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GOVT TO HIT WOMEN'S SUPER



Anna Pha

Last month, Superannuation Minister Jane Hume (also Minister for Women's Economic Security [sic]) announced that a draft bill would be released soon for superannuation changes, including new compassionate grounds for early access to super for victims of domestic violence. They would be allowed to apply for up to \$10,000 "as an important last resort lifeline."

The announcement was the day after a series of nation-wide "March 4 Justice" rallies concluded with a major action in Canberra outside Parliament House.

They demanded implementation of the fifty-five recommendations put forward in Respect@Work, the Australian Human Rights

Commission's 2020 report of the national inquiry into Sexual Harassment. The message was: "Enough is enough."

The idea of women drawing on their superannuation savings to escape domestic violence is appalling. It reflects the government's neoliberal approach to social issues, its appalling attitude towards women, and once again blames the victim for her plight just as it does the unemployed and sole parents (the majority being women).

The idea was raised three years ago in the federal government's 2018 *Women's Economic Security Statement* by the then Minister for Women Kelly O'Dwyer. As previously noted in the *Guardian*, around about seventeen per cent of women have experienced violence from a current or former partner (See #1952).

"At least one child is killed by a parent every month; one woman is murdered every week by a partner or former partner; another hospitalised every three hours. Domestic violence can be physically brutal or more hidden in its various non-physical forms," the *Guardian* noted.

The 2018 *Statement* noted that workers can already get permission from the taxation office to draw on their superannuation funds before reaching retirement age in extreme circumstances under "compassionate grounds" rules. The proposed changes would add family and domestic violence to the list of circumstances.

Apart from the practicalities of gaining approval from the Australian Taxation Office to withdraw up to \$10,000, the final retirement sum will take a hit. The younger the woman fleeing a violent situation, the greater the loss on retirement.

This would further disadvantage women in a system where there are already gross inequalities.

GROSS INEQUALITIES

Even the way superannuation contributions are treated disadvantages women. Workers on incomes below \$18,200 per annum – mostly women – do not receive

a single cent of the more than \$40bil the government forks out in super tax concessions. Sixty per cent of those superannuation tax concessions are handed out to the top twenty per cent of households – more likely to be dependent on men's incomes. Whereas the fifty per cent at the lowest end of the income scale only receive eleven per cent, reflecting the gender inequality in wages (The Australia Institute).

Neither the Liberal Party nor the Labor Party have done anything to address this gross, built-in inequality.

As a result, women retire with forty-two per cent less in their superannuation accounts than men (2018 *Statement*). This is largely a result of the gender pay gap; women being more likely to work part time or as casuals; and the time that many women spend out of the paid workforce such as to raise children or care for an elderly relative. In addition, the new face of unemployment is women over forty-five, with more than seventy per cent of unemployed women on JobSeeker/Newstart for over a year (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 30-09-2020).

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NOTICE: Next week the *Guardian – Workers' Weekly* will not be printed as its staff will be on a short break. Our next issue (#1957) will be out on Monday the 19th of April. Sorry for any inconvenience.

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5th April, 2021

CABINET SHUFFLE DOES NOT BODE WELL

Last Monday, Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced a cabinet reshuffle that saw Defence Minister Linda Reynolds and Attorney-General and Industrial Relations Minister Christian Porter lose their portfolios. Replacing them is Peter Dutton, who will become the next Defence Minister and leader of the government in the House of Representatives, and Michaelia Cash as the new Attorney-General and Industrial Relations Minister.

Other changes included: Karen Andrews as Minister for Home Affairs and Stuart Robert will move from government services to become Employment Minister, replacing Cash. Melissa Price will also return to cabinet and will retain the portfolio for Defence Industry.

However, the news that caught the most attention was the new cabinet taskforce on women's equality, safety, economic security, health and wellbeing. The taskforce will be chaired by prime minister Scott Morrison and Women's Minister Marise Payne. It will "include all women from the ministry as well as Treasurer Josh Frydenberg and Finance Minister Simon Birmingham" (SMH). As part of the new taskforce, Financial Services Minister Jane Hume will gain an additional portfolio, women's economic security.

Speaking on the significance of the new taskforce, Morrison stated that Payne is "effectively the prime minister for women." Further stating that "these changes will shake up what needs shaking up [...]. What we must do is address the government's agenda with the changes we are making."

