service after restructuring associated with the Geelong refinery.

In 2015 three Australian flagged tankers disappeared from the fleet when refineries were shut down. Caltex withdrew the *Alexander Spirit* following the closure of the Kurnell refinery. The *Hugli Spirit* was removed when Caltex closed refining operations at Lytton. BP withdrew the *British Loyalty* after shutting the Bulwer refinery in Brisbane.

In 2016 BP withdrew the last Australian crewed tanker operating under the Transitional General Licence system.

These five ships once ensured that fuel produced in Australian refineries could be safely and reliably transported around the Australian coast by Australian seafarers operating under Australian law. Their loss has left Australia dependent on foreign flagged vessels operating under foreign labour standards and foreign strategic priorities.

At the same time governments allowed refinery after refinery to shut down. Facilities that once provided a critical layer of national resilience were abandoned in the name of short-term corporate profit and free market ideology pushed by the political leaders of the Liberal-National Coalition.

Senior figures in the conservative parties bear direct responsibility for this national failure, including Angus Taylor, Matt Canavan, and Barnaby Joyce.

Instead of defending Australia's national interest, Coalition leaders allowed multinational oil companies to dismantle the infrastructure that kept Australian homes, farms, and factories supplied with fuel.

The National Secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia, Jake Field, said the current geopolitical crisis should serve as a wake-up call.

"Global conflict has highlighted the truth our union has been drawing attention to for many years. Australia is dangerously reliant on foreign tankers and overseas supply chains for something as fundamental as the fuel we all use to get to work or to do our work," Field said.

"Between 2013 and 2022, the Liberals and Nationals told Australians that the free market would provide endless cheap fuel. What we actually got was the destruction of our refining capacity, the disappearance of our tanker fleet and the hollowing out of our maritime industry. In turn, we have become hostage to global fuel cartels and the ships its transported on.

"I think it's a bit dishonest and hypocritical of Barnaby Joyce to be beating this drum now, because I don't recall Barnaby being especially interested in our national security while he was in a position to actually do anything about it. Where were Malcolm Roberts and Pauline Hanson, when Barnaby and Angus were sending our fuel reserves offshore?

"They want to talk about national security? Fuel security is national security!" Field said.

"Let's not forget it was these characters who created the policy settings that allowed oil companies and shipowners to dismantle the systems that keep this country running, and it was Angus Taylor who made the extraordinary decision to store our strategic fuel reserves in the United States."

MUA Assistant National Secretary, Jamie Newlyn said: "The MUA is calling for urgent national action including rebuilding Australia's strategic tanker fleet, restoring domestic fuel production capacity, and implementing a genuine national fuel security strategy.

"A country that cannot transport its own fuel cannot guarantee its economic stability, its emergency response capability or its defence readiness," Newlyn added. "Australia must rebuild its maritime capability before the next global crisis makes this situation even worse."

Maritime Union of Australia

Close Bases Day – Global Day of Action – Australian section

Denis Doherty

The weekend of 21 and 22 February was chosen as the global day of action to close bases. The idea originated in the US where a group calling itself 'World Beyond War' has appealed to many across the world to come out on that weekend with actions to close bases either local ones or foreign bases. In the Australian context for a long time it looked like the response would be small, but it grew significantly over the last few days.

Actions and demonstrations were held in Brisbane, Canberra, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Fremantle, Alice Springs, Newcastle and Wollongong.

The global days of action to close bases marks the day the USA took over Guantánamo Bay from Cuba in 1903, starting the modern era of overseas military bases as a key tool of expansionism and empire building. Actions are designed to draw local and global attention to the environmental and social harms of overseas military bases.

'The sheer scale of global participation this weekend will send an unmistakable message: the physically massive, yet remarkably hidden, problem of military bases can no longer be ignored,' asserted David Swanson, Executive Director of World BEYOND War, a driving force behind this monumental day of action.

There are many reasons to close US bases in Australia but the principal ones are currently as US forces attack Iran to force 'regime change,' is that the US uses bases here to attack other countries and makes us complicit in war crimes as it has done by the use of Pine Gap for Israeli attacks on Gaza and surrounding countries. Of course, we acknowledge that the bases take up Aboriginal Land. Military bases are instruments of dispossession, routinely seizing Indigenous lands without consent or restitution.

The Sydney event at the gates of the Australian Navy Base in Sydney *HMAS Kattabul* was a well-attended day with an anti-AUKUS theme. These nuclear submarines will require the establishment of more bases in Australia. The speakers were: Abigail Boyd (Greens MLC), Matt Murphy (ETU National Office), Pip Hinman (Socialist Alliance), Peter Murphy (AWPR), Catherine Dobbie (Knitting Nanas), Sha Reilly (Labour against War), Olvia Barlow (Greens councillor Sydney inner west), Denis Doherty (Anti-Bases).

The basic themes were that the needs of Australia far outweigh the need for submarines, these bases are facilitating war and the war on Iran. We in Australia need to get from under the thumb of the US, give up our status as a US vassal and try real independence.

Western Australia also had a Close the Bases action on 21 February.

3CR RADICAL RADIO

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PEACE NOTES

The US/Israel War against Iran

Denis Doherty

Some reports on this war from mainstream sources indicate a massive victory is heading the US/Israel's way. However the level of censorship and plain propaganda is huge. The alternative media via WhatsApp and YouTube indicate a different picture. The mainstream indicates for example that six US service personnel have died while the other sources are claiming 200. There are claims that Iran has captured over 100 US service personnel. The Pentagon denies it. These types of discrepancies make it hard to assess just what the real picture is.

Trump and Pete Hegseth are full of bellicose and violent language about their successes, and the President has called for unconditional surrender. While other reports say the President initiated a ceasefire call at the end of the first day with Italian mediators, the Iranians rejected the call.

Remember this war was started by the US/Israel while negotiations were going on, a betrayal that will not be easily forgotten. When the time comes for talks, Iran will be justly very suspicious of US sincerity.

Iran warnings prior to the conflict

Iran was clear about its intentions should it be attacked. It would attack the Gulf states that were hosting US bases. It would attack both Israel and the US assets in the region, and it would close the Strait of Hormuz. In other words, an attack would create a regional war, drawing Shia Muslims from around the region and activating many militias in attacks against Israel and the US. The West, including Australia, are expressing surprise that the war has extended even though Iran clearly stated what was at stake if there was an attack. Iran realises that the aim of the attack is to break up Iran into separate weak pieces as happened in Syria. This war is an existential threat to Iran, and it is fighting that way.

Iran's view

The Iranian approach to the war appears to be that while it is taking a pounding in major cities, and the US and Israel are considering all civilian targets as legitimate, Iran's response is measured and organised. The Iranians are claiming to have hundreds of thousands of drones and missiles that they are shooting off at a controlled rate. They declared that they would use the older missiles first to exhaust the supplies of interceptor missiles. The US is declaring that they have limitless supplies, but many commentators are saying their supply is very finite as they have run down their stocks to supply Ukraine and Israel.

Israel has just bombed the Iranian oil infrastructure and Iranians have replied by bombing the oil infrastructure of the Israeli port city of Haifa – both Israeli and Iranian oil centres are burning.

Interceptor maths

The Iranians have bombed the US radar equipment of the Gulf States, the highly regarded THAAD system. These systems cost over $1 billion each and Iranians have destroyed them with drones worth $30,000 each. The interceptor systems of the Israeli and Gulf States use interceptors worth over $1 million or $4 million each. To hit a missile or drone the defenders must fire at least three interceptors. They often miss. The Iranians on the other hand are hitting their targets and hammering Israel with cheaper missiles. Iranian missiles are both supersonic and have multiple warheads. It's hard to get a clear picture of the situation as Israeli authorities censor any news of damage in Israel itself. There are reports coming in of massive damage inflicted on the Israeli cities Tel Aviv and Haifa.

Australia's response – sending the military

The Australian government has committed troops to the ever-widening war against Iran, using the fig leaf excuse that the ADF will be just protecting the UAE or Australians living in the area. That won't impress the Iranians.

Reserve Bank hit on families

M Santos

Every increase in interest rates is a gift to the banks – and not an insignificant one at that. That includes the latest hike by the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) Board from 3.85% to 4.1% which will hit workers, their families, the unemployed and social security recipients hard.

In announcing the decision, RBA Governor Michele Bullock admitted it would hurt "some" people and suggested that it may be necessary to drive the economy into recession.

