



Trade union rights

TIME TO ACT!

Anna Pha

If the trade union movement is to survive a unified movement to defend trade unions and defeat anti-union legislation must be built on as broad a basis as possible. Last week the High Court and the Federal Court, using the full force of the Coalition government's state machinery hit the union movement and militant unionists with two savage blows.

The first is an attempt to intimidate militant trade unionists by banning unions from paying officials' fines. The second hits the Building and Construction division of the CFMEU with a \$1 million penalty. This comes on top of more than \$12 million in penalties for "unlawful" industrial conduct over the past six years and millions more in settlement of common law claims.

The High Court handed down a ruling on Wednesday, February 14, banning the CFMEU from paying the fines of one of its officials for "unlawful" conduct.

In 2016, the Federal Court had imposed penalties against the CFMEU and its official Joseph Myles, for an "unlawful blockade" of the \$4.3 billion Regional Rail Link project site in Melbourne in 2013, which prevented the delivery of concrete to the site and caused tonnes of wastage.

For his breaches of the Fair Work Act, the Federal Court ordered Myles to personally pay a penalty of \$18,000. The CFMEU appealed to a full bench of the Court and won.

The Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) then took the decision to the High Court which saw fit to hear it. The High Court found in favour of the ABCC and determined that the CFMEU cannot pay Myles' fine.

"Sting"

The Court found that there was "a conscious and deliberate strategy by the CFMEU and its officers to engage in disruptive, threatening and abusive behaviour towards employers without regard to the lawfulness of that action, and impervious to the prospect of prosecution and penalties".

In doing so, the High Court stated, "... the principal object of an order that a person pay a pecuniary penalty ... is deterrence: specific deterrence of the contravener and, by his or her example, general deterrence of other would-be contraveners."

"An order that a contravener must not seek or receive indemnity from his or her co-contravener ... assists in accomplishing the calculated level of sting or burden of the pecuniary penalty ..."

This historic ruling is in effect yet another act of intimidation in a climate of fear and



Photo: Anna Pha

intimidation that the government set out to create under rule of its industry cop, ABCC. This ruling could apply to any union, any union official, in any industry.

The CFMEU previously paid Boral up to \$9 million in 2015 to settle the company's damages case against the union over the boycott.

The High Court is the highest court in the Australian judicial system. Its functions are to interpret and apply the law of Australia; to decide cases of special federal significance including challenges to the constitutional validity of laws and to hear appeals, by special leave, from Federal, State and Territory courts. Apart from giving the impression of overkill, it is difficult to see how this case warrants taking up its time.

Secondary boycott next weapon

The trade union Royal Commission and the Productivity Commission called for the greater use of the secondary boycott provisions in the *Competition and Consumer Act* (CCA) in their reports to the union-bashing Abbott government. They also recommended a massive hike in the maximum fines from \$750,000 to \$10 million for trade unions.

The Coalition increased the penalties and now the ABCC has heeded their advice and used the CCA against a trade union as if it were a corporation.

The court ruled that the CFMEU contravened section 45D(1) of the CCA by

engaging in conduct in concert with a shop steward at two sites which hindered or prevented the acquisition of concrete from Boral and its subsidiary Alsaf for the purpose of causing substantial loss or damage to Boral's business.

It further ruled that the conduct was likely to have the effect of causing substantial loss or damage to Boral.

Secondary boycott conduct, which is prohibited under section 45D of the CCA, involves at least two people acting in concert to hinder or prevent third parties from acquiring goods or services from, or supplying goods or services to, a fourth person, with the purpose and effect, or likely effect, of causing substantial loss or damage to the business of the fourth person.

Criminalising trade union activity

Historically, industrial relations has been a matter for special tribunals and commissions to settle disputes and prevent industrial action. Successive governments have been shifting industrial relations law into the arena of corporate and even criminal law.

The provisions of the Fair Work Act, ABCC legislation and CCA are so restrictive that almost all industrial action is now illegal and can be subjected to substantial civil penalties and even larger damages actions.

There is a big difference between the criminal law and the civil law, the latter carrying jail sentences. Failure to pay court-ordered penalties or damages awarded by courts is

contempt of court which is a criminal offence carrying the possibility of jail.

And this is where it is headed next. The aim is to bankrupt trade unions, their officials and militant unionists. The massive penalties can be forced on them by sequestering their homes, cars and other personal effects if they cannot pay. After that it is jail.

CUDL

The secondary boycott decision highlights the importance of trade unions and the community working together. The government and employers are doing everything they can to kneecap trade unions.

Organisations such as the Community Union Defence League, affectionately referred to by its initials as "CUDL", are the way forward. (See *Guardian*, #1722, 09-03-2016, "Solidarity is infectious.") The Your Rights @ Work campaign also provided a good model but regrettably was dismantled after the defeat of the Howard government.

CUDL is a grassroots organisation set up to support trade unions and unionists. At its launch in Adelaide last year it raised \$4,000 to assist local unionists like CFMEU organiser Jimmy O'Connor who had been fined \$12,000 by the Federal Court for doing nothing more than defending his members.

There is also an urgent need to build an alternative, progressive political force with the necessary support to win government and repeal existing laws. The Communist Party of Australia is ready to be part of that work to build such a force. ★

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Guardian

Issue 1811

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It's your ABC – defend it

The ABC's Charter requires its broadcasts to include a wide range of political views, allowing the public to make informed decisions about important issues. It also states the ABC Board must "ensure that the gathering and presentation of news and information is accurate and impartial ..."

An official investigation of 200 complaints lodged between 2012 and 2017 found only one breach of impartiality and none of inaccuracy. But that's not what the government or commercial media want to hear. Nine months ago Immigration Minister Peter Dutton attacked Q&A host Tony Jones for saying "...if you're a young black American you're more likely to be killed by a policeman".

Jones was replying to panellist Professor Lawrence Krauss' statement: "The real people who are in danger from Muslim terrorists are in the Muslim countries." It didn't matter to Dutton that both statements were relevant and factually correct. He later snarled: "I don't watch (Q&A) and it's a waste of taxpayers' money".

Last October Queensland Liberal-National MP George Christensen attacked the ABC over its coverage of the proposed Adani coal mine in Queensland. Christensen said the ABC repeated "allegations, accusations and unsubstantiated claims" concerning lung disease experienced by children living near an Adani Mine in Goa. He claimed that in order to maintain "balance" the ABC should now do a story about unemployment in central Queensland.

He ignored the long-established link between coal dust and lung disease, the mine's potentially disastrous impact on the environment, and the fact that building coal mines isn't the only way to provide regional employment. He's now being investigated for an on-line threat – that involves a firearm – against "greenies".

Last week Prime Minister Turnbull criticised the ABC after journalist Emma Alberici explained how investment depreciation claims allow big corporations, including Qantas, to declare they're too poor to pay tax, while simultaneously telling shareholders they've made millions of dollars in profits.

Turnbull wasn't upset by the fact that big corporations dodge tax, what made him mad was that the ABC had pointed it out.

Conservative politicians like Turnbull want to safeguard commercial media from competition and big business from critical scrutiny. Commercial media can't compete with the ABC's digital broadcasting services, including news broadcasts on Apple News, Facebook, Snapchat and WhatsApp.

Accordingly, the government introduced legislation to increase the national dominance of commercial media. It's cut the ABC's per capita funding, which in adjusted terms has fallen from eight cents a day in 1987 to four cents a day currently, 34 percent lower than the international average for public broadcasters.

In 2016 it also appointed former NewsCorp executive Michelle Guthrie as ABC managing director. Some of the ABC's key staff have now resigned or been retrenched. Two ABC radio current affairs programs have been cut from one hour to half an hour in duration. The incisive current affairs program *Lateline* has been terminated, apparently on the pretext it's simply been running too long. What prospect for the ABC's current affairs flagship *Four Corners*, first broadcast in the 1960s!

Guthrie did mount a fierce attack on right-wing magazine *Quadrant*, which published an article suggesting last year's Manchester bombing attack should have been directed at ABC headquarters in Sydney, a reflection of the corporate media's deep antagonism toward the national broadcaster.

And in exchange for One Nation voting for the commercial broadcasting legislation on cross-media ownership, the government has agreed to publicise the salaries of every ABC employee who earns more than \$200,000 annually, and to amend the ABC charter to include the words "fair and reasonable" regarding its news and current affairs broadcasts.

If the Charter is changed, the government will use its own definition of "fair and reasonable" to eliminate the ABC's independence, forcing its focus towards trivia, sensationalism and gossip – just like the commercial broadcasters.

But commercial media wants the government to go further. It wants the ABC to be privatised. The national broadcaster underpins democracy and is a national treasure in terms of our cultural heritage. The attacks on it must be repulsed.

PRESS FUND

As the unlovely politician Barnaby Joyce clings limpet-like to the National Party leadership, many people have discussed his extramarital affair's impact on his wife and daughters. A Fairfax correspondent observed drily: "Perhaps he just wanted a boy". But spare a thought for the unborn. Children often have difficulty living in the shadow of an infamous parent, but Barnaby junior will have a particularly tough time if rumours that his father has a corrupt relationship with a local businessman are confirmed. We'll bring you more about this mini-saga of illicit love intertwined with political intrigue, but we need Press Fund contributions, so please send us something for the next issue if you possibly can. Many thanks to last week's supporters, as follows:

June Ayres \$30, Dr G Dittura \$10, MM \$10, AP \$25, "Rough Red" \$5, "Round Figure" \$15

This week's total: \$95 Progressive total: \$950

Gate-keeper Australia

January 31 marked the high point of independence celebrations on Nauru. Curiously the celebrations were marked by the government lifting the ban on Facebook that was imposed in 2015, as part of the crackdown on democratic rights that also removed the right to protest, when hundreds of asylum seekers began to protest against their imprisonment in Nauru.

Nauru is now known internationally for the human rights abuses perpetrated on the island. Sexual assault, bashings, routine robberies of asylum seekers and refugees are ignored by the police force.