Prior to the shake-up Labor leader Anthony Albanese said there was little point in making changes to the cabinet: "Shuffling the deck will not change the bad hand that this government is dealing Australians."

It's hard to argue with Albanese's remarks.

The creation of this taskforce, with the elevation of other women in the Coalition, is nothing but a cheap stunt. While Porter and Reynolds are stepping down from these portfolios, they both still have places in the current ministry! Porter will become Minister for Industry, Science and Technology and Reynolds, who is taking leave over a heart condition, will return as Minister for Government Services.

While this taskforce has captured mainstream media's attention, we must not lose sight of those changes at the top. Dutton becoming defence minister should worry everyone who cares about peace and is concerned with imperialism. Last year in April, Dutton landed himself in hot water with Chinese authorities over remarks that China needed to be "more transparent" on COVID-19 based on information he received from Washington. The year before that, Dutton "accus[ed] [the CPC] of engineering a series of cyber-attacks on Australian targets, stealing intellectual property and muzzling free speech" (Guardian UK). The Chinese embassy responded by qualifying Dutton's remarks as "anti-China rhetoric." Suffice to say that Dutton feels at home parroting US propaganda and will no doubt be their righthand man in Australia promoting its imperialist agenda.

Additionally, every worker in Australia should be worried about Cash's ascension to Industrial Relations Minister. In Porter's absence, Cash was instrumental in ensuring the watered-down IR omnibus bill passed. If that doesn't scare you, the Australian Resources and Energy Association AMMA, a lobbying group for Australia's largest energy corporations, has welcomed the move. Steve Knott, AMMA Chief Executive, stated that "she was an outstanding Minister for Employment, which included industrial relations responsibilities until 2017, navigating key reforms through the parliament such as the reinstatement of the Australian Building and Construction Commission." It is no surprise that Knott, representing employers, would laud the reinstatement of such an anti-worker body as the ABCC. Employers, and those who represent them, have a friend in Cash.

As a Party of the working class, we need to ensure that workers' rights don't diminish further under Cash, and we must fight back against Australia's part in imperialist actions with Dutton as Defence Minister.

GOVT TO HIT WOMEN'S SUPER

Continued from page 1

Women are also more likely to be affected by the requirement to be earning at least \$450 a month from an employer to be eligible for the compulsory superannuation guarantee (CSG) to kick in. The \$450 threshold can act as an incentive for employers to casualise work and take on more workers on fewer hours, thus avoiding paying any super.

The CSG should apply to ALL wages, regardless of how small. If there is to be any cut-off then it should be at the higher end of the income scale. The wealthy should not be receiving super tax concessions. At present they are rorting the system.

When the CSG was first introduced, it gradually rose in small increments. ALL workers had to pay for "the employer" contributions by forgoing an equivalent wage rise – even those on low wages who receive no tax concession.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY

Enabling women to draw \$10,000 from their superannuation fund, in particular when they are younger, could cost tens of thousands of dollars in final retirement savings.

In effect, it would present women with the choice of remaining within an abusive and violent situation or undermining their retirement income – a choice their abuser would not be faced with. Already one of the major reasons that women remain in abusive

relationships is lack of economic independence and where-with-all.

No woman should have to face such a choice. It is the government's responsibility to provide the necessary support systems and financial means for them to be able to safely leave a relationship and be protected from a former partner. It is not just necessary for the women but also for the protection of any children involved. Children have a right to grow up in a safe and healthy environment.

Instead of cutting funding to domestic violence services the government should be increasing it.

Women need access to paid domestic violence leave, immediate shelter, ongoing housing, legal and social services, and a range of other assistance if they are to be safe and their children resettled in a new life. The recent legislation to dismantle the Family Court will put women at further disadvantage than they already are (See Guardian #1951).

OPENS AVENUES FOR EXTORTION

The government created a precedent allowing people to draw up to \$10,000 from April to the end of June and another \$10,000 from July to the end of the year in 2020 during the pandemic. Instances of financial abuse have been sighted in reports and contributions to the Senate Estimates Committee. No provisions were put in place by the government or the ATO to prevent women being coerced to draw on their savings.

As the ATO pointed out, it would be very difficult to know whether a woman was being coerced to do so. The hearing heard reports that the scheme had opened up another frontier for people to financially abuse their partners.

According to the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority, 4.5mil Australians had withdrawn \$34.4 billion via the early super access scheme by the 18th of October. More than half a million had completely drained their savings, including many women.