Millions of Australians are already in the midst of a deep cost-of-living crisis, struggling below the poverty line and facing rampant price rises.

At the time of writing diesel fuel had already hit $3 a litre. Diesel is used by the trucking industry and this huge increase in price will either be passed on to consumers or see companies go out of business unless the government steps in and controls prices.

Resource-rich Australia faces serious shortages of fuel and gas all of which will add to external factors driving up prices but these resources, the property of the people of Australia, are beyond the control of the government.

Nationalisation must be on the agenda.

The US/Israeli war is already showing all the signs of bringing on a severe global recession or even depression if it continues. The RBA should be considering measures to ease the burden on families from a recession, not deliberately increasing the burden on them.

BANKS ARE LAUGHING

The winners (and when are they ever the losers?) are the banks. With every hike in interest rates, bank profits increase, to the elation of shareholders, many of whom are the capitalist class or self-funded retirees who are the most significant contributors to any actual demand-side pressure on prices. Make it make sense!

In this case, the big banks did not hesitate, immediately saying they will pass on the full rate hike on variable interest rate loans.

When banks lend money to clients they charge interest at a higher rate than they pay on deposits and borrowings from other sources, including from overseas financial institutions that offer lower interest rates than in Australia. This difference is called the interest margin and is their principal source of profits.

To cut costs, workers have been culled by the tens of thousands, most recently with the use of AI and 'AI washing' – using AI as an excuse for sackings when it hasn't actually replaced those workers jobs.

Take, for example, the Commonwealth Bank (CBA), which reported a gigantic after tax cash profit of $5.445 billion for the second half of 2025. Return on equity – how much profit a company makes for every dollar invested by shareholders was 13.8%. A return that would be the envy of many private corporations. Here's one way they get there.

MARGIN MANIPULATION

Interest rates on home loans vary depending on the ratio between the purchaser's deposit and the purchase price.

For example, the CBA's interest rate was, prior to the last RBA increase, 5.59% on a home loan where the borrower had a deposit of 60.01%-70% of the purchase price and as high as 7.24% where the loan was 90.01%-95% of the purchase price.

There are also differences for fixed-term and variable rate loans. One thing is certain: financial institutions never lend without a profitable interest margin. But they also manipulate interest rates to increase profits.

Let's take a look at how the CBA does this.

Take an online savings account with the CBA, the total possible interest rate in August 2025 was 4.65%. That's higher than a term deposit. Who wouldn't be tempted!

But it was a variable rate. A month later it had slipped to 4.3%. In January 2026, when inflation had already risen to 3.8% – well above the Reserve Bank of Australia's (RBA) target of 2%-3%, the bank slashed the standard interest rate on savings accounts to an incredibly low 1.55% and later increased it to 1.7% in February.

By then all bets were on a rise in the RBA's cash rate. That's what it did on 3 February – from 3.6% to 3.85%.

The margin between 3.85% and 1.7% is a banker's dream. Any customer who didn't watch their account like a hawk would not realise their original 4.65% had plummeted to a paltry 1.7%.

Why did the CBA do this apart from the whopping margin?

When your correspondent queried this at a branch it soon became obvious. The teller suggested taking out a term deposit. Yes, the interest rate would be far higher than 1.7% but, and there's the sting in the tail, you would be locked in for 12 months or more with rates set to rise.

It seems that with term deposits suddenly looking far more attractive, clients who kept an eye on their savings accounts would bite the bullet and shift cash from savings accounts to term deposits. Locking people into term deposits, with inflation and interest rates set to rise, was a nifty move on the part of the CBA. The bank stood to make a motza either way.

In addition, millions of bank customers – individuals and small businesses – have money in accounts that pay zero or almost zero. The interest margins on those bank accounts are enormous.

It is also worth noting that the major banks increased interest on mortgages the day the RBA made its announcement. As for increasing interest on people's savings, that takes longer and the full amount is not always passed on.

Reserve Bank of Australia, Sydney. Photo: Danausi – wikimedia.org (public domain)

privately-owned banks are powerful, parasitic enterprises

PRIVATISATION FAIL

Privately-owned banks are powerful, parasitic enterprises that have the sole aim of making the largest profits possible in the interests of shareholders and senior executives. They do not serve the interests of the people, rather they rip off their customers.

The CBA was once known as the 'people's bank.' The Hawke-Keating Labor government privatised it in the 1990s, claiming that it would increase the bank's competitiveness and efficiency, while reducing the burden on taxpayers.

Privatisation did exactly the opposite.

The publicly owned CBA was never a burden on taxpayers. It provided the government with income tax and profits. It had a strong social charter and provided strong competition with the private, for-profit banks.

Taxpayers are funding the bank's massive profits which now flow through to private investors, no longer to the government.

The CBA, like the Reserve Bank, should be nationalised and democratically run, with trade union and community organisations on the board.

Homelessness vs property investor tax breaks

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

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

Meanwhile, 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 is calling 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."

- 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.

Australian Council of Social Services

Something to say?

Write to the Editor!

editor@cpa.org.au

A strategy of chaos: imperialism targets Iran, but aims at China

Jad Kabbanji

Photo: Jan Zakelj – pexels.com (CC0)

The United States' conflict with China has long moved beyond simple trade wars to focus on physical control of strategic flows. There has been much talk of competition over access to rare earth minerals. Oil is back in the spotlight. This war of attrition over energy has one central objective: to restrict Beijing's room for development.

In this context, the US-Israeli war against Iran is, among other things, a lever used to paralyse China's vital supplies and weaken its industrial model.

ENERGY TRIANGLE THREATENED

Oil is a key factor in the global balance of power. China, the world's largest importer of crude oil, has in recent years built its growth on energy partnerships with countries that refuse to bow to Washington's authority. These relationships, based on non-dollarised trade, have become the primary target of US sanctions.

Three countries illustrate this dynamic. Data from the International Energy Agency shows that Iran sent around 90 per cent of its crude exports to China in 2024. Venezuela saw three-quarters of its exports go to Beijing before the recent regime change, while Russia has redirected nearly 50 per cent of its flows to China since 2022.

These flows were not developed out of charity, but out of market logic to circumvent US hegemony. For Beijing, this meant securing strategic supplies at very competitive prices: discounts of $5 to $12 per barrel for Russian crude, and $7 to $8 for Iranian and Venezuelan crude. This strategic advantage considerably strengthened Chinese industrial competitiveness while offering these three countries a lifeline in the face of suffocation by Washington.

Military escalation in the Middle East now threatens this fragile balance.

STRAIT OF HORMUZ

Israeli and US strikes against Iran, which killed Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, triggered an immediate response from Tehran. Iran's Revolutionary Guards carried out their historic threat: the Strait of Hormuz – through which nearly 20 per cent of global oil consumption passes daily – is virtually paralysed. The Gulf oil monarchies that are subservient to Washington are suffering from Iran's retaliation and seeing their oil and gas facilities hit hard.

The Guards have warned that any ship attempting to pass through the strait will be "burned alive," with several tankers having already been targeted.

The consequences are immediate and measurable, with the markets reacting immediately. The cost of chartering a supertanker to transport oil from the Middle East to China has doubled. The Brent crude benchmark price soared, briefly exceeding $115 per barrel, a threshold that had not been reached since the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022.

For China, the loss of Iranian flows – which accounted for about 13 per cent of its maritime imports, or 1.38 million barrels per day on average last year – is not just a question of volume. It is the loss of leverage over global prices and a supply route outside of US control. More than 40 per cent of the crude oil purchased by China transits through the Strait of Hormuz, and the major shipping companies are now avoiding this area due to the conflict.

While Tehran is the direct target, it is Beijing that is being aimed at.

THREE FRONTS

In the immediate term, Beijing can cushion the blow with its strategic reserves – around 900 million barrels, or just under three months of imports. If the blockade of the strait continues, pressure will build through several mechanisms: soaring freight and insurance prices will permanently increase the cost of transporting all Middle Eastern crude oil; discounts on Iranian oil, which were a major competitive advantage for Chinese industry, are being phased out; and prolonged uncertainty over the security of maritime routes will force Beijing to constantly revise its supply plans, transforming a cyclical vulnerability into a systemic constraint.

Washington is using two complementary levers: in the south, the war against Iran and the closure of Hormuz are stifling flows from the Gulf; in the west, the prospect of a negotiated peace in Ukraine is being exploited to divert part of Russia's crude oil to Europe.