The celebrations of "independence" are overshadowed by Nauru's role as a jailer for the Australian government. With the phosphate resources almost completely depleted, Nauru was vulnerable to the millions of dollars offered by Australia to maintain Nauru as an offshore detention centre; money on which it is now dependent.

Nauru lost its independence when it allowed itself to be subordinated to the decisions of Australia's Border Force. Nauru has been unable to respond to the New Zealand government's offer to take refugees, because Australia is the gate-keeper, preventing any arrangements being made between Nauru and New Zealand.

Even HOST International, contracted to provide

services to refugees in the Nauru community, were drawn into the celebrations with precious welfare dollars being spent catering for various independence events, often for the Nauruan elite.

Nauru's celebrations are overshadowed by the stark contrast between the celebrations and the conditions on the island for both poor Nauruans and the asylum seekers and refugees that are held on the prison island – some still living in tents after four and half years.

There are many children on Nauru who cannot get the medical help they need because it is not available on Nauru and Border Force obstructs recommendations that they travel to Australia for treatment.

Many families have been separated – fathers from their partners and new babies; brothers from sisters and mothers – by deliberate government policy.

"Ending offshore detention would be a genuine step to Nauru regaining its independence, and freeing itself from the stain of its culpability for human rights abuses," said Ian Rintoul, from the Refugee Action Coalition.

"Hundreds of asylum seekers and refugees face being left behind on Nauru regardless of the US deal. Unless the asylum seekers and refugees are brought to Australia, Nauru's future will be blighted by its role as a prison island for Australia." ☹

Who will feed us?

We are told that it is big agribusiness, with its flashy technofixes and financial clout, that will save the world from widespread hunger and malnutrition and help food systems weather the impacts of climate change.

We are told that the Industrial Food Chain, through globalisation and consolidation, will help us survive climate change and address nutritional deficiencies by commercialising next generation, "climate-smart" technologies. The assumption that the Industrial Food Chain, driven by commercial interest, will feed the world has no factual basis.

However, a new report from ETC Group* shows that in fact, it is a diverse network of small-scale producers, dubbed the Peasant Food Web, that feeds 70 percent of the world, including the most hungry and marginalised people.

Drawing on a wide variety of sources, the report concludes that it is the Peasant Food Web that has the diversity, resilience, and light footprint needed to successfully adapt to climate change. Global agribusiness, on the other hand, is a major source of carbon emissions, and made vulnerable by genetic uniformity.

The flagship report, *Who Will Feed Us?*, is a data-driven report full of unexpected statistics that reveal a tale of two food systems.

This is the third edition, and most complete synthesis, of a research exercise that the ETC Group have been undertaking for several years. *Who Will Feed Us?* upturns common assumptions about who feeds whom in a hungry world threatened by climate change.

Some highlights of the report:
Peasants (not food corporations)



feed the world: 70 percent of the world's population is fed by the Peasant Food Web, using only 25 percent of resources.

Industrial food production fails to feed: Only 24 percent of the food produced by the Industrial Food Chain actually reaches people – the rest is wasted in meat production inefficiencies; lost in transport, storage and at the household; and diverted to non-food products.

Industrial food costs us more: For every dollar spent on industrial food, it costs another two dollars to clean up the mess.

The theme of World Food Day in 2017 was changing the face of migration by investing in food security and rural development.

With the right policies, land and rights, peasant-led agro-ecological strategies could double or even triple rural employment, substantially reducing the pressure for urban migration, significantly improve nutritional quality and availability and eliminate hunger while slashing agriculture's greenhouse gas emissions by more than 90 percent.

The report is available on the ETC Group website.

*ETC Group is a non-profit international organisation that works to address the socioeconomic and ecological issues surrounding new technologies that could have an impact on the world's poorest and most vulnerable people. ☹

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“ Inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them. ”

1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid

Centrelink issues hit remote people

Rudi Maxwell

Aboriginal people from remote communities in the Northern Territory are struggling to access enough money to eat, due to difficulties contacting Centrelink. And, at the same time, the Turnbull government has come under fire for handing over \$430,000 to an American consultancy firm for ideas about resolving problems with Centrelink call centres.

Centrelink telephone services have attracted sustained criticism in recent years, with more than 55 million calls met with an engaged tone in the past financial year.

Telephone wait times also ballooned over the year, with people calling the welfare agency waiting on average 15 minutes and 44 seconds to speak with someone. However, in remote communities the wait times are frequently more than an hour and problems are exacerbated by the lack of Aboriginal language interpreters.

Michael Gravener is the chief executive of Urapuntja Aboriginal Corporation, the peak body representing more than 1,200 people living on 16 homelands 250 kilometres north-east of Alice Springs on the Alyawarra and Angarapa Aboriginal Land Trust. He told the *Koori Mail* that every day, people were struggling to get help from Centrelink to deal with issues relating to the Basics Card, the income management tool introduced by the Howard government for Aboriginal people in the NT more than 10 years ago.

"If an old person loses their Basics Card, it can take up to eight weeks to get a new one," he said. "It's pathetic. The mob are treated as second-class citizens, and it's racist."

Mr Gravener said that when faced with long wait times to speak with Centrelink, many people gave up. "With the Basics Card, we had a situation ... where a man had \$38 left on his card and couldn't access it. He was hungry and spent one-and-a-half hours on the phone until he finally got through, when he was told, because there's no Alyawarra interpreter available, that they weren't going to be able to help him.

"My mate gave him \$30 to get a feed.

"To be fair, [the next day] we rang again



and we got somebody who said, 'that's a very bad error,' and actually solved the problem. But it's the inconsistency; it's about people being able to put food on the table, and access water out here.

"It's just cruel"

"I'd suggest if you rang every remote community, you'd get the same story. Our staff spend an incredible amount of time helping people with Centrelink. It's just cruel."

Pressure on the Centrelink call system prompted the Federal Government to team up with outsourcing group Serco late last year to help operate the service, taking on an extra 250 staff to cut through the backlog of calls.

Now, in a development first reported by the UK *Guardian Australia*, the federal government has brought in a foreign consultant to improve the call centre operations.

The contract was awarded on a limited tender to US-based consultancy Brad Cleveland Company LLC for \$430,000.

Labor human services spokeswoman, Linda Burney, said throwing money at consultants and outsourcing groups would not fix the problems at Centrelink. "[Prime Minister Malcolm] Turnbull cut 1,200 jobs from Centrelink at last year's Budget, and unanswered calls doubled to 55 million," she said.

"Centrelink needs permanent, fulltime staff, who are qualified and familiar with the often complex issues facing Australians who require income support."

Mr Gravener said the problems for Aboriginal people from remote communities who were on Centrelink were made even more complex by low levels of financial literacy and unscrupulous companies, who sign up people to debt payments with high levels of interest,

including white goods retailers and phone companies.

"I would like to see a serious attempt by the Prime Minister to sit down and actually talk to remote communities," he said. "The government talks about creating stronger communities but then decisions are made by people who have never even met the people they're supposed to be serving.

"We need to be heard.

"The Basics Card makes life a lot more difficult. There's a shame element; Aboriginal people are treated differently, and it's quite noticeable when you walk around.

"And it's treating people like children, not allowing them to be responsible for their own money. The system penalises everyone involved when most Aboriginal people are quite capable of looking after themselves."

Koori Mail ☺

From the Archives

The Guardian, November 1995



Perth



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Criminalising journalism

The Turnbull government's *National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Bill 2017*, introduced on the last sitting day of Parliament in 2017, would criminalise all steps of news reporting and pose a grave threat to press freedom in this country.

One leading academic says the Bill would make Australia the worst nation in the free world for criminalising journalism. Peter Greste says the laws are a gross over-reach and make it "incredibly difficult" for journalists to do their duty of holding governments to account.

The Bill would make it a crime for anyone to "receive" and "handle" certain national security information. A journalist in possession of a document classified "top secret" could face 20 years in jail – even if they never broadcast or publish a story.

The result is that fair scrutiny and public interest reporting is increasingly difficult and there is a real risk that journalists could go to jail for doing their jobs. It also undermines the ability of journalists to work with their sources, including whistle blowers, on important news stories.