The government should be funding domestic violence services. It is criminal that it has cut funding, forcing many legal services, refuges and other services to close at a time when domestic violence is on the rise. Don't be surprised if there is a token gesture in the May budget with an increase in funding that in effect partially restores previous cuts.

GOVT AGENDA

If the government gets away with this, not only will it hurt victims of domestic violence, but it will set the scene for further erosion of super funds. The next step will be withdrawing savings for a deposit on a house. Then to fund education in private schools for children of the not so wealthy.


Permitting victims of domestic violence to draw down on their retirement savings also furthers the government's aim of destroying industry funds.

It must be defeated. ✪



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NSW FLOODS NOT A SINGLE STORY

B A Ford

In late March, floods covered 600km along the NSW coast with tens of thousands of people evacuated from their homes. This event has been referred to in the media as a once in a 100-year event.

Rainfall on the NSW coast during this time reached more than 400mm, according to the ABC. In contrast, Sydney usually reaches 132mm in total over March, which means that these rainfalls were significantly above average.

The cause of the floods has been attributed in part to the La Nina trade winds that bring the cool air of the south to Australia, which also probably contributed to the cooler weather we have experienced this summer. The other cause has been climate change.

It seems that year after year we face another natural disaster. Before these floods, we had the bushfires in 2020, and before that we had the draught wrecking western NSW across the Murray-Darling Basin. This basin is commonly thought of as Australia's 'food bowl'.

I ask readers to throw their minds back to the events in late 2018, and early 2019 where we had up to a million fish die and wash-up on the banks of Menindee lakes. An independent investigation was set up to analyse what caused the fish mortality, and the report found that significant-high flows following the draught caused major algal blooms that suffocated the local fauna. It is possible that if dry conditions follow in the next year or so after these major flows, we might be looking at a similar situation if not properly managed.

Some may think that once the flooding event is over, the problem is now resolved. But this is not the case. Rainfall, river flows, and water levels all have significant impacts on wildlife.

Increased nutrients in water can be dangerous for both our health and the health of our wildlife because they deplete the available oxygen in the water. It is either caused by "blackwater" from



flooding, where nutrients from dead organic matter on land are washed into our waterways, or by draughts that limit the water available.

Increased flows can especially affect waterways if there has been significant agricultural runoff. Agricultural plains have high amounts of nutrients from fertilisers. These nutrients can lead to algal blooms and non-potable water.

The Hawkesbury river reached a max height of 12.9m during the floods. In contrast, current levels of lower Hawkesbury river now sit below 2m. Mainstream media refers to a historical moment where water heights reached 19m in 1867 as "the highest in living memory", but this "living memory" is only the living memory of colonists.

There is a lot of attention on the

importance of fire management led by First Nations people, but there is less emphasis on the importance of First Nations people's water management.

The "Echuca Declaration," published in 2009 by the Murray and Lower Darling River Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN), states that "RECOGNISING and REAFFIRMING that each of the Indigenous Nations represented within Murray and Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations is and has been since time immemorial sovereign over its own lands and waters" and that "water has a right to be recognised as ecological entity, a being and a spirit and must be treated accordingly."

The "Echuca Declaration" denounces the Commonwealth of

Australia for not only the theft of land and water, but also for "causing ecosystem collapse, severe water quality degradation, extreme stress upon river ecologies and species extinction at a scale and rate which is unprecedented."

The "Echuca Declaration" demanded the government give MLDRIN a water quantity for "cultural flows," "cultural flow benefits" and for there to be consultation and involvement both ways between MLDRIN and the various state governments and between Indigenous scientists and Western scientists.

The First People's Water Engagement Council was set up in 2010 as a national body in response to First Nations demanding their water rights but was abolished by the Abbott government in 2014.

Water management bodies have engaged in discussions about cultural flows and Indigenous water management over the past few years, but at the same time, water is being increasingly privatised and sold off. Grassroots actions against these profit-driven deals are ongoing.

This "once in a 100-year event" needs to be seen not as a singular event, but as a part of the story of ecological degradation in this country at the hands of the illegal, capitalist government. The future must hold sustainable water practices as part of climate justice, and to keep water in the hands of the majority and First Nations people and out of the hands of private multinationals that drain our catchments dry. ✪

GOVERNMENT'S CONTEMPT FOR DISABLED PEOPLE CAN NO LONGER BE IGNORED

Vasi Bougas

It is hardly a shocker to hear of the Coalition government's antipathy towards its nation's most disadvantaged people. But with recent facts coming to light this month, the government's attacks on disabled people have gone from predictable to egregious.