Venezuela, the third pillar of China's energy strategy, is now effectively under Washington's control. Like Tehran, Caracas is enduring a hybrid war in which economic sanctions, attempts at political destabilisation and military interference are used to exert US domination. Deprived of its energy sovereignty by decades of interference, the country cannot freely dispose of its resources or significantly increase its production.

Beijing is exploring ways to circumvent this multi-pronged offensive, including through supply agreements in yuan, accelerated development of the Arctic route, and strengthening of its strategic partnership with Pakistan to secure a land corridor. In addition, China has asked its refiners to suspend fuel exports in order to prioritise the domestic market, a sign of supply tensions. But these alternatives, which are costly and time-consuming to implement, cannot replace the Middle Eastern pillar of its energy security overnight. 57 per cent of China's maritime imports still come from the Middle East.

FRAGMENTATION AND SUFFOCATION

What is revealed for all to see is a system that, in an effort to maintain itself, creates chaos to strangle China. By attacking Venezuela and Iran and maneuvering to neutralise Russia's advantage, Washington is not seeking peace – instead, it looks to reorganise the flow of oil to its advantage.

Beyond the current conflagration, the US strategic objective for the Middle East is clearly emerging: the balkanisation or Lebanonisation of nation states. This planned fragmentation aims to create permanent chaos through ethno-communal civil war. Recent events confirm a deliberate desire to destabilise Iran by stirring up the secessionist ambitions of its minorities, while deploying armed groups from among them – equipped and financed by Washington – to wage a ground war in addition to US-Israeli air strikes.

The aims behind fragmentation are not limited to weakening recalcitrant states. It also operates like a brake on the autonomous development of nations and, more specifically, is a major obstacle to China's New Silk Roads project, aka the Belt and Road Initiative, this project relies on massive investments in infrastructure and transcontinental trade. As such, it requires a stable geopolitical environment and strong nation states capable of guaranteeing the security of economic corridors and the sustainability of agreements.

The New Silk Roads are also oil and gas routes, and the stability they require is the very condition for the security of supply that underpins China's industrial power. Permanent chaos in the Middle East, Central Asia and elsewhere has the collateral effect of countering China's influence, weakening its partners and compromising the returns on investment of its infrastructure projects.

By fragmenting nations, US imperialism isn't just closing trade routes. It is methodically suffocating Beijing's access to strategic resources, whether through direct war (Iran), sanctions (Venezuela) or coercive diplomacy (Russia).

SPIRAL OF WAR

This offensive isn't limited to China. Cuba, which has been subjected to a criminal blockade for more than six decades, suffers the consequences of this economic war on a daily basis. Every barrel of oil that struggles to reach the island, every blackout that paralyses it, is a direct consequence of the same logic that today seeks to destroy and massacre the Iranian people.

The power cuts in Havana and the strikes on Tehran come from the same hand – the hand of imperialism, which does not hesitate to starve entire populations to preserve its domination.

NATO, the armed wing of US-led imperialism camp, was among the first institutions to support the bombing campaign against the Iranian people. NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte described the offensive as "crucial" and welcomed the elimination of the Supreme Leader, stating that "we are all better off without him."

Officially "uninvolved," the military alliance nevertheless assumed the role of a logistical platform: without the French bases in Istres, without British reinforcements in Qatar, without the "facilitation" of European allies, the US campaign would not have been possible. The interception of a missile targeting Turkey served as a pretext for strengthening NATO's defences, transforming a war of aggression into a threat against which the Alliance must "protect" itself.

As it did in Yugoslavia and Libya, NATO is once again acting as a cop in the service of US interests, trampling on the sovereignty of nations and international law.

The case of Canada perfectly illustrates this contradiction. On 28 February, Prime Minister Carney gave his "unequivocal support" to the US strikes before acknowledging that he had supported them "with regret," judging them to be potentially "contrary to international law." Foreign Minister Anita Anand even had to delete messages referring to a "diplomatic solution," a sign of internal tensions.

When asked about Canada's possible military involvement, Carney refused to rule it out, saying that this country would stand "shoulder to shoulder with its allies" if necessary. Behind the scenes, a Liberal MP speaking on condition of anonymity expressed his fear that Washington would invoke NATO Article 5 (the mutual clause) to drag Ottawa into an unwanted conflict. This mixture of overt support, discreet regrets and powerlessness sums up the position of Washington's allies – willing hostages to an imperialist strategy that they ultimately endorse.

The war of aggression against Iran that has set the Middle East ablaze, the tightening noose around China, and the reinforced blockade against Cuba form a coherent whole. By turning hunger and energy into weapons of war, methodically destabilising entire regions, and multiplying threats and coups d'état, US imperialism is plunging humanity into the abyss.

People's Voice (edited for space)

Queensland: beautiful one day, illegal to say things the next

FK

Everyone has heard the news that Queensland has not only banned two pro-Palestine chants, but has arrested protesters for saying the forbidden phrases. Two people were arrested on 11 march for the offence of "recital, distribution, publication or display of prohibited expressions."

Deputy Premier Jarrod Bleijie has responded to criticisms of the arrests by saying that "the law is the law." True enough, just as a car is a car, a drink is a drink, and an LNP government is an authoritarian mess.

In this case, the law Bleijie is talking about is a bad one that the government he's in just made and could unmake if they wanted. However it'll take more than common sense and reason to make the Chrisafulli government go back on this repressive measure.

So what can protesters do in the meantime? Here are some suggestions:

1/ Sing John Farnham's 'Two strong hearts' which includes the line 'from the river to the sea.'

Pro: They haven't made 'Two strong hearts' illegal. Yet.

Con: Do the people of Brisbane really deserve mass acapella John Farnham singalongs?

2/ Chant 'from the creek to the ocean, we do the locomotion.'

Pro: Catchy, clever

Con: Might be too indirect. Are you supporting Palestine or being nostalgic for Kylie Minogue's first hit single?

3/ Make a circle with your fingers to signify 'globe', point to your eyes then point at a nearbye mother so you can tell the cops you were chanting "Global eyes the anti-father" instead of (illegally) chanting "Globalise the intifada."

Pro: Good way to get your mum to come to a demonstration, maybe?

Con: A bit baroque, might not be appreciated by the Queensland police who probably aren't allowed to play charades while on duty.

4/ Mix up protest against Queensland's silly and fascistic new law by chanting "From the river to Crisafuli is a fascist" or "Globalise that idiot Jarrod Bleijie."

Pros: Technically legal

Con: Makes the protest about the terrible Queensland government, not about the genocidal Israeli government

5/ Chant the forbidden phrases in bits: fifty people chant 'Globalise', another fifty chant 'the', the next fifty chant 'Intifada' and so on.

Pro: Legal

Con: Perhaps we should leave singing 'rounds' to teachers who make primary school kids sing 'Frère Jaques' and 'Kookaburra sits on the old gum tree.'

No longer legal in Queensland.
Photo: Basateen – wikimedia.org (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Film review: *Send Help*

Reviewer: Peter Farmer

There's a lot to be said for boss revenge movies. Principally, the way capitalist society works is that most people have a boss, most people like whinging about their boss, and many bosses richly deserve it.

Hence *9 to 5* (women office workers get revenge on their boss), *Weekend at Bernie's* (the boss dies and is more useful that way), and *Click* (Adam Sandler gets a magical remote control so he can fart on his boss). In the absence of actually changing the social order, we might as well enjoy watching fictional characters overturn it.

Sam Raimi's *Send Help* involves an abused female employee, Linda Little (get it?), played by Amy Adams who is persecuted by a smug, male, management jargon-spouting boss whose idea of action is practicing his putting in the office when he's not humiliating her in public.

As luck would have it, she's given the chance to go to Thailand with him. The plane crashes on the way and the two of them wind up on the proverbial desert island, along with snakes, fish, and the odd wild boar left over from the last *Lord of the Flies* remake.

Almost as improbably as a downtrodden employee being called 'Linda Little,' our heroine has learned a lot of survival skills from watching the *Survivor* TV series, so with the boss wounded the tables are turned. She gets to snarl, "You're not in the office now" at him when she's not spearing snakes and killing wild pigs.