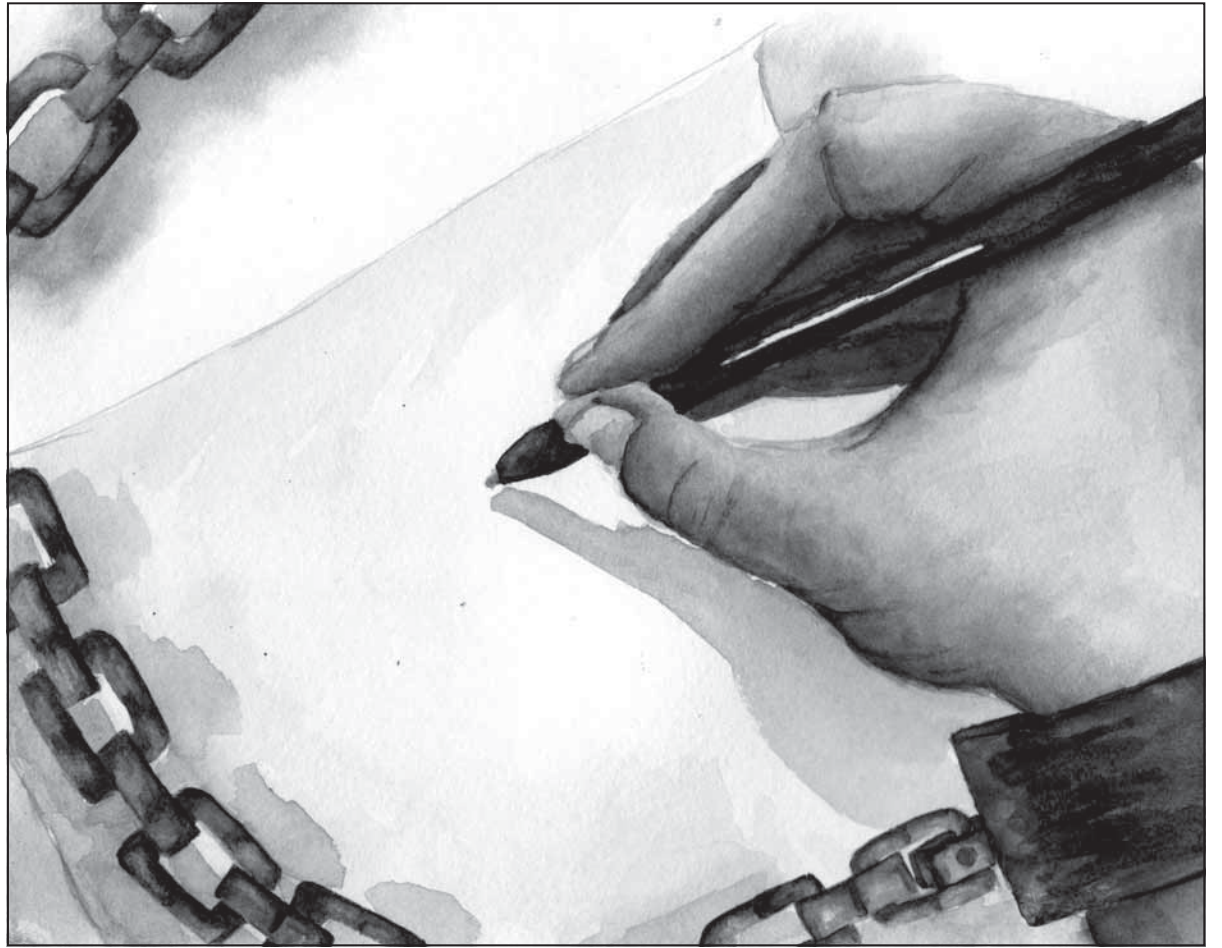
This applies to not only journalists but other editorial staff and support staff that know of the information, from sub-editors and designers to even the receptionist who is handed a classified document.

Public interest defences for journalists are so broad and subjective at a time when accusations of "fake news" are raised so readily, that they offer no protection at all.

This Bill is just the latest in a raft of strict national security and anti-terror measures that have undermined the ability of the news media to report on matters in the public interest and to play its role in a healthy democracy by keeping Australians informed about their environment and communities. There have been 67 pieces of "national security" legislation passed since September 2001.

The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, along with all major media publishers and broadcasters, says the Bill should not proceed unless there is a robust general public interest/news reporting defence for both the secrecy and espionage elements.

In the name of press freedom and government accountability, the MEAA calls on the Turnbull government to withdraw the Bill until it is rewritten to protect journalists from criminal prosecution. ✪



Free labour force not technically "employed"

Closing the Gap set the goal of halving the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous unemployment rates by 2018 in 2007. In the tenth Closing the Gap report, released last week, the Turnbull government confirmed that this target will not be met.

In conceding this failure, the government argued that the figures on Indigenous employment have been "complicated" by the fact that people who were working, and earning a wage, through previous programs are no longer classified as being employed because they are subject to the Abbott/Turnbull government's racially discriminatory Community Development Program (CDP).

"Workers subject to the CDP are forced to work 25 hours per week, often in manual labour positions, are not paid, receive no employment benefits or rights, have no access to OHS protections or workers' compensation. CDP does not generate jobs, in fact, it displaces them," said ACTU spokesperson Kara Keys.

"The introduction of a scheme which creates a pool of free Indigenous workers ready to be exploited by for-profit businesses, decimating employment opportunities in remote and regional communities has undoubtedly 'complicated' Indigenous employment.

"It is obscene that a government which has enacted a policy as brutal as CDP is now trying to cook the books and explain away the devastating effects of their own program.

"This program is devastating for tens of thousands of people in remote communities who are expected to slave away for no wages. All the hand wringing in the world will not change that.

"The CDP has had a disastrous impact on employment opportunities in remote and regional communities. The Turnbull government is handing out free labour and wondering why employers don't seem interested in paying anyone a wage.

"This program is not about helping Indigenous people or empowering communities, it is about punishment and compliance. The rates of penalties handed out in this program far exceed all other welfare programs.

"If the Turnbull government wants to get serious about closing the gap on Indigenous unemployment it needs to abandon this paternalistic, racist approach and invest in communities on an equal footing. Indigenous workers, like all other workers, should be entitled to decent work, respect and jobs which pay a wage. Until this happens, sadly, we should expect to see more of the same." ✪

Review by Denis Doherty

Taking the Party to the People - a practical handbook

Following up the theme of the CPA's National 13th Congress, taking the party to the people, the Maritime Branch of the CPA has published a "how to" manual entitled *Taking the Party to the People - a practical handbook*.

The handbook focuses on three major areas – working with the organised working class in unions on industrial issues with special emphasis on the maritime industry, working on community issues such as housing, and working in the mass movement at times of national stress such as a war or threat of war or industrial upheaval like the campaign against WorkChoices.

The book seeks to explain and make real the concept of a branch being a centre of political activity. At present most of the Australian working class look towards the ALP for leadership and support but the CPA works to replace the ALP in the hearts of the working class, in our workplaces and communities.

The great majority of CPA members live in urban areas so it is important that the Party is active in that setting. Neo-liberal ideas have impacted the cities by making them places for huge profit at the expense of the community. Communities have been robbed of adequate housing, heritage buildings, open space, swimming pools and much more, all to feed the god of profit. The manual outlines ways to work in this environment so we campaign with and for urban dwellers.

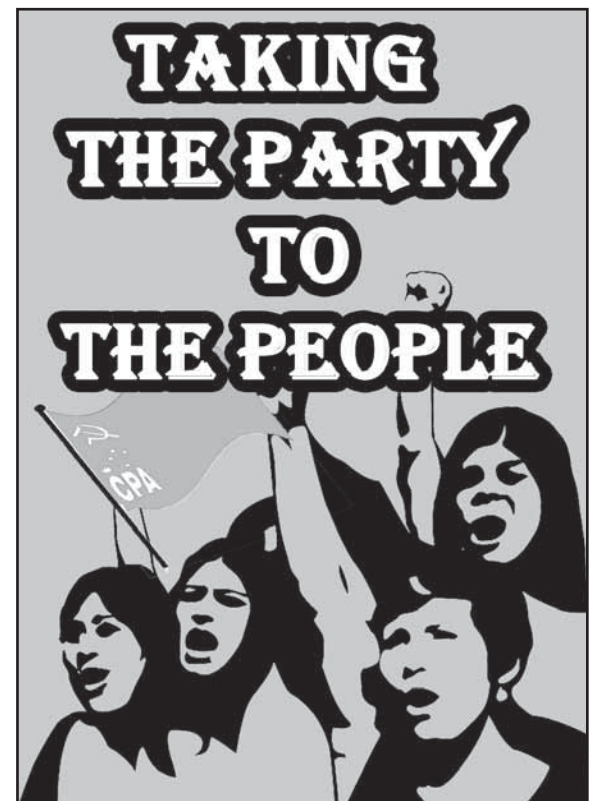
Interlaced in the text are historical accounts of great communist actions and campaigns, taken from the CPA and the South African Communist Party.

The problem of time for activism is discussed. CPA members have to juggle work, family, chores around the house and recreation. Members who neglect their work and/or family are not doing themselves or the party any favours.

The handbook suggests comrades should spend two hours a week as a starter, apart from party meetings. By comparison one author in this field reckoned 14 hours per week would be a reasonable start!

The book should help get Party members active in a branch and with some study and discussion ready and able to put the 13th Congress' resolution into action.

Friends and supporters are welcome to use this



manual too. The publication is also invaluable for classes for new members, getting them used to action rather than just talk.

Taking the Party to the People answers the vital questions posed by our 13th Congress: how can we grow and be really effective if we are practically invisible to the great bulk of people?

The Maritime Branch offers a free pdf format to all branches who contact us or \$2 each plus postage for those wanting a hard copy.

For copies apply to peace@mira.net ✪

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Extreme weather and extreme politics

Rob Gowland

Extreme weather events have always been with us. What makes them noteworthy now is their increasing frequency and severity, and the realisation that both those aspects are a consequence of human activity. Or to use the appropriate scientific terminology: a consequence of anthropogenic climate disruption (ACD).

Of course, there are those – like Donald Trump or Tony Abbott – who simply don't believe in ACD. It offends their faith in God or the market. They prefer to blame sunspots or simply to deny that anything unusual is happening at all. But while the very rich can turn a blind eye to extreme weather events from the comfort and security of their penthouses, it doesn't make ACD any less real, especially for the poor who don't have the benefits of wealth with which to cushion its effects.

It is significant that right-wing politicians through-out the world generally reject ACD. In fact, most actually deny even the possibility of damaging climate change, and vehemently reject the possibility that humans might be responsible for it. They seize on any alternative explanation they can find and blithely assume that, somehow, the rich will be able to buy their way out of the problem.

And, of course, as they demonstrate constantly, they have no faith in science, so scientific evidence carries no weight for them. So they can choose to believe or ignore it as they see fit, on the grounds that it is simply "someone's opinion". In the same way, they can ignore completely the potentially catastrophic consequences of such a policy. But not for too much longer.

2017 was the third-hottest year on record for the Earth. It saw bush fires in Australia and Spain, floods in Paris, record-breaking wildfires in California, record-breaking rainfall

events in Texas, damaging hail events, tornadoes, and extreme droughts in other parts of the US. Most of these are recognised as having been fuelled at least in part by ACD.