The ongoing battle against the destructive National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) reforms, including the introduction of mandatory Independent Assessments (see Issue #1932) – has been spurred by a series of shocking revelations, including leaked drafts of the reform legislation.

Leaked draft legislation for the reforms confirms fears that NDIS

funding will be refused to anyone who does not consent to these highly invasive and inappropriate Independent Assessments. But this is far from the worst that this draft has to offer.

For instance, one of the proposed changes removes support from people in prisons and external territories such as Christmas Island. Notes accompanying the leaked draft also hinted at the exclusion of cognitive impairment from the definition of "psychosocial disability", with concerns that such an exclusion could preclude young children with intellectual disabilities, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and acquired brain injury.

If passed with its current sentiments intact, this legislation will also completely gut the NDIS of the

core ideals it was based on. The NDIS was originally conceived as a "collaborative" scheme between the federal government and the states, but these reforms will downgrade the rights of the states in favour of giving the federal minister responsible for the NDIS very sweeping powers that will allow them to define what is or isn't funded. The fundamental definition of "reasonable and necessary" supports in determining what can be funded has also been completely stricken from the legislation – likely to be replaced with the discretion of the federal minister, or the NDIA's CEO. This is hugely concerning as it strips the legislation of all semblance of unbiased fairness and democratic processes.

This will also limit options for

appealing NDIA decisions through independent bodies, such as the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

The government has since defended itself with a counterclaim that "only" eight per cent of NDIS participants will no longer be eligible for the scheme – but this constitutes a staggering figure of approximately 40,000 people.

The NDIS as with insurance schemes such as superannuation and workers' compensation are a capitalist, neoliberal solution to social problems, and as such can never be considered a serious model for social security. This is also why, at the provider level, the NDIS has created a poorly regulated sector that breeds insecure working conditions for disability workers. Some Australian Disability Enterprises

also use the scheme as a means to hire NDIS participants as workers, taking a cut from their NDIS funds and paying them well below the minimum wage.

It is clear that the current government is exploring every possible avenue to divest as much funding from disability support services as it can. Instead of investing more support schemes that at present only cover a fraction of Australia's disabled population, perhaps the government feels that some of this money may be more appropriate for delivering bragging rights of a budget surplus – an unfortunate but predictable side effect of a "handicapitalist" mentality. It is time for disabled people to be empowered in ways that aren't based on their role as consumers. ✪

TOWARDS THE 14TH CPA NATIONAL CONGRESS

Vinnie Molina

The CPA is just commencing the process of Party-wide discussion of the draft Political Resolution to be adopted by the 14th Congress to be held in Sydney on 29-31 October 2021. The upcoming break might be a good opportunity for all Party comrades to exercise their rights to participate under our internal democracy to analyse, discuss, amend and develop the Party document that will guide the Party's political work for the next four years.

The Political Resolution aims to analyse our Party activity since the 13th Congress, how decisions were implemented, our successes and errors. This is a fundamental process for the dialectics of social change.

The building of a strong working-class party is one of the strategic tasks for advancing socialism in Australia.

The 13th Congress decided to take the Party to the People. All Party activity stemmed from the decision to have an organisation that is seen and taken to the people through activity.

Since the last Congress, the CPA has

experienced some substantial growth in membership and a growth in our diversity.

Many people are seeing in the CPA an organisation representing the interests of the working class and all the popular strata. Comrades have joined the CPA from all parts of the country where the Party has branch activity. It was also interesting that more and more people reached out looking for the most effective way to defeat capitalism since the last federal elections. Many have come from other political parties, including those who had pursued social democracy as a way for social change. It has become clearer to many that social democracy is not the answer for workers in Australia.

Since last Congress, we experienced many positive developments with a more active Sydney District Committee and the beginnings of establishing a NSW State Committee. A branch has been established in Wollongong, quickly becoming an active highly visible branch in the area as well as contributing to rallies and being active in Sydney to support comrades there. There has also been growth in other regional branches in NSW. All the other CPA branches in Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth

have continued to develop, and there is also good potential for branches in Canberra and Darwin.