So far, so cute, but the humour gets black very quickly. It turns out Linda has a past that's a lot more sinister than watching *Survivor* religiously, and the island experience is bringing out the homicidal maniac side of her skill set. Without any more spoilers, we can safely say that if there's a moral to this, it's a bleak one: alienated company work is the only game in town, so you'd better be just as evil as your managers.

Worth podding:
podcasts we're listening to

The Deprogram: Fun and light hearted, while still being well informed. Hosted by the three biggest communist youtubers; Second Thought, Hakim, and Yugopnik.

The Sickle and the Hammer: A history of the Soviet Union. Well researched and well presented.

Geopolitical Economy Report: The host, Ben Norton, is an incredibly well researched geopolitical analyst.

Proles Pod: Deep dives into theory and history. Recently released a-14-hour-long series on Stalin. Spiritual successor to the former podcast, Proles of the Round Table.

Blowback: A season-based podcast with each season covering a period of US intervention in foreign countries.

Behind the Bastards: very liberal, but the deep dives into the lives of Nazis, right-wing dictators, and American politicians are quite interesting.

Some More News: Also pretty liberal but blends humour with current affairs (mostly focused on the US).

People's History of Ideas: a podcast by a historian aiming to provide an in-depth view on the historical development of Maoism.

Red Menace: Solid political analysis especially on Marxist-Leninist fundamentals/texts.

Rev Left: Good episode on current events, philosophy, and activism.

Mother Country Radicals: Just one season, but an interesting look at the Weather Underground.

Probably Cancelled Podcast: A podcast by Marxist-Leninist women mostly about challenging liberal ideology.

Pick Me Up I'm Scared: podcast by Madeline Pendleton (a Marxist known for getting into fights with liberals) covering a variety of topics.

Solutions to Crossword

Guardian 16 March 2026, #2182

Across

4 AI company that got on Trump's bad side – **ANTHROPIC**

5 Politician who's moved out of his electorate and closer to Borloo – **COOK**

6 The kind of surrender Trump says he wants – **UNCONDITIONAL**

7 Group of babies, worth $6 trillion – **BOOMERS**

9 Kind of plant attacked by Iran – **DESALINATION**

10 Russell Crowe flick, used by White House to promote war – **GLADIATOR**

11 What Isaac Herzog's mind does when asked if Israel's attack is legal – **BOGGLES**

Down

1 Distinguishing feature of Africans offered refuge by Trump – **WHITE**

2 Workers for MA Services, exploited by Coles – **SECURITY GUARDS**

3 Criminalised in freedom-loving Queensland – **SLOGANS**

4 China just had two of these – **SESSIONS**

5 Something that's getting more expensive thanks to Trump and others – **OIL**

Lianghui/Two Sessions 2026: getting stuff done

A Carruthers

To follow the events of Lianghui, Two Sessions in China, just after participating in our 15th Congress was interesting because to a large extent our Party the CPA, while operating in different conditions, has a similar operational formula.

The Communist Party of Australia's 15th Congress now implements the Political Resolution. The recently completed Two Sessions is now tasked with implementing the 15th Five-Year Plan. In other words, the point of having these meetings is largely practical and organisational. They exist to implement a plan, to get stuff done.

But what is Lianghui? Two Sessions is the meeting of the NPC (National People's Congress) and CPPCC (Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference). The latter is worth noting because, whereas Western media calls China a "one-Party state," in fact the CPPCC is composed of many non-CPC organisations, like the 8 other political parties and what are called people's organisations, trade unions, women, youth, literary writers and art circles, lawyers, journalists, disabled people, and others. The CPC doesn't "control" these organisations. They are there to constructively contribute concrete proposals to the United Front body.

They meet and discuss hundreds of proposals. This is democracy on a large scale. Unlike US and Western money-fuelled election cycles which are just about spin and surface, this is deep, concrete, peoples' democracy. They discuss real issues, real problems that affect people's lives, then those that are passed are implemented at the end of the sessions.

Chinese media reported on some of the key discussions. Three in particular stand out:

1. The drafting and ratification of an Ecological and Environmental Code. This was passed and is now being implemented. The socialist path has always been connected to the larger drive beyond capitalist plunder of the environment towards a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature. Marx and Engels recognised this in their writing on nature, and China sees this as a top priority, core to achieving socialism and communism.

China saw, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the financialisation of the globe, that environmental catastrophe had to be averted for the sake of human survival. They took the term "Ecological Civilisation," in fact, from the Soviets. Now, the Code will link together the twin issues of biodiversity and green industry on a local and national scale.

Three factors are in play. There is a need to transform the entire productive system (EV transport, solar, commodity production) to a green advanced system of production. This means linking the new productive system to new industry that suits local conditions and labour, like eco-tourism. In doing so, biodiversity must not only be protected but advanced as well. This means projects like the ten-year fishing ban on the Yangtze which saw the reemergence of finless porpoises, and other initiatives to ensure the survival of endangered species.

All three must be managed simultaneously: the transformation of production on a large scale, new social relations and new jobs around this production, and the protection of biodiversity.

2. Putting minorities first is a key priority of socialist China. Liberating minority cultures and allowing them to flourish, as opposed to the racial division and suppression of minority cultures as we see in the West, is central to China's drive to achieve a harmonious socialist society. The Ethnic Unity and Progress Promotion Law is fundamental to this. Like the Soviet Union, China is a multi-ethnic state. This isn't quite the same as multicultural society, but there are similarities. For this code, written into law are the "standardisation, digitisation, and preservation of minority texts" and eliminating and abolishing all "ethnic discrimination" and "ethnic hatred." As our own societies in the West descend into bigotry and chaos, China is taking a different path, the principle of autonomy plus centralisation. This law as it's put into practice is one to watch.

3. National Development and Planning Law. You would think China was already using a planning-oriented governmental model,

The Great Hall of the People where the Lianghui is held. Photo: Haijun Li – Facebook

planning of this type directly places production at the service of the masses

and yes, it is. China already has one of the world's most planned economies in a certain sense. To build its famed comprehensive high-speed rail (HSR) network involved planning directly from the Ministry of Transport, rather than outsourcing and hiring a private corporation to do it. Other countries have built smaller, disconnected HSR through private corporations, less successfully.

On this scale, capitalist and socialist systems treat production and the productive forces differently. Planned economics would seem to go against the free market principle, and it does insofar as planning is antithetical to capitalism. It doesn't mean getting rid of the market. It just means that planning of this type bypasses profit motives, and directly places production at the service of the masses.

What China wants now is even more integrated and intensive planning on a national scale. Given that the centralised planning system is working so well, China seeks to eliminate the messy edges and refine it to an even higher level. This doesn't meant going back to the Soviet-style model, but it does mean strengthening the Five-Year Plan model, which goes back to the Soviets (after all, Stalin pioneered the Five-Year Plan). Now that it has proven its success, China must ensure the Five-Year Plan is adhered to and outcomes quantified according to the whole.

China is certainly not the only socialist country, but it's worth serious attention, not the simplistic demonisation it receives from so much western media.

China derives truth from practice, it avoids dogmatism, it self-criticises. Its success is measured by what it can do to improve people's lives. It requires the support of the Chinese people. But it is China's system that deserves more close study. Because Chinese whole-process people's democracy is roundly dismissed in the West by pundits and paid-up "journalists" with an ulterior motive, we have missed an opportunity to study a system which is actually working.

Lianghui has opened its doors to outside scrutiny and what we can certainly say is this: why can't we have a system like this? What happened to us in the West, in Australia, such that we have wound up so lacking in creativity? Could we not have the flexibility and foresight to dream up a new democratic system that is truly built to serve the people and get the big stuff done? ✪

Christian nationalism, the US, and war

In today's political climate, few images are as striking as that of US religious leaders gathered around the president in the Oval Office with their hands extended in prayer.

To some, it is a traditional expression of faith. However, to many scholars, it symbolises something far more political: the public ritual of Christian nationalism.

What was once a fringe movement has now become a central force in American politics. Christian nationalism is no longer just a matter of private belief; it is a political project. Its goal is to redefine the United States as a "Christian nation" guided by divine authority, not a secular democracy.

By 2026, this religious-political shift will influence global events, framing new conflicts in West Asia as part of a modern-day "Holy War."

What Is Christian Nationalism?

To understand this movement, it is important to distinguish between Christianity as a personal faith and Christian nationalism as an ideology.

According to sociologists Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry, Christian nationalism is a cultural framework that fuses Christianity with American civic life. At its core is the belief that the US has a divine mission and should prioritise Christian symbols and leadership in public life.