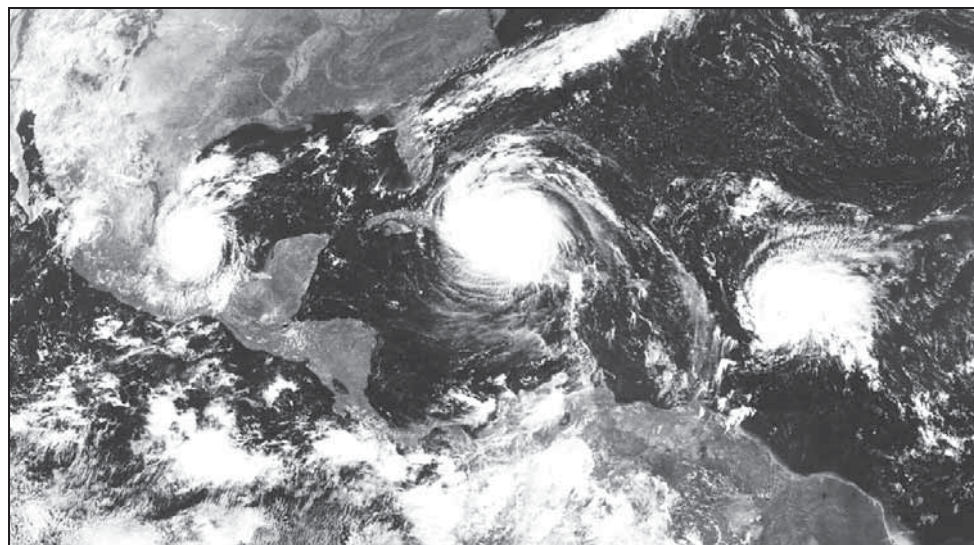
Despite a very cautious approach, J Marshall Shepherd, professor of meteorology at the University of Georgia, in a statement to Britain's *Guardian* newspaper once again confirmed the link between extreme weather events and climate change: "While we have to be careful about kneejerk cause-effect discussions, the National Academy of Science and recent peer-reviewed literature continue to show that some of today's extremes have climate change fingerprints on them."

And Kerry Emanuel, a professor of atmospheric science at MIT commented: "We've been saying for decades now that there are two things that are a pretty sure bet. The incidence of high-intensity events are going to go up in general, and rainfall from a given hurricane is going to go up a lot."

The cost to national economies of these extreme weather events is itself extreme. For example, the three most expensive hurricanes to ever hit the US all occurred in 2017. In fact, extreme weather events combined cost the US nearly a third of a trillion dollars (\$306 billion) in 2017.

As award-winning US investigative journalist Dahr Jamail, wrote in *Truthout*, "That is more money than the US government spent in 2015 on transportation, housing and community, international affairs, energy and the environment, and science, combined."

But \$300 billion plus is chicken feed compared to projected total global future costs of ACD. US banking giant Citigroup released a report in 2015 warning that inaction on ACD could cost up to \$44 trillion by the year 2060. A report in the journal *Nature* in 2013 warned of unchecked ACD causing global damages total-ling upwards of \$60 trillion – from unchecked



Satellite image shows three storms in the Atlantic: Hurricane Irma, Tropical Storm Jose, and Tropical Storm Katia, in September last year.

release of Arctic methane gases alone. A 2015 study by Cambridge University's Judge Business School warned that global damage from a "moderate warming scenario" would be a staggering \$400 trillion.

Dahr Jamail raises an additional and very alarming point in his article in *Truthout*. After noting that "the ACD impacts we've seen thus far are a result of humans having increased the global temperature approximately 1°C", he goes on to state that, "Behind closed doors, oil giants Shell and BP are planning for global temperatures to rise by as much as 5°C by 2050."

I see no reason not to believe him. It's precisely what you would expect from corporations that make their money from exploiting greenhouse-gas-emitting fossil fuels! If a one degree rise can produce the climate chaos we

are already seeing, the consequences of a five degree rise will be truly catastrophic. Clearly, the fate of the world cannot be left in the hands of greedy corporations with a vested interest in causing – and denying – climate change.

As Dahr Jamail says: "The costs – financial and beyond – are, at this point, too great to predict." Unfortunately, waiting until we know for certain is not an option: by then it might be too late, the change to the climate irreversible.

The corporations that are prepared to play fast and loose with our planet's future must have their wings clipped before they destroy us all. This is a campaign that, under the leadership of the working class, the class that does not decide issues on the basis of greed, can unite the mass of the people against the dominant one percent and their instruments of power. ✪

Australian Navy offends both Koreas

The Australian Navy participated in the HAEDOLI WALLABY war games off the coast of South Korea (ROK) between November 1 and 3. Two navy ships HMAS Melbourne and HMAS Parramatta and an Australian Airforce P-8 were involved. The physical presence of the ships inevitably increased tension and antagonism on the Korean Peninsula.

The timing of the exercise was an expression of the Turnbull's government hairy-chested commitment to backing US President Trump's bellicose pursuit of North Korea (DPRK).

North Korean representatives expressed their disgust at Australia's grovelling behaviour. They even threatened a missile attack on Australia.

Once the military exercises were finished, the Australian Navy ships sailed into the ROK naval base on Jeju. Protests erupted immediately at the nearby village of Gangjeong. Photos of the protest actions show banners with the names of the two Australian warships.

The *Gangjeong Newsletter* (November 2017) refers critically to an increase in military exercises in the Korean region conducted by the US and its allies. The article alleges that the RAN ships and some others were to blame for environmental damage and were also insensitive to the people of Jeju Island.

The newsletter also accuses the Australian ships of dumping their trash and sewerage on the island. It claims that the amount of rubbish from warships already surpasses the island's infrastructure.

Australian peace groups have written to the Minister for Defence, Senator Payne, to ask why Australian warships are allowed to create environmental vandalism and undermine Australia's international reputation.

The newsletter asserts that the island is designated an Island of Peace by the Korean government because of a past history of terrible massacres. The very presence of the Australian warships is offensive to the sensibility of the people of Jeju.

The newsletter says Australian ships are not helping to bring peace to the Korean Peninsula. The opposite is true. "Jeju is being used for port visits by the ships that join frequent joint military exercises, which practice for war and thus make war more likely to happen," the article states.

The Communist Party of Australia passed a resolution in its recent 13th Congress calling on the Australian government to adopt a "freeze on freeze policy" in regard to Korea which would include no military exercises, no missile tests and no nuclear tests. Freeze on freeze is a far better way to go than the regime of sanctions and threats encouraged by Australian military visits. ✪



Sudan

Regime crumbling, call for solidarity

Ben Chacko

Morning Star readers will be aware of the huge protests that rocked Sudan last month – and of the rapid arrest of many of the protest leaders, including Sudanese Communist Party general secretary Mohamed Mokhtar al-Khatieb. Last week, over 60 communist parties signed an appeal for the release of Khatieb and other political prisoners in Sudan and called on authorities to ensure they had access to medical care and legal advice.

Leading Sudanese communist Rashid Sidahmed says a few prisoners have been released – but others could be in more danger than before.

“Comrades Kamal Karar, Muhiedeen al-Jalag and Siddy Kabalo were transferred to Zalingi prison in the west of Darfur,” he tells the *Morning Star*. “A town in the vicinity of camps for displaced people and where many of the atrocities occurred. We are concerned for their safety. Many have medical conditions that require attention – with treatments not available in prison and in short supply over the whole province.

“Some of these conditions stem from previous detentions.”

There is little doubt that prisoners are at risk in Sudanese jails, even the colloquial names of which send a shiver down the spine. Stories of torture and murder are associated with the “ghost houses,” secret prison sites where enemies of the regime have been taken.

Sidahmed also talks of “war zoos” controlled by irregular militias, where “physical liquidation can be attributed to chaos.”

“The number under arrest is more than 300 from all opposition forces, and while a few have been released over the past couple of days, some more have also been arrested.”

The crackdown doesn’t just affect communists – Sidahmed says members of the Uma Party, Ba’ath Party, Sudanese Congress Party, Hashed Unity, the Democratic Front and women’s and student organisations have been rounded up alongside human rights activists.

“The detainees represent all shades of the Sudanese political spectrum bar the National Congress Party” (NCP).

The NCP is the Islamist party that rules Sudan and is headed by Omar Bashir, who has been president of the country since he seized power in 1989. Bashir has survived global outrage over the atrocities committed in Darfur, and even the sundering of the country when South Sudan broke away in 2011.

But the Sudanese communists say last month’s protests, sparked by a budget ending subsidies and thus forcing up the price of bread and other necessities, could be the beginning of the end for the tyrant.

Case for revolution

“We believe the regime has exhausted itself in the futile exercise of self-preservation to the extent that it is taking an irrecoverable nosedive,” Sidahmed says.

“It is a classic case for revolution. A regime which cannot govern, and a people who have reached a point where they cannot accept the status quo.” He looks back to the giant protests against fuel price rises of autumn 2013 – “the first massive revolt against the regime since 1989, with over 200 young martyrs.

“Yet this year’s demonstrations were more organised and more people participated.

“They were designed to continue and to build, making use of innovative methods to guarantee sustainability and resilience. The January 16, 17 and 31 demonstrations were the culmination of a long resistance to the NCP’s policies.

“The 2018 budget triggered a long-brewing revolt which has accumulated for 28 years. The adoption of free-market policies perpetrated by the IMF’s classic prescription – wasting the country’s resources in non-productive or developmental projects, selling vast areas of land to foreign investors, dismantling major projects such as the Gezira irrigation scheme, Sudan Railways, Sudan Shipping Lines, Sudan Airways, dedicating over 70 percent of GDP to the armed and security forces – all this has helped ripen the situation.”

Things ought to have improved for Bashir when the US lifted 20-year-old sanctions last October – but Sidahmed says that with the sanctions gone “the regime lost one of its brainwashing tools. They used to attribute all the difficulties in providing peace and adequate living standards to the sanctions.”

Hence the thousands-strong demonstrations that took place last month, rallies the Communist Party played the chief role in organising but which saw involvement of dozens of other groups.

“The alliance between us and other political and civil forces was not built on only ideological grounds – it is composed of many strains of political ideas, but the common denominator is changing the Islamic fundamentalist regime and stopping Sudan from sliding into chaos.