The Party has also overcome some internal challenges but successfully met the issues by the commitment and hard work of Party members to build the Communist Party of Australia. COVID-19 in 2020 affected the way we do things, but Party activity and the work of branches was adapted to new conditions. Party branches organised meetings online and stayed active according to the limitations of the new reality and many impressive initiatives were put in practice. In fact, some of the new ways of working will continue to be utilised to enhance our reach and accessibility, particularly for remote members.

Despite COVID-19, the Party leadership successfully implemented the Health, Workers' Rights and Socialism campaign, which had the key objective of keeping the Party structure active. The pandemic could not stop Communists and the labour movement from exercising their right to protest. Comrades participated in many struggles including Black Lives Matter and the May One Movement in which Party members

played an active role as well as supporting workers on strike.

Ultimately the key objective is to campaign to prevent workers paying for the crisis, something the bourgeoisie and the Morrison government will try to enforce. To this, Communists say: "workers Won't Pay for the capitalist crisis."

From early April, all party members will get involved in the Party-wide discussion of the Congress documents. It is expected that the collective discussion will deliver the best way forward to be adopted by the 14th Congress in October. We encourage all Party members to participate with discipline, criticism and self-criticism, putting the Party ahead of any other personal or group interest. Discussions will take place at the branch, district and state levels.

The Central Committee will also invite all members to contribute articles for the Congress discussion journals that have been planned for May and June.

We ask all Party members to take this opportunity and actively participate in the process towards the 14th National Congress of the CPA. Stay safe! ✪

PALM SUNDAY: MELBOURNE WALKS IN SOLIDARITY WITH REFUGEES

Bree Booth

On Sunday, the 28th March was Palm Sunday, an important day on activist calendars for groups across the political spectrum. The Palm Sunday march is held each year on the Sunday before Easter in Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney, and other cities across the country. It began several decades ago as a peace march against war and nuclear armament but has since developed into a platform for fighting for justice for refugees.

In Melbourne this year, speakers unanimously called for humane treatment of refugees by the

Australian government, calling out the hypocrisy of "fair go" rhetoric in Australian political discourse. Those seeking asylum in this country are never given a fair go. Their rights are violated every day in contravention of basic human decency and international law.

Palm Sunday is the final Sunday of Lent and the beginning of the Holy Week leading up to Easter. It marks the day on which Jesus arrived in Jerusalem before he was crucified. In the Gospels, Jesus entered Jerusalem to the praise of the townspeople who threw palm fronds in front of him in homage. For this reason, Christians at the Palm Sunday rallies carry palm fronds as a symbol that their

participation in the fight for refugees is an expression of their faith.

But Palm Sunday is not a purely Christian occasion. Other faith groups were also represented at the march. Leaders from the Jewish, Sikh, Muslim and Christian communities all spoke at the rally. Many activist and community groups were also present including Grandmothers for Refugees, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Refugee Action Collective and Rural Australians for Refugees.

Mostafa Azimbitar, commonly known as Moz, a Kurdish-Iranian refugee who was recently freed after 8 years in detention, spoke to the crowd and led a rendition of "We Are Australian." He was followed

by Sr Brigid Arthur of the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project, who spoke about the struggles of those on bridging visas. Julian Burnside, a QC and member of the Australian Greens, spoke about his experiences advocating for refugees in the wake of 9/11 and the Tampa incident.

The march proceeded peacefully down Lygon St, before coming to a halt at the Park Hotel in Carlton where 7 refugees brought to Australia under the medevac legislation are still detained. The public response from onlookers was overwhelmingly positive with motorists beeping their horns in support and diners on Lygon St waving and cheering.

At the conclusion of the march, there were more speeches from

survivors of Australia's brutal immigration system. As has been happening for the past few months now, the pavement outside the Park Hotel was chalked with messages in support of the seven men imprisoned there.

The CPA stands in support of the rights of refugees to seek asylum in Australia. We condemn the cruel treatment of refugees as a violation of human rights and International Law. We ought also to join Sr Brigid in our sincere hope that in 2022 Palm Sunday will be a day to celebrate substantial change for the better and commit ourselves to fight for justice for all people seeking protection within our borders. Seeking asylum is not a crime. ✪



PARLIAMENT CALLS FOR ROYAL COMMISSION INTO VETERAN SUICIDES

Bree Booth

CW: This article contains a discussion of suicide and related mental health issues.