Researchers often describe the ideology as resting on three main pillars of dominion:

Sacred hierarchy. The idea that society follows a divinely ordered structure that often favours traditional patriarchy and a national identity centred on white Christian heritage.

The Myth of Founding: The belief that America was created by and for Christians, which downplays the secular ideas behind the US Constitution.

Divine Sanction for Power: The belief that Christians must control key sectors of influence, such as government, media, and education, to keep the nation "in covenant" with God.

This ideology borrows heavily from a mythical vision of national destiny. Its followers view the United States as a contemporary version of biblical Israel, a "chosen nation" in covenant with God.

This myth gained strength in the nineteenth century and reemerged during the Cold War. According to this narrative, America's success is a divine reward for its faith, and moral decline could result in divine punishment.

This narrative relies on historical revisionism. It downplays the influence of the Enlightenment on the Founding Fathers and misrepresents the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

By portraying figures such as Jefferson and Madison as theocrats, it depicts the secular republic as a distortion of America's "true" Christian origins.

This imagined "Golden Age" lends legitimacy to current calls for "national renewal" or "taking back" the country for God, a rallying cry that transforms political diversity into a perceived moral threat.

Today, this legacy has evolved into a sophisticated political machine. Projects such as Project 2025 aim to reshape federal institutions along explicitly Christian nationalist lines.

Figures such as Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth view their government roles as spiritual missions and cast political conflict in theological terms.

Telesur (edited for space) ✪

Stop the war on Cuba

Vinnie Molina

The Trump regime has undertaken to starve the people of Cuba. The decision to impose an oil blockade and threaten any country who dares to provide oil or other humanitarian assistance to Cuba is a war crime and an act of collective punishment.

The Cuban people have been living for over 60 years under an economic, financial and trade blockade. Most Cubans born after 1959 don't know what it is like to live without the criminal blockade.

They have lived under the constant threat of a military invasion. They defended their homeland during the Bay of Pigs invasion and defeated the enemy in 72 hours.

The revolution led by Fidel Castro and his comrades, the young generation of Cuban revolutionaries defeated the Batista regime and its army 90 miles from the United States. This seems to be an unforgivable act of sovereignty by the Cuban people; one that the US imperialism refuses to accept.

Despite all the obstacles and the limitations, the Cuban revolution led by the Communist Party of Cuba and its leadership built a socialist system that has provided social development for its people. A universal health and education system that provides all of the Cuban people with the right to a healthy life, medical attention and the right to free education from early age up to university.

Under socialism Cuba has achieved the largest number per capita of doctors in the world despite the blockade which affects the health and education areas through limitations on what can be purchased such as medicines, equipment or basic educational materials in the international markets. A focus on developing science and biotechnology in Cuba has helped mitigate some of these limitations, along with a 'people first' approach that focuses on health and preventative medicine.

Challenges do not prevent the Cuban people living a happy life full of culture and richness that in many ways has become the envy of many countries in Latin America and other developing countries.

Solidarity with other peoples across the globe has also been the model of the Cuban revolution. Since the 60s when the revolution was in its early stages, Cuban doctors and teachers have travelled abroad on international missions. They have been present with their army of white coats looking after victims of natural disasters, earthquakes, hurricanes, Ebola and most recently the COVID pandemic. The Cuban people also shed their blood for the defeat of apartheid and the freedom of other oppressed nations in Africa.

Speakout for Cuba: Hands off Cuba, Boorloo/Perth, 13 March 2026.

It is time to show our solidarity with Cuba.

The 21 March has been declared an international day in solidarity with Cuba. People all over the world will host events, collect donations and send humanitarian aid to Cuba. The 'Our America' flotilla led by young activist Greta Thunberg and other prominent activists will challenge the criminal blockade and deliver aid by air and sea.

This is all a tribute to the small island in the Caribbean that has shown that another world is possible. Cuba is an example of what it is possible to achieve when people are put before profits.

We pay tribute to the leaders like Fidel Castro who dedicated his life to the building of a different type of society.

The world will celebrate Fidel's centenary on 13 August 2026 reflecting on his enormous contribution to the world of politics and ideas. It doesn't matter how powerful US imperialism can be, it has a great weakness in itself, it cannot break people's solidarity. Solidarity is unbreakable and holds people together.

In Australia all solidarity organisations will be part of the solidarity effort through the Australia-Cuba Friendship Society across the country and CPA members will make a contribution.

We will continue to demand that the Australian government stand with the Cuban people by condemning the act of war by the US on the people of Cuba. We say voting once a year in the UN General Assembly is not enough, we expect much more.

We all say Cuba is not Alone!

Let Cuba live!

Down with the criminal US blockade on Cuba!

The Miami Five: 25 years on we must campaign for Cuba's freedom again

Geoff Bottoms

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the unjust conviction and sentencing of five Cuban political prisoners in the United States.

Known as the Miami Five, they faced charges ranging from using a false identity to conspiracy to commit espionage, and even murder, for which they were given sentences ranging from 15 years to double life.

In reality Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Labanino, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando Gonzalez and Rene Gonzalez had come from Cuba to infiltrate right-wing Cuban exile groups based in Miami, who had been responsible for terrorist attacks against Cuba.

For more than 40 years, those groups had killed almost 3,500 people and injured over 2,000 others with the complicity of the CIA and the US government.

Actions included chemical attacks on crops, biological attacks on livestock and the general population, the blowing up of a Cuban airliner in 1976, killing 78 people, and a bombing campaign against Cuban tourist hotels in the 1990s, killing an Italian tourist.

To save lives, Cuba sent these five men to Miami to infiltrate and monitor the groups. At the request of the US government, this information was passed to the FBI in 1998. Instead of arresting the terrorists, the US government arrested the five anti-terrorists on September 12 1998 in Miami, where they were illegally held in solitary confinement for 17 months.

The trial began in November 2000 in a hostile Miami, where the Cuban-American mafia, intent on destroying the Cuban Revolution, wield enormous political influence, making a fair trial impossible.

A change of venue was denied five times by the judge, defence evidence was suppressed and witnesses were intimidated by the local press. US officials testified that the Five had not accessed any classified documents, yet the jury reached a unanimous guilty verdict on all charges. All were convicted.

On 7 October 2011, Rene Gonzalez became the first of the Five to be released on parole from prison after serving his full term. In February 2014 Fernando Gonzalez also completed his sentence and returned home while in December 2014 the final three prisoners were released early as part of a prisoner exchange following an international campaign and talks between Cuba and the US.

Fast forward to the present day and the threat of terrorist and mercenary aggression remains. On 26 February 2026 Cuba intercepted a group of 10 armed anti-Cuban exiles on a Florida-registered speedboat in Cuban waters, who were trying to infiltrate the country from the US for terrorist purposes. After first opening fire, five of the exiles were fatally shot and five were wounded.

Earlier South Florida Republican lawmakers, Maria Elvira Salazar, Mario Diaz-Balart and Carlos Gimenez, had written a letter to the Trump administration urging the US Department of Justice to indict former Cuban leader Raul Castro, citing decades-old reports indicating that he personally ordered the attack on the Brothers to the Rescue aircraft 30 years ago, killing three US citizens and one permanent resident.

The aircraft belonging to the terrorist group was shot down after continually entering Cuba's air space and had been warned to leave.