Reinstate democracy

“We have to reinstate a democratic system that is able to stop the wars and rebuild the war-torn parts of the country, create a reconciliation plan. In order to do that we have basically forged an agreement called the Democratic Alternative.

“Only under democracy will our party be able to achieve its objectives. In a nutshell, we are ready to work with and alongside all Sudanese whose objectives are not compatible with the NCP’s.

“Sudan is sitting on a ticking bomb – we have to disarm it first and strive to create a progressive, just and prosperous society. These are massive tasks and cannot be achieved by our party’s efforts alone.

“The way forward is to continue employing realistic tactics and involving all forces that aspire to change, peace and democracy in Sudan on the platform of a wide popular front.”

I ask if independence for South Sudan has helped or hindered this goal.

“The right of the South Sudanese to choose their future is unquestionable. But the secession of South Sudan has definitely weakened the potential for a strong and prosperous

country, enjoying a great position in Africa and the Arab world.

“In retrospect, had the NCP acted in a balanced or patriotic way, the referendum results would have been in favour of unity. But we should not cry over spilt milk.

“What we hope for and will work for in the future is a special relationship between our two countries, with aspirations of real co-operation, perhaps federal agreements, and maybe reunification – who knows?”

These are questions for the longer term. Right now, Sidahmed’s thoughts are with his imprisoned comrades. He calls for mounting pressure on the authorities in Khartoum to end the repression and release the prisoners.

Solidarity

“We believe in solidarity and its power to influence decisions, especially when a regime like that of the NCP is craving acceptance within the international community.

“We also believe in the effectiveness of media attention and its role in galvanising opinion and shedding light on the atrocities of despotic regimes like that in Sudan.

“The regime has been forced to respond to such pressure in the past, albeit reluctantly.

“We can see some results of that pressure in the last few days. But we think that the regime is fully aware that this time is not like the other times, so it is very difficult to predict its responses.

“We can only say that maintaining the solidarity campaigns is important and could be effective. What we need is wide exposure of the situation and winning over official bodies, governments and human rights organisations, exposing those states and organisations which assist the regime’s survival.

“This should be loud and clear so we keep the Sudan issue continuously in the limelight. There are forces within British political parties and trade unions who could be instrumental in this endeavour.”

Morning Star ✪



On Israel and the question of apartheid

Eric A Gordon

Culver City, California: From 2008 to 2014 Professor Richard Falk served as United Nations special rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories. He dropped a bombshell on his audience when he declared that ending the Occupation, as so many human rights activists around the world seek to do, is simply not the answer, and not enough to address what he has seen and studied for many years.

"Israel has made it clear that the end of Occupation would be the end of the conflict," he told more than a hundred attentive listeners February 7 at this city's Culver-Palms United Methodist Church. That would be "a way of finding some measure of normalcy," he said, and ignoring the problems besetting the 20 percent Palestinian minority within Israel's recognised borders, not to mention the several million Palestinians – the youngest of them now in the fifth generation since expulsion from Israel in 1948 – still confined to refugee camps in the West Bank and in a number of neighbouring countries, and also not to mention the uncertain fate of the Gazans if the end of Occupation dealt separately with that million-plus population.

No, Falk, insisted, it is only correct to look at the Palestinians as a coherent people, wherever they live, and not provide tacit consent to the fragmentation both geographical and political to which Israel has subjected them. Viewed in those terms, ending the Occupation alone, without addressing the larger issue afflicting the Palestinian nation, is "a misunderstood pragmatism."

That larger issue, claims this academic, author of some 20 books, is the structure of oppression itself, including physical displacement and all the policies and practices Israel promotes toward the Palestinian people. "The conflict is not purely territorial," Falk says.

Apartheid

The UN report that he co-authored with Virginia Tilley, professor of political science at Southern Illinois University, names that structure "apartheid," meaning "separation" in Afrikaans.

The 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid does not speak only of South Africa. There the term is defined as "inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them."

Following Professor Falk's formal remarks, a questioner asked if, in the case of Israel, "apartheid" would be the correct term to apply, since the Jewish population of Israel is itself multi-ethnic and multi-racial, comprising not only Ashkenazic Jews from Northern and Eastern Europe, but Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews from the Mediterranean and Muslim lands, as well as Ethiopian and Indian Jews. Falk responded that Israeli law treats all these Jews the same, entitling them to the same rights and privileges that are denied to Palestinians, such as the sacred "right of return" to Israel by Jews, most of whose ancestors never inhabited Biblical Israel. "The whole rationale of Israel is to be a Jewish state, and they don't fragment their own identity."



Richard Falk, 87, is professor emeritus of international law at Princeton University, where he taught for 40 years. He is chairman of both the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor and serves on the editorial board of *The Nation* magazine. Although he retired from formal teaching in 2001, the following year he began a career as research professor at the Orfalea Centre for Global and International Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He currently directs a Global Climate Change, Human Security, and Democracy project.

The professor's talk was co-sponsored by a coalition of groups inclusive of Muslims, Christians and Jews: LA Jews for Peace and the United Methodists' Holy Land Task Force, along with The Markaz, Friends of Sabeel of LA and Orange County, People for Palestine-Israel Justice, Southern California Workmen's Circle/Arbeter Ring, the Orange County Cousins Club, Jewish Voices for Peace, and Interfaith Communities United for Justice and Peace (ICUJP).

UN-bashing

The Falk-Tilley report, "Israeli Practices towards the Palestinian People and the Question of Apartheid," was released March 15, 2017, under the aegis of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). Its release caused an immediate firestorm, raising accusations of anti-Semitism against the authors (Falk is Jewish incidentally), and providing space for more UN-bashing, especially on the part of Israel and the United States. Although the ESCWA countries unanimously endorsed the report, and although the report was issued as representing the view of the authors alone and not the UN per se, it was removed from the UN website under threat of US withdrawal of UN funding; however, it is otherwise available.

Defenders of Israel are particularly

sensitive about the word "apartheid," citing factors that existed in South Africa but which do not exist in Israel, such as separate park benches and Arab representation in the Knesset. But as anyone who follows Israeli politics knows, leading figures in Israeli life, including prime ministers, writers and journalists from both the left and the right, have consistently used this word in Hebrew, addressing fellow Israelis, warning of the consequences of a failure to make peace leading to permanent apartheid.

It's when the word gets uttered in public forums in English that Israelis and their supporters hear the whole Zionist project being attacked. Jimmy Carter and John Kerry are only two American statesmen who have felt the brunt of Israel's condemnation.

In many other ways Israel has defied the international community, for example, by referring to the occupied West Bank territories as "Judea and Samaria," ancient Biblical terms which international law does not recognise as legitimate; and insisting on calling the Palestinians "Arabs," as if to say they belong in other homelands, not in the Jewish state.

And although there are a few outstanding border questions in the world, there is no other state which doesn't even claim its final and definitive borders: By creating more "facts on the ground" with each year's growing settler encroachment on land that would have been the natural Palestinian state, Israel has been pushing steadily toward complete annexation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

Israel has tried to politically separate Gaza from the larger Palestinian nation and for now seems to have abandoned that area for Jewish settlement. But at least one strand of thinking in Israel wishes to remove the Palestinians from Gaza one way or another, and free up that land for eventual incorporation into the Zionist state.

Nationalism/colonialism

The problem of Israel, according to Falk, is that the nationalism born in Europe in the 19th century made its way to the rest of the world by the mid-20th century and helped to create many newly independent countries in the wake of colonialism. But Israel, founded in 1948, came along at the end of the nationalist wave, and the global community had become sceptical of colonial projects in the underdeveloped world.

"The Palestinian people have been made to pay the price for the crimes of the Nazis," Falk says.

There is an inherent tension, says Falk, between Israel's self-definition as a Jewish state and its claim to be a democratic society. Especially as more and more Palestinians fall under direct or indirect Israeli control in the variously segmented entities between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, the contradiction between these two professed ideals becomes ever sharper.

In almost every case, Falk says, where an oppressed people, with inferior arms and weak social institutions, sets out to oppose their colonial or neo-colonial masters, they eventually win. The Palestinians will continue to resist, "and they are right to resist," he insists. From the Israeli point of view, the resistance is a challenge to the established order and must be put down. The United States, more substantively than anyone else in the world, gives Israel this unconditional mandate.

"Until that mandate is lifted," says Falk, "there will be no peace. It's our struggle here to end this destructive policy."

Richard Falk and Virginia Tilley wrote an "Open Letter to UN Ambassador Nikki Haley on Our Report on Apartheid in Israel."

People's World ✪

In almost every case, Falk says, where an oppressed people, with inferior arms and weak social institutions, sets out to oppose their colonial or neo-colonial masters, they eventually win.