On 22nd March, the House of Representatives joined the Senate in passing a motion calling for the establishment of a Royal Commission into Veteran Suicides. The government has been reluctant to call for the establishment of a Royal Commission, taking the less drastic step of appointing a National Commissioner last year, but Scott Morrison eventually conceded that the government would support the motion.

This is a major step forward. On average, one veteran dies from suicide in Australia every two weeks. At this point, more veterans have lost their lives by suicide than have been killed on active duty since 2001, when Australian troops were first sent to Afghanistan. It is no wonder this has been called “one of Australia’s most pressing problems.”

A Royal Commission is a temporary body set up by the Governor-General on the advice of government ministers and on behalf of the Crown under the *Royal Commission Act*. It has wide-ranging powers to investigate, summon witnesses, and gather evidence. The government decides the terms of reference for a commission, how it is funded and who the commissioners will be.

Royal Commissions can serve both investigatory and advisory purposes, gathering information to guide the development of government policy. They are different from a Commission of Inquiry created by the passage of legislation that defines the scope, powers, funding, and penalties available to the Commission.

In February last year, the government set up a permanent National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention, in response to an epidemic of veteran suicide cases dating back two decades and steadily increasing over the past year. It was a long-awaited response to an ongoing campaign by families of those who had served in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and later lost their lives to suicide. The National Commissioner has the authority to investigate the deaths of ex-service members.

But some families are distrustful of the National Commissioner. They say that the Commissioner is not as independent as a Royal Commission would be. They say that the ADF and the Department of Veterans



Affairs (DVA) cannot be trusted to investigate this issue as they are the root cause of these deaths. A National Commission has also been criticised as more limited in scope and lacking the necessary resources.

A Royal Commission can play a particularly important role in drawing attention to the issue at the national level. The establishment of a Royal Commission is a positive sign that the government of the day is treating an issue with a certain sense of urgency. It is also likely to interrogate the root causes of the issue rather than simply focus on prospectively preventing more suicides. Importantly, it will allow for gathering data on veteran suicides, which have been difficult to gather until now. Good policies require good information.

But a Royal Commission cannot and will not be effective unless it is given broad terms of reference which interrogate the broader institutional and cultural underpinnings of the ADF. It is not just the “horrors of war” which contribute to suicidality amongst veterans, but also the culture of denigration within the ADF, institutional abuse, and bureaucratic obstacles to mental and physical

healthcare that veterans face once they get home. Given the government’s reluctance to support the parliamentary motion calling for a Royal Commission, it is uncertain whether the commission will be wide-ranging enough to be effective.

The Commission’s investigative powers would also be strengthened by the introduction of protections for witnesses. Current serving members of the ADF are public servants whose ability to comment publicly is restricted. Protective measures will encourage more witnesses to come forward without the fear of stigma or public scrutiny. These protective powers are not unheard of: they were offered to witnesses to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

Given that the main criticism of the National Commission is its lack of independence from the DVA and the ADF, commissioners appointed to the proposed Royal Commission need to be completely independent from these organisations. Commissioners should also have broad fields of experience beyond just mental health.

Communists have long been strong

advocates for peace and disarmament. While we have our very strong criticisms of the very existence of continuous imperialist wars and the interests they serve, we must patch up the symptoms before we can tackle the root cause of the disease. Pointing out that war only serves imperialist ruling class interests is important; ultimately the military industrial complex treats damage to veterans’ physical and mental wellbeing as collateral damage, the cost of doing business. But this is a purely descriptive point: for those currently suffering and dying due to the effects of serving in those wars, emergency reforms from within the system are needed right now.

As such, we recognise that the project of peace and disarmament requires much more than simply throwing down arms and going home; it will require long lasting structural supports for those who have suffered the effects of war. Veterans need better access to both physical and mental healthcare, ease of access to services, and a lot of work must be done to address institutional abuse and neglect of service personnel. The Royal Commission is a welcome step forward in this process. ✪

On average, one veteran dies from suicide in Australia every two weeks. At this point, more veterans have lost their lives by suicide than have been killed on active duty since 2001 ...

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ART IN THE NAME OF EXPLOITATION: DARK MOFO'S UNION FLAG CONTROVERSY

Valentin Cartillier

This article contains a description and discussion of an event that First Nations peoples may find distressing.