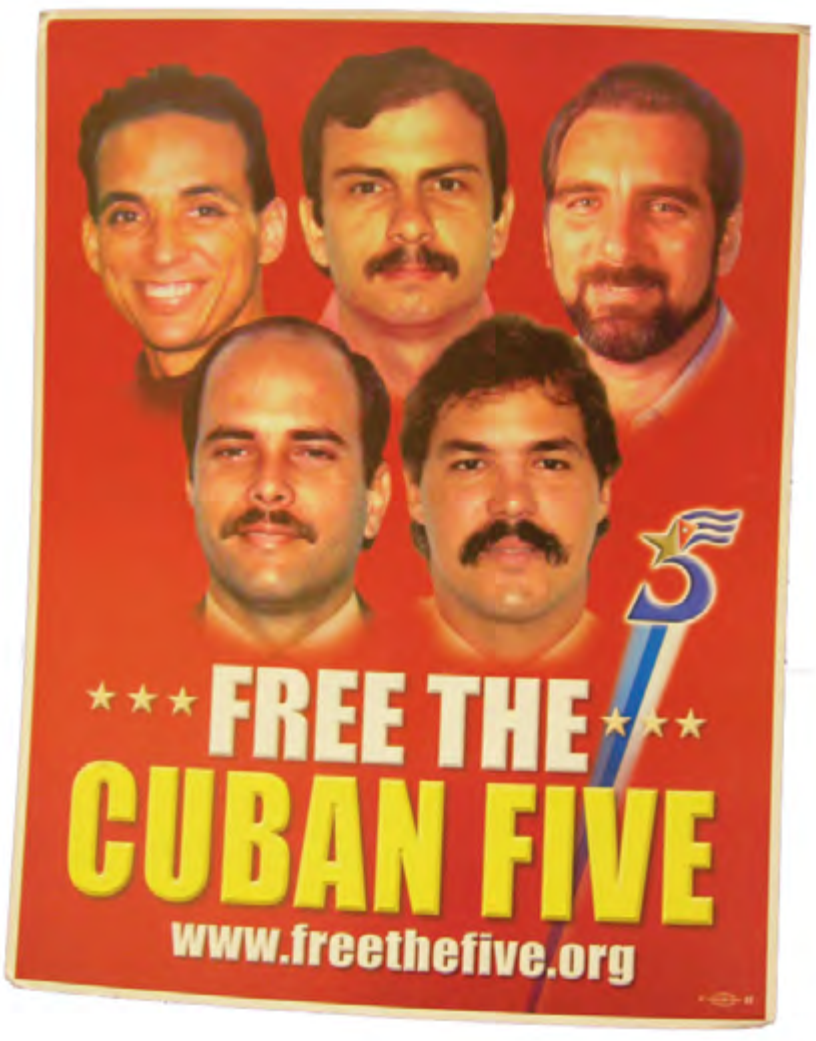
Following these calls, Florida's attorney-general James Uthmeier, announced that a state-level criminal investigation into the incident would be reopened. The top federal prosecutor in Miami, Jason Reding Quinones, is currently considering criminal investigations against Cuban government officials.

Cuba today faces an existential crisis with the escalation of the US economic, financial and commercial blockade whose origins lie in the Mallory Memorandum of 6 April 1960. This aimed to overthrow the revolution by cutting funding and supplies to Cuba, causing hunger, desperation and poverty, and basically starving the people into submission.

Following the absurd re-designation of Cuba as a State Sponsor of Terrorism by President Donald Trump within hours of his inauguration, the screw has been tightened even more by the signing of an executive order on 29 January this year that has declared Cuba to be an "unusual and extraordinary threat" to the national security of the United States.

The real threat that Cuba poses is that of an example, proving that another more just, peaceful, sustainable and equitable world is possible.

Morning Star (edited for space)



India: Maoist decline leaves villages deprived

Maximus M

Since late 2025, The Communist Party of India, Maoist or CPI(M) has been in decline from a series of attacks from the Indian government with the arrests, surrenders and killings of several top Maoist cadres.

In 2009, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called the Maoist People's War "the greatest internal security threat to our country."

As of 2026 the Indian government has almost reached its goal of eliminating the influence of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) particularly in the Dandakaranya region, what India calls the end of a decades-long People's War.

Over the past three years, Indian political and military operations have weakened the five decade-long insurgency. The recent surrender of top leaders, such as Mallujola Venugopal in October 2025, and the killing of top communist commander, Madvi Hidma in November 2025 as well as surrenders of communist forces have left the leadership of the CPI (M) in a divided position over its objectives for the People's War.

The retreat of Communist cadres across India has left a series of social and political vacuums. The Maoists didn't just engage in guerrilla warfare; they operated as an alternative structure of governance, playing a crucial role in dispute resolutions, the distribution of land and resources, and organised collective labour. In many places the CPI(M) role was far more important than the Indian government. Many villagers depended on the party when state presence was minimal.

If the Indian government continues to dismantle alternative power structures without replacing them and keeps up the attacks, it will lead to a state with no local governance. What's quite likely is that the problems which so aided the CPI(M) in the first place – illiteracy, healthcare disparity, insufficient infrastructure, and unemployment – will again flourish.

West Bank: Israeli forces shoot family after shopping trip

Peter Farmer

A husband and wife and two children have been shot in their car by IDF forces on the occupied West Bank according to a recent BBC report.

The family, Ali Khaled Bani Odeh, his wife Waad and their three young children had been shopping ahead of the Eid al-Fitr holiday in Nablus. They were on their way home when Israeli forces opened fire. The IDF claimed that the car accelerated towards them, but a nearby resident contradicted their account, saying that the car had come to a complete halt. Ambulance crew members have reported large amounts of bullet casings from assault rifles around the car.

One account reports that Waad had asked her husband to pull over so she could find something in her bag.

The West Bank is illegally occupied by Israeli forces. Violence towards Palestinians from Israeli settlers and soldiers has increased drastically since the Al Aqsa breakout on 7 October 2023. Over one thousand Palestinians, including 233 children, have been killed on the West Bank since 2023.

IDF soldiers of the Kfir Brigade participate in a West Bank raid, September 2024.
Photo: IDF Spokesperson's Unit – wikimedia.org (CC BY-SA 3.0)

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

instagram.com/communist.party.australia/

Global Briefs

OMAN: Oman has declared that it has no intention to join Trump's "Board of Peace." "We affirm our solidarity with the countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council, as well as with Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon ... We will not normalise relations with Israel and we will not join 'The Board of Peace,'" Oman's Foreign Ministry said in a statement. The decision, taken at the most crucial moment of the US-Israeli war against Iran, clearly demonstrates support for Iran. The move also serves Oman's interest in becoming a stable and safe place for capital – not involved in military alliances.

YEMEN: Yemen has taken the decision to support Iran, an Ansar Allah Political Bureau member said. The leader of the movement, Sayyed al-Houthi, accused leaders of the United States and Israel of openly discussing plans to reshape West Asia in favour of the "Greater Israel" project. The Yemeni leader said the Islamic world is currently facing a direct confrontation with the "tyrants of the era," represented by the Americans, zionists, and global powers seeking domination over the region. Yemen witnessed massive demonstrations on International Quds Day, reaffirming Yemen's solidarity with Iran. The demonstrations also extended support for Islamic Resistance in Lebanon and Iraq.

BRITAIN: The UK has accepted a US request to use its military bases to strike Iran. "The only way to stop the Iranian threat is to destroy the missiles at source, in their storage depots, or to destroy the launchers, which are used to fire the missiles. The United States has requested permission to use British bases for that purpose. We have taken the decision to accept this request," Starmer said. He added that he would send experts from the UK and Ukraine to the Gulf states to help the military shoot down Iranian drones. Iran's response was quick – Ukraine has become a legitimate target as it is directly involved in the conflict.

HUNGARY: Prime Minister Viktor Orban and his political opponent Peter Magyar called their supporters onto the streets of the capital for a show of strength before the election next month. Tens of thousands of Hungarians flooded the streets of Budapest. Orban's supporters marched under the slogan "We will not be a Ukrainian colony". The Orban government has long opposed the EU's policy of arming and funding Ukraine against Russia. Foreign Minister Peter Sziijarto, who was also present at the rally, claimed that Brussels and Kiev wanted to overthrow Orban's government "because they want Zelensky to form a government in Hungary as well".

GHANA: Ghana plans to submit a UN resolution declaring the transatlantic slave trade a 'grievous' crime against humanity and demanding reparations. The initiative has the backing of 40 African Union (AU) member states. The West African country has become one of the most vocal advocates for slavery reparations, "taking into account slave trade scale, duration, legalisation and enduring consequences." As the Ghanaian president said: "The truth about the story of the transatlantic slave trade must be told."

KOREA: The USA is planning to move part of its anti missile systems from South Korea to the Middle East. The Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense system, or THAAD was first installed in South Korea in 2017. South Koreans protested at the time, saying it made them a target. The move comes as Iranian missiles are straining the USA's military stocks. Early in March Iran destroyed the radar of a THAAD system in Jordan. A THAAD unit costs US $1bn and requires 100 personnel to operate.

Iran: women and girls bear the brunt

Claudia Webbe

Shajareh Tayyebeh school in Minab. Photo: Mehr News Agency – wikimedia.org (CC BY 4.0)

On 28 February just over a week before International Women's Day, the US and Israel launched an unlawful and illegal war on Iran.