Against US wars at home and abroad

Resolution of the Conference on US Foreign Military Bases, held at University of Baltimore, Baltimore, Maryland, January 12-14, 2018

WHEREAS the United States has been in a state of perpetual war and has been using its unrivalled military might in every corner of the world to subdue, dominate and exploit sovereign nations for the benefit of its rich and powerful elite and corporations in violation of international law; and

WHEREAS it is widely recognised that the Pentagon itself, its 1,000 bases worldwide, its endless wars, its enormous use of fossil fuels, toxic substances and massive pollution around its bases has made the US military machine the world's biggest institutional consumer of petroleum products, the world's worst polluter of greenhouse gas emission, and this huge military waste footprint from US bases is sickening both people and the earth; and

WHEREAS the US military and war budget almost equals that of the rest of the world combined, reaching \$700 billion in the Pentagon alone, not counting nuclear weapons, so-called Homeland Security, mercenaries employed by the State Department, debt for past wars, and many other expenses totalling well over \$1 trillion; and

WHEREAS, while the United States ranks first by far in military

spending, it ranks 7th in literacy, 20th in education, 25th in infrastructure quality, 37th in quality of health care, 31st in life expectancy, and 56th in infant mortality; and

WHEREAS the bipartisan militaristic foreign policy and spending has enriched the coffers of the war industry, causing ever-higher levels of economic inequality, racial, ethnic and gender discrimination and oppression, poverty, hunger and homelessness; and

WHEREAS the global militarisation and racism of US war policy has greatly increased the militarisation of the police, attacks on civil liberties and the growth of White Supremacy at home; and

WHEREAS since 2001 the United States has used its military force for invading and bombing in numerous countries – Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan – eventually costing the American taxpayers \$4 trillion in Afghanistan and Iraq alone, and is now threatening to attack Iran and North Korea; and

WHEREAS the United States maintains close to 1,000 foreign military bases and tens of thousands of troops in more than 175 countries of the world at the cost of over \$150 billion a year; and

WHEREAS the bipartisan militarisation of our foreign policy has led to the death of an untold number of civilians, terror by drones, destruction of infrastructure and the environment, massive number of refugees, creating chaos and terrorism



Air Force jets perform an exercise at the American Kadena Air Base in Japan.

by destabilising sovereign nations; and

WHEREAS, in addition to hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties caused by US wars, 6,831 US military personnel have died in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and about one million have been injured; and

WHEREAS there are over 39,000 homeless military veterans, on any night more than 1.4 million are at high risk of homelessness, of which 9 percent are female veterans, and 20 military veterans or active duty military take their own lives each day; and

WHEREAS the development and enlargement of nuclear armaments has heightened the threat of nuclear annihilation; and

WHEREAS it is vital that the

workers, unions and peace, social justice and environmentalist forces unite in a joint movement to promote a foreign policy independent of the political and economic interests of Wall Street, corporate America and the military-industrial complex;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the organisations endorsing the Coalition Against US Foreign Military Bases, including those present at the Conference on US Foreign Military Bases convened in Baltimore, Maryland, call upon all peace, social justice and environmental forces in the United States to join hands in organising a United National Day of Anti-War Action in the spring of 2018 to demand: – Ending all US

wars, bombings and drone attacks and other forms of US aggression, including economic sanctions and weapons sales; – Closing of all US bases on foreign soil; – Bringing all US troops home; – Using the funds of the massive military budget for human needs and protection of the environment; – Dismantling all nuclear weapons.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Coordinating Committee of the Coalition Against US Foreign Military Bases and the organisations and activists present at this Conference commit ourselves to helping with the organisation of this United National Day of Anti-War Action, and we invite our international friends to join us.

Socialist Voice ☘

A class question – SACP

Cyril Ramaphosa was sworn in this week as South Africa's new president after the resignation late last night of Jacob Zuma. Ramaphosa was the only candidate nominated for election after two opposition parties said they would not participate.

They instead tried to have parliament dissolved and elections brought forward from 2019.

Zuma resigned after years of scandals that damaged the reputation of the ruling ANC, which had instructed him this week to step down or face a parliamentary motion of no confidence that he would almost certainly have lost.

Mr Zuma denies any wrongdoing, saying in a television interview that he felt he was being treated unfairly and had not been told why he should quit. He faces an

investigation into his relationship with the billionaire Gupta family, which has been dubbed "state capture" because of their alleged influence, and the reopening of a corruption case related to a 1990s government arms deal.

In a statement, union umbrella body COSATU said that it welcomed Mr Ramaphosa's "long overdue" election and noted his past as a trade union leader and ANC negotiator. But while the unions expressed relief at the resignation of Mr Zuma, COSATU warned that there was no time for self-congratulatory back-slapping.

"There is no time for handling crooks with kid gloves. There is no time for laziness when addressing the jobs bloodbath and unemployment. We demand an activist, capacitated developmental state

that we have long fought for," it wrote.

"COSATU expects government to wake up to the economic crisis that is drowning workers and their families in poverty and rising unemployment."

The South African Communist Party noted the vital task of "radically reducing class, race and gender inequalities and uneven development between urban and rural areas" that Mr Ramaphosa must get to grips with.

"In particular, this requires increased attention to rural development and resolute policy measures to uplift the quality of life of the workers and poor through giving effect to the right to work as enshrined in the Freedom Charter and expanding decent work for all." *Morning Star* ☘

Afghans seek justice

Afghans have submitted 1.17 million statements on war crimes to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the three months since it began collecting material for possible prosecutions. The statements contain accusations of criminal conduct by the United States-led NATO invaders, Afghanistan's Western-backed government, foreign and domestic spy agencies, government-supporting warlords, the Taliban and other jihadist insurgents.

Abdul Wadood Pedram of the Kabul-based Human Rights and Eradication of Violence Organisation said the total number of people seeking justice from the ICC could be several million, as one statement might include multiple people and a single organisation might represent thousands of victim statements.

"It is shocking there are so many," Mr Pedram said, noting that in some instances whole villages were represented. Many of the representations include statements involving multiple victims, which could be the result of air strikes, assassinations or suicide bombings, he said.

The statements were collected by organisations based in Afghanistan and Europe, but Mr Pedram said that, though he had the organisations' names, they were reluctant to be publicly identified as they feared retaliation.

Mr Pedram himself was forced to flee Kabul briefly last year after receiving death threats. Several powerful warlords who aided the US invasion in 2001 have been accused of war crimes.

"The warlords are all here. You have to be very careful," Mr Pedram said.

The *New York Times* reported in 2013 that, for over a decade, the CIA has delivered suitcases full of cash to Afghanistan's president each month for him to dish out to warlords.

The ICC can only consider crimes alleged to have been committed after May 2003, when the country ratified the court's Rome Statute. While the US has rejected the court's jurisdiction, its citizens can be charged with crimes committed in countries that are members.

US, British and other NATO forces have been responsible for a long list of war crimes in Afghanistan, including indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas, the murder of civilians in deadly night raids by special forces and the killing of other civilians in drone and missile assassinations, as well as routine kidnapping, torture and rape.

In 2015, the US military even bombed a hospital in Kunduz for more than 30 minutes in broad daylight.

Morning Star ☘



Sydney

**VIGIL DEMANDING
THAT THE USA STOP
THE BLOCKADE ON CUBA**

12:30 pm Saturday March 17 Sydney Town Hall

After the vigil off to Cockatoo Island for a picnic
and a discussion of the history of the Cuban struggle.

Solidarity with the Government and the People of Bolivarian Venezuela

The US government is not slowing in its attempt to annihilate the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela in order to seize the enormous wealth of that country and to strike an unprecedented blow on all of Latin America. To do so it is sparing no effort.

In 2015, the previous administration decreed that Venezuela constituted “an unusual danger for the National Security of the United States of America”. As absurd as the decree is it remains in force today. This was implemented without Venezuela ever having threatened any country. Since Hugo Chavez assumed power in 1999 there has been a steady drum beat of war plans emanating from Washington.

The interference against Venezuela has intensified after the election of Trump, by renewing Obama’s decree in January 2017 and orchestrating threats from the Organisation of American States (OAS) through the buffoon of that imperial court, Luis Almagro, with the application of the Democratic Charter during the months of February and March. In April, extreme violent groups caused more than 100 deaths.

The siege and economic pressure is growing with a fierce media campaign of discrediting the

democratically elected President Nicolás Maduro on an international scale with no recognition of the country’s democratic institutions.

The media lies do not take into account all of the 19 electoral processes carried out by the Bolivarian government nor the efforts to bring to the table a dialogue with the opposition that is best characterised by its dependence and servitude to imperialism. Venezuela recently gave a democratic civics lesson to all with the sovereign decision of the people by electing the National Constituent Assembly that has now set a general election date for April 22.

It is in this context that the US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson recently toured Latin American countries with the main objective of lining them up to increase pressure for a military coup, specifically in Venezuela, but to also resurrect the Monroe Doctrine for the entire region with the infamous imperial phrase, “America for the Americans”; a true reflection of their aspirations for intervention and domination.

The pressure and exchange of favours with the subservient governments of Latin America resulted in the pathetic declaration of February 13 of the Lima Group, which supported the decision of the corrupt right-wing government of Peru to

exclude Venezuela from the Summit of the Americas.

The empire is relying on the corrupt coup plotters like Temer and Macri, the fraudulent murderers like Hernández in Honduras, right-wingers involved in corruption up to their necks like Cartes of Paraguay and Pedro Pablo Kuczynski from Peru. And then there is Santos who is responsible for the continuation of the paramilitary death squads in Colombia. These are the scum who the Empire are relying on with total cynicism to denigrate Venezuela about democracy and human rights, all of whom will sooner or later be judged by their own people.

We call on International Solidarity to keep alert and be in permanent mobilization in the face of the real danger of a provocation on the borders of Venezuela, aimed at creating a conflict that will give a justification for a multinational military intervention. We call for unrestricted support for the Bolivarian government of Venezuela, the candidacy of President Nicolás Maduro and the holding of elections on April 22.

More than ever, the Proclamation of CELAC that “Latin America is a Zone of Peace” must prevail. International Committee Peace, Justice and Dignity ✪



Region Briefs

Thailand: On February 7, a court in Bangkok began a defamation trial against 14 migrant workers from Myanmar who accused a Thai chicken farm of labour abuse, a case rights groups say is an effort to silence whistle-blowers. The workers stated they were forced to work upwards of 20 hours a day without compensation for overtime, among other abuses on the farm owned by Thammakaset, a meat supplier to the Thai food conglomerate Betagro. The poultry farm in response charged the workers with criminal defamation after they filed a complaint with a national rights commission in 2016, alleging they had been overworked and underpaid. Historically Thailand has a reputation for exploiting migrant workers in the country’s fishing fleets, farms and factories, treating them like second-class citizens. Workers from Myanmar make up a large portion of the migrant workforce with many workers remaining undocumented, leaving them highly vulnerable to unscrupulous employers, police and human traffickers.