On 20th March, the organisers of the creative arts festival Dark Mofo put out a chilling call to First Nations people on Instagram: “we want your blood.” Once you read the text beneath the picture, they began to specify that they were asking for blood donations to be used for one of the festival’s performance pieces. The idea behind the “artwork” in question entitled “Union Flag” was to drench the British flag in the blood of First Nations people. This immediately drew swathes of criticism from First Nations peoples and was roundly condemned in the arts community and beyond.

Dark Mofo is an annual festival held in Hobart, Tasmania, known for its controversial artworks and performance pieces. It originally started as a nudist run into the freezing waters of the Tasman Sea and has since grown into a full-blown modern art festival. In 2017, performers slaughtered a live cow and covered themselves in its entrails and, in 2013, a light show sent seven people to hospital with seizures.

The controversial Union Flag “artwork” was created by Spanish artist Santiago Sierra and was set to be one of the key works at the festival. It was purportedly meant to symbolise the blood shed by First Nations peoples at the hands of the British settler-colonists. While the symbolic imagery is clear, the intentions behind the festival featuring the “artwork” are not.

It would be easy to get sidetracked and simply dismiss this as another instance of “cancel culture” or “political correctness gone mad,” as right-wing talking heads love to wheel out every time something like this happens, but to do so would be a grave error. The controversy is not only centred around a national conversation about Indigenous history and Australia’s brutal settler-colonialism, but it also reveals the broader forces of capitalistic profiteering.

Let us begin at the micro-level with the artist. Sierra came forward calling the criticism of his piece “superficial and spectacular” and complained that he has been “left without a voice,” even going so far as to say that critics have “built up the indignation to suit their own needs.”

So, let us examine some of the criticisms. Paola Bella, a Wemba-Wemba & Gunditjmarra woman wrote in an article for *The Conversation* that the “Union Flag aimed to literally extract Aboriginal blood as an anthropological and biological specimen. Extracted to be used as paint without the bodies or sovereign voices it belongs to and within.”

In the same article, Bella cited numerous First Nations people including Trawlwoolway and Plengarmairenner Pakana visual artist and dancer, Jam Graham Blair who has called on artists to boycott the festival and Wardandi (Nyoongar) curator Clothilde Bullen who stated “this is why we need far more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers and curators in senior leadership and director positions.”

Other First Nations people have spoken out, including rappers Tasman Keith and Briggs saying, “we already gave enough blood.” Noongar writer and academic Cass Lynch wrote in *Overland*, “Simply stating or depicting that the beginnings of the Australian colony were brutal and bloody for Indigenous people is a passive act.”

She continued by stating:



The Union Flag “artwork” is yet another blatant display of a wealthy businessman profiteering from the suffering of First Nations people.

“The concept on its own isn’t active as an agent of truth-telling, it doesn’t contain an Indigenous voice or testimony, it has no nuance. On its own, it leans into the glorification of the gore and violence of colonisation.”

Trawlwoolway artist and Aboriginal Heritage Officer Fiona Hamilton also condemned the festival:

“Dark Mofo, and particularly Leigh Carmichael [the festival’s creative director], have made a really grave error of judgement around how this would resonate, particularly with First Nations people, not just in Tasmania but around the world [...] I would say Leigh Carmichael needs to resign.”

Nala Mansell from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre tentatively supported Sierra’s work as it was “a great opportunity to raise awareness of the massacres” of Aboriginal people, however she did add “speak to the people of whom they would like to represent would be the main message.” This project has been in the works for over two years with no consultation with any First Nations people.

These are not only entirely accurate criticisms but contain concrete demands.

There have been calls for:

- Both artists and festival-goers to boycott the festival
- Greater representation and consultation within the arts
- More First Nations-led projects; not only as curators but also as performers
- The resignation of Carmichael
- And the refusal:
 - To donate any blood towards the artwork
 - Of the ongoing exploitation and tokenisation of First Nations people
 - To participate in anything to do with the festival.

Sierra’s claim that the criticisms against his work are “superficial and spectacular” is absolutely laughable. One could be generous and say he’s referring to the criticisms of more mainstream media and not First

Nations people, but if that’s the case, then he’s listening to the wrong voices. Despite Carmichael initially doubling down in his support of the project, stating that “self-expression is a fundamental human right,” just because something is done in the name of “art” does not make it exempt from criticism.