On the very first morning of the war, while children sat at their desks at the Shajareh Tayyebeh girls' elementary school in Minab, three missiles struck the building. It was a "triple-tap" – a second strike designed to kill those who survived the first, and a third to ensure no rescue.

At least 175 people were killed. Most of them were girls between the ages of seven and 12 – 165 out of a pupil population of just 170. A mass funeral filled the streets of Minab. Sixty-nine children were so completely destroyed that their remains required DNA identification. The deliberate targeting of a girls' school led to comments from critics, including Iranian academic Professor Foad Izadi, that the "Epstein class" had moved from raping girls in the west to murdering them in Iran.

Meanwhile, the pro-Israel propaganda network got to work, spreading entirely false claims that Iranian forces had hit the school in an echo of the early days of Israel's genocide in Gaza. The first Israeli bombings of schools and hospitals there were blamed on "misfiring" Hamas rockets while Israel denied any responsibility. Within a few months, every school and hospital in Gaza had been bombed, often repeatedly, and the invaders no longer bothered denying it.

Hundreds of thousands flooded the streets for the girls' funeral, creating scenes that should have been on the front page of every newspaper. Not one carried it.

In all three ways, the Minab school attack therefore typified the horror of modern warfare. Women and girls are treated as targets, responsibility is denied and fingers are pointed, then the media move on. By the time the truth is confirmed, it's been left behind by the narrative.

The same narrative tactics seen in Gaza were accompanied by the same brutality toward civilians. Women and children were especially singled out – not only through direct violence but through acts intended to humiliate and degrade them as women. Accounts describe women and children being forced to strip and paraded before husbands, fathers and strangers. In some cases, Israeli soldiers filmed themselves posing and celebrating in the underwear of those they had humiliated. Such scenes were not confined to Gaza. Similar practices soon appeared in the occupation's treatment of women in the West Bank and even in the treatment of Palestinians who hold Israeli citizenship.

These abuses are serious war crimes. They are also part of a broader pattern of violence directed at Palestinian women. According to the United Nations, rape, sexual torture and other forms of gender-based abuse have been reported both in Gaza and, especially, in Israeli detention camps where many women are held for months or years without trial or charge. These horrific abuses intensified from the earliest days of the genocide and continue now, with harrowing accounts from women eventually released or from the legal representatives of those still held.

Even when they avoid direct abuse, Palestinian women suffer many of the worst impacts of war. Maintaining dignity where sanitary products and privacy are non-existent, the struggle to feed their children, the impact of malnutrition on pregnancy and breastfeeding – all these become so close to impossible that a new report by Israeli human rights group B'Tselem describes Palestinian women in Gaza as "clinging to what's left of life."

Nor are these patterns confined to Gaza or to Palestinians alone, or to the women and children of Iran under US-Israeli carpet-bombing. Equally horrific scenes of rape, violence, murder and starvation have emerged from Sudan, where the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have been accused of genocidal atrocities in Darfur and the United Arab Emirates has been accused of providing support to the militia. Some analysts have also argued that the RSF has adopted rhetorical strategies similar to those used by Israel to justify attacks on civilians. The consequences of regional violence are also being felt in Lebanon, where escalating hostilities and Israeli air strikes have displaced civilians and damaged critical infrastructure.

A 2025 United Nations report observed that these conditions have created significant barriers for women in Lebanon seeking healthcare and safe childbirth while increasing their exposure to gender-based violence and exploitation. The United Nations has described these impacts as deeply gendered.

Yet while the United Nations has condemned many of these crimes, it is reduced to doing little more than wringing its hands in response, and thus remains structurally incapable of enforcing the principles it proclaims. The genocide of Gaza by Israel has exposed the profound limits of international law when confronted by powerful states and their allies. What was once presented as a universal legal order now appears increasingly contingent on power: applied to adversaries, ignored for friends. Western leaders have begun to say this openly.

Morning Star (edited for space)

Laos: Party Secretary General calls for swift action

Peter Farmer

It's Congress time in Laos too. The Lao People's Revolutionary Party has finished its 12th National Party Congress and the Party leadership is moving on the Resolutions adopted there.

Party Secretary General Thongloun Sisoulith has made recommendations to the Party Central Committee on ways to ensure the Resolutions are carried out swiftly and with clear focus to achieve practicable results.

Sisoulith has addressed the 2nd Plenary Session of the 12th Central Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party. He advised Committee members to prepare for the inaugural meetings of the new National Assembly and Provincial People's Councils in a comprehensive and thorough manner.

"The Politburo must be a strong, highly unified team and work together in the coming years to resolve the problems we still face," he added.

"Let's continue efforts to resolve outstanding issues and make new breakthroughs. We also want to ensure the 12th National Congress of the Lao Front for National Development is a great success, and push forward the unified implementation of new guidelines for the reform of the Lao Front's work, so it is more effective in the current era of development," he said.

The Party Secretary General also stressed the need for a strong focus on inspections, the work done by government offices and the media, efforts to build up grassroots political foundations, and spur rural development, poverty alleviation, and implementation of the Party's Three Builds directive, which calls for action at the province, district and village levels to reduce poverty and improve administration.

Sisoulith called for a renewed patriotic spirit and continuous development to bring about a positive transformation in production and business operations on the path to creating an independent economy, self-reliance, and greater self-strength.

During the Central Committee plenary, the Party Central Committee approved several important documents and issued a number of guidelines.

Members approved the Committee's plan of work over the next five years, and the fundamentals of action plans and focused work plans for each central and local sector.

Participants agreed on the need for effective use of personnel and visible shows of respect and compliance with the principles of democratic centralism.

The meeting agreed to strengthen the wisdom and strength of the Party Central Committee and avoid situations in which the Party Secretary General uses his rights and powers in an arbitrary manner during decision-making.

The 10th five-year National Socio-economic Development Plan will be submitted to the National Assembly for successful approval and effective implementation.

Central Committee members specified that the roles, rights and duties of provincial Party Secretaries and the Mayor of Vientiane, as well as the relationship between district Party Secretaries and district Governors, must comply with democratic principles and not encroach on each other's rights and duties.

A Provincial Party Secretary, acting on behalf of the Chairman of the Provincial People's Council, is responsible for monitoring and inspecting the work undertaken by local administrative organisations, ensuring they strictly comply with the rules and are decisive and transparent.

Each locality should establish communes in line with the set plan, which must be completed by mid-2027 at the latest, prior to nationwide implementation.

All work undertaken must comply with Party and State guidelines and policies, especially the Resolutions adopted by the 12th National Party Congress, with the aim of reaching grassroots communities.

Finally, the Party Central Committee called for the monitoring of business managers to ensure they do not violate discipline regulations and other legal obligations, promote only talented and competent individuals, and act with integrity.

By *Times* Reporters
(Latest Update 10 March 2026)
Vientiane Times

China helps Cuba achieve 900 MW per day solar power generation

Graham Holton

The Trump administration's energy siege on Cuba – cutting off oil from Venezuela, threatening punitive tariffs on any country that dares sell fuel to the island – is designed to bring the Cuban Revolution to its knees. What it has produced instead is one of the fastest and most remarkable renewable energy transitions ever achieved by a developing country, carried out in close partnership with socialist China.

Facing blackouts lasting up to 20 hours a day, Cuba has responded not with capitulation but with transformation. In just twelve months, solar power's share of Cuba's electricity generation has tripled from 5.8 per cent to over 20 per cent, with 49 new solar parks now connected to the national grid. Wind energy, electric public transport and decentralised home solar systems are all expanding rapidly. The long-term goal is full energy sovereignty – complete independence from imported fossil fuels by 2050.

Cuba's Ministry of Energy and Mines has announced that the country has achieved a record 900 MW (Megawatts) of solar electricity generation, marking a significant milestone in its rapid renewable energy expansion. This produces more than 20 per cent of Cuba's annual power requirement. The accelerated deployment of solar power, in partnership with China, reduces the reliance on ageing, fossil-fuel thermal plants and helps combat the present chronic power outages. Currently, Cuba lacks sufficient battery storage, meaning it cannot alleviate shortages during nighttime peak demand. Still, this achievement represents a significant step towards 2,100 MW of solar capacity by 2028. The present need is 2,500 MW daily.