Kazakhstan: On February 13, the Metallurgical Workers’ Union Zhaktau, affiliated to IndustriALL through the Trade Union of Mining & Metallurgy Workers of the Republic of Kazakhstan received a summons to appear in Temirtau court. The union was accused of urging miners to continue their strike in December last year, when they urged 700 workers to defend their demands. The company, ArcelorMittal Temirtau, claims that this destabilised the operation of the mine, preventing an end to the strike, impeded negotiations between the employer and employees and blocked workers from returning to the surface. The workers demanded a 100 percent wage increase, early retirement and better working conditions. Management agreed to a 30 percent wage increase for all underground workers and said they were also ready to negotiate an increase of wages for ground workers.

India: On February 12, LPG cylinder delivery workers’ union leaders and members staged a protest in Kakinada seeking the implementation of labour laws. The Gas Delivery Workers Union district secretary demanded that the Sri Agency (HP gas agency) withdraw a decision for the removal of 14 gas delivery workers. He alleged that the management of Sri Agency was not implementing the laws related to the labourers in their agency.

Philippines: On February 7, according to the Centre for People’s Media, more than 1,500 workers from the Federation and Cooperation of Cola, Beverage and Allied Industry Unions (FCCU-Sentro) held simultaneous protests in Manila and other Coca-Cola bottling plants and offices. A statement released by FCCU-Sentro said there was no warnings from the Coca-Cola management when they laid off around 600 workers. FCCU-Sentro stated there will be a series of protests until the management accepts their demands and explores options with the union. The company claimed the layoffs were due to recent sugar-sweetened beverage taxes implemented from January 2.

Andrew E Rayment

Communists propose nationalisation

A group of Communist Party lawmakers is pushing for a nationalisation drive in a bid to boost the Russian economy and strengthen national security. In a draft document sent to the State Duma and published on the Russian parliament’s website last week, the group describes nationalisation as a forced but compensated confiscation of private property. It says that turning assets over to the federal state would help meet public needs, increase the general effectiveness and social orientation of the national economy, and strengthen Russia’s national security and sovereignty.

The list of assets that would be subject to nationalisation include land plots, mineral deposits, forests, natural bodies of water, and enterprises in strategically important branches of the economy, such as energy, transport and heavy industry.

Other grounds for forced

nationalisation include the threat of mass personnel layoffs in companies that control major parts of the economy in a city or a region, the bankruptcy of a strategically important enterprise, a monopoly position of a company, violations committed during privatisation, and the potential threat of strategically important enterprises falling under foreign control.

The bill reads that nationalisation would be applied to any form of private property, including shares in various companies. At the same time, sponsors of the motion acknowledge that nationalisation is an extreme measure that should be applied only on condition of fair compensation to former owners. They emphasise that the nationalisation of property should not become a form of punishment, or even a way to coerce businessmen into fulfilling certain obligations.

Nationalisation has always been a key issue in the political

program of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. It was also a cornerstone of the anti-crisis plan presented by party leader Gennady Zyuganov in 2016 as the platform for the parliamentary elections. Back then, Zyuganov said that nationalisation was absolutely essential for increasing budget revenues and preventing the outflow of hard currency from the country.

The presidential program of Communist Party candidate Pavel Grudinin also lists nationalisation of major enterprises as a key condition for future prosperity. “Our priority will be the prosperity of the general public ... we will make Russia’s riches, its natural, industrial and financial resources serve its people; we will nationalise strategically important and systemic industries, the power sector, railways, communications systems and leading banks,” the document reads.

RT – Russia Today ✪

Something to say?

Write to the Editor!

email: tpearson@cpa.org.au

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

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for Aboriginal rights and for other poor and disadvantaged Australians.

They have neglected pleas from vulnerable and powerless people for help and justice. And the Coalition parties have engaged in harsh and shameful policies that have and continue to cause great harm to many people.

I doubt that rich, powerful white dudes like him will ever understand the much more serious and dire situations of other people and accord a semblance of dignity and empathy towards them and actually assist them.

Most politicians and other privileged people are too wrapped up in their own petty games, affluent lifestyles and pursuit of pleasures to

notice the real-world problems that exist for most of the public outside their well-off circle.

When it comes to feeling empathy and sympathy I'll save mine for those who really deserve it, the poor, weak and disadvantaged.

Steven Katsineris
Vic

Un-Australian awards

I fail to see why it is necessary to honour elements of the RAAF who were responsible for RAAF sorties in Syria over the last 18 months or so. This mission was a mission not sanctioned by the UN or the legitimate government of Syria but a belligerent action

by the US which your government meekly joined with.

It is strange that a mission that had so many negatives attached to it should be honoured by awards. Are the awards for Australia Day meant to honour those who disgrace Australia? The RAAF mission in Syria contributed to turning their cities into rubble.

They hit and killed civilians and Syrian soldiers during their actions. On top of that they were reported as the most secretive Air Force in Syria, more secretive than the US and Europeans, about their missions and refused to divulge the coordinates of their actions to international watch organisations. I fail to see why these RAAF Commanders should be rewarded when they brought

disrepute on Australia. Australia Day awards for these people are tantamount to rewards for bad behaviour.

Can the government outline the thinking of those who made the recommendations for such awards as these? Can Australia be proud of service that kills civilians? Can we be proud of a service which kills soldiers fighting IS? Can we be proud of a service which keeps the awful truth of their mistakes from the people? Surely you should consider taking back those awards.

Denis Doherty
National Coordinator
Australian Anti-Bases Campaign
Coalition

True empathy

I'm finding it very hard to have any respect and sympathy for Barnaby Joyce and his personal life and circumstances. He and his government show so little sympathy and respect for the circumstances of asylum seekers,

Culture & Life

by Rob Gowland



Punishing the poor for being poor is a favourite ploy of the capitalist class.

The increasing signs of poverty

The bourgeois mass media, faithful to the capitalists who own it, consistently present an image of the developed world as one in which life is so much better than it used to be: we all have plentiful "labour saving devices", multi-roomed homes, new or near-new cars and of course a job that pays for all our needs.

The reality, of course is very different. Signs of poverty and social distress are everywhere: there are more people begging in railway stations; the number of homeless people sleeping rough on city streets has grown dramatically; and charities that used to run TV commercials urging people to sponsor poverty-stricken children in Africa now do the same for the children of the poor right here in Australia.

Full employment is now something that hasn't been seen for decades; those who are in work have to cope with increasing casualisation and job insecurity while prices and rents inexorably go on rising.

These, of course, are not problems that concern the capitalist class. The problems of the poor, no matter how severe they might be, are deemed to be their own fault, for not being sufficiently enterprising. All that concerns the capitalist ruling

class is whether their luxurious lifestyle might be adversely affected. If it is likely to be, they will take steps to protect themselves – and only themselves. They will happily move their investments – their sources of profit – offshore to a lower-wage country, with scant regard for the economic turmoil and distress such a removal must inevitably cause. Any job losses resulting from their closing down factories or moving whole industries to low wage countries are – in their opinion – neither their fault nor their concern.

For capitalists, the poor – all the poor – are undeserving. As filthy-rich store owner Gerry Harvey expressed it, "you could go out and give a million dollars to a charity tomorrow to help the homeless. [But] you could argue that it is just wasted – they are not putting anything back into the community."

"It might be a callous way of putting it but what are they doing? You are helping a whole heap of no-hopers to survive for no good reason. They are just a drag on the whole community."

The significant point here is that Harvey sees the homeless as "no hopers"; it's their own fault they're homeless. Capitalists and their hangers-on have the same

attitude towards the unemployed, the under-employed, the chronically ill, towards all those whom capitalism's chaotic, crisis-ridden system has failed.

Punishing the poor for being poor is a favourite ploy of the capitalist class. Late last year, US President Donald Trump and his Republican mates were gleefully triumphant as Congress passed his "Tax Cuts and Jobs Bill". The main beneficiaries of Trump's tax cuts are big corporations: the bill cuts the corporate tax rate from 35% to a piddling 21%, an enormous gift to his business backers. Naturally, the Republican Party claim it will "create jobs", hence the grossly misleading name of the bill.

But slashing corporate taxes is not all that Trump and the far-right of the Republican Party want to do to get rid of "big government", the disparaging term they use to cover their attacks on welfare, public health and education, in fact anything not owned by private enterprise – except of course that extraordinary and extraordinarily profitable sacred cow, the military. They want to slash Medicaid, food stamps and welfare generally. So what if people starve in the richest country on Earth? They're just no-hopers, after all.

Black American journalist

Nicholas Powers wrote this month in US on-line journal *Truthout*: "How do we justify poverty in a land of abundance? The US is the wealthiest nation in history. The annual federal budget is nearly \$3.5 trillion. ... Yet, out of 326 million people, 43.1 million live in poverty."

He comments that "needed programs" like food stamps and Medicaid "lie on the Republican chopping block. President Trump has pushed drug testing for food stamps and work requirements for Medicaid." Republican member of the House of Reps Paul Ryan "wants to cut Social Security and Medicare."

It's been half a century since Hollywood regularly turned out movies aimed at the mass market that nevertheless took an anti-big business position or exposed the machinations of right-wing politicians. Of course, one result of such films being made was a counter-attack by the capitalist establishment in the form of the McCarthyite witch-hunts and blacklists. Hollywood never recovered and has never been so bold again, except for infrequent and isolated individual films or TV shows.

The spokespersons of big business, on the other hand, holding almost all the cards as they do, are bolder than ever in trying to crush

the poor under foot. They have revived without apology the race card and, under Trump in particular, they are playing it with a vengeance, pandering to the ignorance and prejudices of their lumpen power base.

Powers observes that the Republican Party "is led by a business elite that does not have a natural base". [It does, however, have a strong class base.] "Since the 1970s, it has allied with Christian Evangelicals, jingoists and racists to ride reactionary movements to power. It fuses our class and racial hierarchies to cut off interracial, working-class solidarity. It is kept going by feeding their voting base with political 'red meat' via Fox News and other right-wing outlets, which channel resentment at immigrants, the poor and especially the poor of colour."

Trump and the Republican Party pandering to the racism of the far-right in the US will have far-reaching and long-lasting consequences. It will take decades to undo the effects of Trump's politics of hate. And it will only be achievable if the ability to control the Mass media is taken out of the hands of capitalist media moguls like the odious Rupert Murdoch. ☛

Film round-up

Black Panther

Celluloid superheroes were once rare. Not anymore.

Hollywood has created a box-office bonanza by exploiting every comic-book hero from the X Men, Superman, Batman, the Green Hornet and Spiderman to The Incredible Hulk.

But, given that Black Panther was co-created by Marvel Comic's Stan Lee – who make a modest appearance here – I expected the usual mixture as before.

I was wrong, because while director and co-writer Ryan Coogler delivers all the comic-strip hero action that the most dedicated genre fan could desire and more, the subtext of wealthy countries exploiting poor and oppressed ones hits home hard and often.

The central storyline sees T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman) return from the US to his African home country of Wakanda to take his rightful place as king.

There, facing treachery and danger on every side, he reverts to his superhero alter-ego the Black Panther to save his nation and, naturally, the world as well.

Fortunately for mankind Wakanda – a hidden futuristic city stunningly realised complete with skyscrapers and huge flying saucers – is the source of the magical element Vibranium that powers Black Panther to victory. Stirring spectacle and action decorate a gripping and fast-moving story which alone are worth the price of admission.

Adding impact to a riveting superhero show that puts its predecessors in the shade, is the enthralling and credible blend of character and combat that grips and entertains over its two-and-a-quarter hours.

There's everything from raging sword-and-spear battles featuring giant charging armoured rhinos to space fights and combat to thrills,

chills and blazing action in darkest Korea.

Boseman scores strongly in his Jekyll-and-Hyde superhero role, while Angela Bassett, Forest Whitaker, Michael B Jordan and Lupita Nyong'o provide potent support.

Andy Serkis is great as a villain from darkest Johannesburg – his South African accent is impeccable – while Martin Freeman, who fell from space in the flop film of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, hits the mark here as a heroic FBI agent.

Who could ask for more? I couldn't.

Alan Frank

Lady Bird

With five Oscar nominations, this surprising indie coming-of-age comedy drama is taking the current award season by storm with its fresh insights into the adolescent mind and the turbulent relationship between mothers and daughters.

It's something that actress-turned-writer/director Greta Gerwig, shockingly only the fifth woman to be nominated for a best director Academy Award, captures to stark perfection.

"Do you think I look like I'm from Sacramento?" asks 17-year-old Christine, who insists on being called Lady Bird, of her strong-willed and no-nonsense mother (played superlatively by Laurie Metcalf). She points out that the question is irrelevant, as she is indeed from the Californian town.

Set in Sacramento in 2002, the film stars the sublime Saoirse Ronan as the artistically inclined and angst-ridden teenager, who describes herself as being from the wrong side of the tracks. She is desperate to escape her home town and working-class



Black Panther – the subtext of wealthy countries exploiting poor and oppressed ones hits home hard and often.

roots by going to study on the East Coast, the centre of art and culture, she believes.

Ronan channels the selfish, self-absorbed, confrontational and demanding nature of a teenage girl who wants to expand her horizons but refuses to accept that her parents cannot afford to pay for her artistic and cultural endeavours. Her mother, who is a nurse, is tirelessly working all hours to keep the family afloat after her father loses his job.

Metcalf and Ronan, both Oscar-nominated, portray the volatile mother-daughter relationship with realistic intensity. Many will probably relate to Metcalf's blunt and brutally honest mother who refuses to sugar-coat the truth, while Lady Bird's dad (Tracy Letts) – good cop to his wife's bad cop – is forever trying to keep the peace between the two. He promises to give his daughter everything she asks for, despite his precarious financial situation.

Although very little happens during the course of the film, Gerwig's snapshot in the life of a teen is, reminiscent of Richard Linklater's work, enthralling.

With a sharp and intelligent screenplay brought to vivid life by her stupendous cast, the director delivers a witty and amusing yet deeply moving comedy drama which will have women calling their mothers straight after.

Maria Duarte

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POLITICS IN THE PUB

February 22

A COMMON GOOD: DEMOCRATIC FUTURES FOR PEOPLE AND PLANET

- Tim Hallo, Director of The Green Institute
- Professor Stuart Rees, Council for Justice & Peace, USYD

March 1

THE TOXIC INFLUENCE OF THE ZIONIST LOBBY

- Cathy Peters, Coalition for Justice & Peace in Palestine (CJPP)
- Peter Slezak, Assoc Prof in Philosophy, Humanities & Languages, UNSW

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DOES EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA NEED REFORM?

- Professor Robyn Ewing, Teacher Education and the Arts, USYD
- Dr Rachel Wilson, Snr Lecturer in Research, Methodology, USYD

March 15

FREEDOM THROUGH GUN CONTROLS OR UNLIMITED FIREARMS?

- Sam Lee, Coordinator, Gun Control Australia
- David Shoebridge, Greens Upper House MP

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"Its name is communism"

Jenny Farrell

In February 1848, 170 years ago, Marx and Engels published the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, commonly called the *Communist Manifesto*, the birth certificate of scientific communism.

A hundred years later Bertolt Brecht, the German communist poet, attempted a versification of it. Below are extracts, translated into English by Jack Mitchell.



The Manifesto

Wars ruin the world and a spectre is haunting the ruins.
Not born in war, seen around in peace too, for some time now.
Nightmare to rulers but friend to the children that live in the townships.
Shaking its head as it peers into half-filled plates in poor kitchens.
Standing in wait then for those that are weary at pit-head and yard-gate.
Visiting friends in the prisons, passing in without pass-card.
Seen even in offices, heard in the lecture-halls, personally
Sometimes mounting giant tanks and flying in death-dealing bombers.
Speaking in various tongues, in all tongues. Keeping silent in many.
Guest of honour in ghettos and slums, the terror of palaces
Some here to stay, and for ever: its name is Communism.

Much you've heard tell of it. This, however, is what its founders say.
If you read history you read of the deeds of immense individuals;
Their star, in its rising and falling; the march of their armies;
Or of the pomp and destruction of empires. For them, for the founders
However, history is foremost the history of conflicts of classes.
They see the peoples internally split into classes and
Warring within. Patricians and knights, plebeians and slaves
Nobles, peasants and craftsmen, proletarians and bourgeois today
Keep in their turn the whole mighty household in motion, creating
And distributing the goods that are needed for living, but also
Fighting their fight to the death, the old fight, the one for dominion.
...

Never before was unleashed such a wild surge of creation
As that which the bourgeoisie in its epoch of sway has unfolded
One which bowed nature to man and made steam and electrical power
Cleared rivers for shipping and continents ready for tillage.
Never before had humanity guessed that asleep in its womb
Such liberations were lurking and powers of production like these.

This, however, was how it went: blast-furnace, weaving-loom, steam-power
Revolutionised manufacture and now the guilds and all feudal
Property turned into fetters that cramped this colossal creation
And up rose the bourgeoisie and shattered the fetters.
Free competition moulded the state form of the bourgeois class.

You see then how hurricane-like is the rise of productive forces
Smashing the time-honoured modes of producing, believed everlasting
And with what impetuosity classes, subservient yesterday
Tear up all the title deeds, ridicule hoary and reverend prerogatives.
...

Thus, when this class, provided with new title deeds and prerogatives
Had conjured up means of production in past times undreamed of
Then it became like the sorcerer who could no longer control
The subterranean powers he had so craftily raised.
Acting like dammed-up water that first feeds the crops and then
Drowns them completely, the means of production, ever expanding
Multiplying thus the might of this class, expanding still further
Threaten that class with extinction; just as the founders have shown us.
...

For millions of workers however
Whom it commands as large armies planlessly ordered about
Herdling them into the sweatshops, now out of the sweatshops again
Brusquely on to the icy streets – the truth is now dawning, they whisper
Amazed to each other that the days of the world of the bourgeois are numbered
Since it in its ceaseless increasing increased their misery only
Since it has grown too narrow to compass the wealth it created.

Now however those weapons wielded with deadly effect
To shatter the feudal world are turned on the bourgeoisie.
Yes it too has brought forth a class that will bear those death-dealing
Weapons against it, for all through the centuries, bound in its service
Grew with the bourgeoisie also the proletariat of the modern
Workers, living by labour and finding work only so long as they
Work in the bourgeois interest, increasing his capital interests.
Just as the capitalist sells his commodities, likewise the worker
Sells his commodity, namely his labour-power, being subjected
Therefore to competition and all the ups and downs of the market.
Appendage merely to the machine he sells his simple knack
Costing no more than the cost of his keep and whatever little he needs to
Reproduce and bring up his kind, that most useful of species
Since labour-power's price, like the price of all other commodities
Depends on its cost of production. Out of the tiny workshop of old
Handicraft grew the great factory ordering army-wise
Work and the workers, slaves of the bourgeois state but also
Slaves of a certain bourgeois, his overseers and the machine.
...

Therefore the one class capable of defeating the bourgeoisie
And shattering the fetter its state has meanwhile become
Is, in our time, the working class. It is this by its size and condition.
All that once guaranteed life in the older society now is
Rubbed out, done away with, in the life of the proletariat.
Propertyless, head and provider no longer to wife and children
Hard to distinguish by nation or native place now, for the selfsame
Subjection at the selfsame machine marks him from Essen to Canton
Morals and religion confront the proletarian as fata morganas
Mirroring to him, far off unattainable, edens in deserts.
...

His is the movement of the immense majority, and his dominion is
Domination no more but the subjection of all domination.
There oppression alone is oppressed for the proletariat must
As society's undermost stratum, in rising, completely demolish
The social set-up entire with all its uppermost strata.
It can shake off its subjection only in shaking off all
Subjection from all people.

Socialist Voice ✪



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