Under the United States oil embargo Cuba's largest thermoelectric plants have failed due to the lack of fuel, age and finance for maintenance. With the cessation of oil shipments from Venezuela and Mexico, Cuba is unable to obtain oil from international markets as tankers are sanctioned under the present US blockade, which is at its worst in more than 60 years. As a consequence, the country's power generation has suffered greatly.

The Cuban government has tried several emergency measures. In the 2010s Cuba expanded renewables, with wind parks and biomass from sugar mills. It imported floating power plants using Turkish generator ships. Diesel generator networks were installed as small local generators. These alternatives only provided 15 per cent of its electricity generation; the rest came from the large thermoelectric power plants. Cuba is now setting up solar farms.

China has become a major partner in developing solar power in Cuba, helping the country replace imported oil.

The cooperation involves financing, equipment, and technical expertise for large solar parks and smaller systems.

In 2025 seven Chinese-supported solar parks were connected to Cuba's grid, to produce 35 MW, saving 18,000 tonnes of fuel annually. Cuba plans to construct ninety-two solar parks by 2028, adding 2,000 MW of solar capacity, which is close to Cuba's entire fossil-fuel power generation. Studies have shown the feasibility of a 100 per cent renewable electricity scenario for Cuba by 2050. With Chinese assistance, Cuba aims to expand solar energy to 2 GW (Gigawatts) annual electrical power capacity.

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel has emphasised the importance of these renewable energy projects, highlighting the way their clean energy contributes to environmental sustainability and strengthens Cuba's long term energy requirements. Solar projects will improve energy supply and reduce power costs.

Cuban Energy Minister Vicente de la O Levy said that with China's help, the project represents "a joint commitment to energy sovereignty."

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Half the Sky

Cuban women protest US imperialism through song

GH

Cuba is a famously musical country. Cuban women have long protested against US imperialism through their music, intertwining anti-colonial sentiment, national sovereignty and feminist critique. Women singers and composers combined traditional Cuban music and songs, blending poetry and melody with political messages. Popular music fusion combined salsa, son, and rumba to carry anti-US messages through lyrics about economic exploitation and US hegemony.

Following the 1959 Revolution, women's music became explicitly political. The revolutionary government promoted anti-imperialism, and female performers expressed national pride and resistance to US influence. They critiqued US intervention through songs protesting economic domination, the military threats of the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis, and cultural imperialism. National sovereignty celebrated Cuban independence, socialist achievements, and women's contributions to revolutionary society. Gendered perspectives on imperialism highlighted how US policies impacted women's work, family life, and social status. Solidarity with global anti-imperialist movements through songs connected Cuba's struggle alongside other nations of Latin America, Africa, and Asia who were also resisting US imperialism.

Songs were often circulated orally, or through grassroots radio, building a shared sense of female solidarity. They inspired women to mobilise within revolutionary structures or in clandestine feminist groups when official avenues were limited. Combined with dance and performance, music functioned as both entertainment and education, passing on feminist consciousness to younger generations.

In the 1940s during the Buena Vista Social Club era, which was primarily romantic and social in theme, they subtly critiqued gender norms. In the 1950s Tania Castellanos and other Cuban women singers used folk and trova styles to discuss women's agency, reproductive rights, and labour conditions. Afro-Cuban women performers integrated spiritual and secular music to highlight intersectional struggles, blending traditional percussion with feminist lyrics. Afro-Cuban rhythms integrated into protest songs to highlight cultural identity alongside political critique. Female singers emphasised both women's empowerment and resistance to US cultural and economic imperialism.

Gender inequality and sexism were critiqued as were patriarchal norms, harassment and workplace discrimination. Songs of domestic violence explicitly called for awareness and resistance against abuse. Commentary told of women's limited influence in political participation and civil rights before Cuba's revolutionary ideals of equality. Afro-Cuban women rappers highlighted the dual oppression of race and gender, connecting cultural pride with activism. Sexual autonomy and identity in songs explore reproductive rights, bodily autonomy, and LGBTQ+ visibility.

Mobilisation and awareness through songs function as grassroots education tools, especially for young women in urban neighbourhoods. Some Cuban female rappers collaborate with global feminist hip-hop networks, amplifying their messages abroad producing international solidarity. By adopting global urban genres and infusing them with local political content, Cuban women asserted both artistic and political agency in spaces often dominated by men.

The 2000s saw women integrate popular genres – salsa, rumba, and urban music – to critique US policies. Female artists blended traditional and modern sounds to reach younger audiences while maintaining anti-imperialist messages. Songs celebrated Cuba's international solidarity efforts, linking local struggles to global anti-imperialist movements.

In the 2020s Cuban women abroad produce music directly addressing US imperialism, economic sanctions, and cultural domination. Contemporary Cuban women increasingly use urban music, diaspora platforms, and social media to communicate protest, reaching both national and international audiences. Social media allows circulation of politically charged songs, often combining feminist themes with anti-US sentiment. Critiques of external oppression are paired with gendered struggles, emphasising the dual pressures of imperialism and patriarchy. The rebellion through music continues.

Protesting? Read this

When powerful organisations or groups harm Australians, states don't do nothing. They rush through laws to clamp down on protests that might challenge those organisations. Laws, some originally designed to prevent terrorist attacks have been used to stop or slow down protests against fossil fuel companies. Now the pro-Israel lobby is urging governments to criminalise protests that challenge the apartheid state. Naturally governments are cooperating.

Here is a list of protest laws you should know about if you're planning to take action.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Two laws are on their way through the Legislative Council. One makes it an offence to share images or videos of 'relevant offences' with intent to glorify or boast about what the images show. The laws are meant to stop social media boasting about antisocial behaviour, but they're so broad in scope they could easily be used against peaceful protesters.

The Cook Labor government is also passing a law to allow police to refuse a protest permit if they think it could lead to hate based on religion or race. The law also bans face coverings in public protests. Who gets to decide if a protest could lead to hate? The police.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The Summary Offences Amendments Act 2017 allows the state Attorney-General to declare an area a 'public precinct' giving police the ability to evict people from the area, using force if necessary, as well as the authority to conduct drug detection and metal detector searches without warrants. The legislation has mainly impacted homeless people, but could easily be used on protests.

The Summary Offences (Obstruction of Public Places) Amendment Act 2023 imposes Australia's harshest fines for protest. The state can recover emergency services costs from protest organisers, as well as a maximum fine of $50,000 or 3 months imprisonment.

VICTORIA

Victorian councils can make their own protest laws, but need to seek police approval to give a protest the go-ahead. As of 2009 police can designate an area as 'high-crime' which means police can conduct no-warrant searches. In 2025, the Allan Labor government, with Coalition support passed an amendment which gives police the power to order protesters to remove masks. As in NSW, the legislation allows the prohibition of protests outside of or near places of worship.

TASMANIA

Tasmania is the only state where it's an offence to hold a public demonstration without first obtaining a police permit. In 2022 an Act was passed making it an offence to trespass in industrial areas, including forests, or to prevent someone from carrying out work. Protesters can be fined over $14,000 or imprisoned if the offence is repeated. Police can charge and arrest people for merely holding up traffic.

NEW SOUTH WALES

Protesters are required to notify police ahead of protests, giving police control over which protests go ahead. Police can block a protest by citing public safety concerns. Business property is protected with police able to search people or their cars and seize items without a warrant if they believe the items are intended to interfere with a business.

Ministers can designate any road or infrastructure facility as a 'major' facility, which means protesters can face fines of up to $22,000 if they conduct an unauthorised protest there.

The Minns government has been especially anti-protest, creating new offences for disrupting or obstructing access to a place of worship. They also rushed through legislation in wake of the Bondi attack prohibiting the public display of "terrorist organisation symbols,' with two years imprisonment or a $22,000 fine. Police now have the power to fine protesters $5,500 for refusing to remove a face covering. The Police Commissioner can make a 'public assembly restriction declaration' and prohibit a public gathering for 90 days after a terrorist act.

QUEENSLAND

Police can search and detain people in public places using hand held metal detectors without a warrant or even reasonable suspicion. Under 2019 legislation, police were given greater powers to search people and vehicles at protests.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

In 2006, the Martin Labor government made it an offence to loiter in a public place after being told to move on by a police officer. The law isn't directly aimed at protesters, but can obviously be used against them. Loitering is defined very broadly.

Based on material from the Human Rights Law Centre and Deepcut ✪

Photo: M Santos

Who gets to decide if a protest could lead to hate? The police.

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