David Walsh, who owns the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), the host of Dark Mofo, later admitting his error, said that he “thought it would appeal to the usual leftie demographic. I approved it without much thought (as has become obvious).” This quote speaks directly to the ideological bankruptcy in the mind of the capitalist. Not only is there a flagrant disregard for the consequences it would have on First Nations people but betrays that his vague conception of a “leftie demographic” is simply about putting on whatever he thinks will net him the most profits. This isn’t the first time MONA has been criticised over a similar issue. In 2014, they cancelled an Aboriginal DNA identity testing installation by Swiss artist Christoph Buchel. You’d think they would have learned by now.

On Monday 23rd March, Dark Mofo issued a feeble apology on Instagram that stated, “We’ve heard the community’s response to Santiago Sierra’s Union Flag. In the end the hurt that will be caused by proceeding isn’t worth it. We made a mistake, and take full responsibility. The project will be cancelled.” One is left wondering if the “hurt that will be caused” they care about is their own bottom line in the face of mounting calls for a boycott of the festival.

So how can these criticisms be understood? It is not simply a question of aesthetic outrage but is demonstrative of a broader system that goes well beyond the art world.

Walsh made his fortune from professional gambling and business ventures. As a multi-millionaire he had a run-in with the Australian Tax Office over \$41 million taxes he owed from his gambling profits in 2012, which was resolved in a confidential settlement with the Tax Commissioner. He claims that “the dispute was now entirely resolved.”

The Union Flag “artwork” is yet another

blatant display of a wealthy businessman profiteering from the suffering of First Nations people. The pursuit of profits is blind to any other considerations. As Marx wrote in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*:

“Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the labourer works, is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has purchased of him.”

The “vampire-like” nature of capitalism here however is no metaphor. There is nothing that capitalism will not commodify and sap to the very last drop until every resource on earth is entirely consumed. First Nations people the world over know this from brutal first-hand experience. This artwork goes a step further than simply purchasing labour-power, it adopts the guise of being penniless and asks for donations. No remuneration was offered to those giving blood, all the profits of the “artwork” would go to the festival and the artist. They ask for donations without remuneration in the time where there should be reparations. This is yet another egregious, literal example of the “vampire-like” nature of capitalism’s impact on First Nations peoples.

First Nations peoples, domestically and internationally, have been ruthlessly exploited under the reign of capitalism and colonialism for centuries, for what was once abundant lands are being sucked dry. This controversy is not simply a question over the merits of an “artwork.” The question is how to listen to the criticisms of those affected and to act in accordance with them. This is what it means to build genuine class solidarity. Art can and does serve a critical function in society, it can call into question the existing order of society in a way in which words cannot always express. It can, to recontextualise Marx’s quote on religion, be “the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions” But this Union FlagJack piece is not a demonstration of that principle. It is shameless and barefaced profiteering off the historical and on-going suffering of First Nations people. ✪

BLINKEN BLINKS FIRST AT US-CHINA SUMMIT IN ALASKA

Casey Davidson

Top officials from China and the United States (US) exchanged verbal blows at the Alaska Summit last week, after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan opened the session by making false and unwarranted accusations about China's governance and international affairs.

In the summit's opening remarks, Blinken accused China of threatening a "rules-based order that maintains global stability" by their actions regarding Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan; cyber attacks on the US and economic coercion in other nations. In an attempt to put additional pressure on the Chinese officials, he pointed out that US-allied countries, as well as important neighbours and trading partners of China – South Korea and Japan – were also concerned.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Chinese Director of the General Commission for Foreign Affairs Yang Jeichi responded in an uncouth way by pointing the finger back at the US to address their own human rights record and stop interfering in China's internal affairs. The Chinese delegates assertively clarified that the US does not represent international public opinion, and that China will not be shaken by unwelcoming and threatening behaviour.

The US maintains a military presence in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait, and just days before the summit put sanctions on Chinese ministers. While the mainstream media describes these actions as essential for countering human rights violations and cyberattacks, the reality is that China has improved living conditions for its population and sustains a non-interference policy with other nations. The US government's demands are in no way an effort to "maintain global stability," but to maintain global hegemony.

While the Trump administration was instrumental in creating worsening attitudes towards China, the new Biden administration also revealed its illusion of US moral superiority. Sullivan lectured the Chinese officials on the "secret sauce of America," that is, the ability to confront challenges and come out more united as a country. In



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (far right) speaks as Chinese diplomats Yang Jeichi (left) and Wang Yi (second from left) listen during the opening session of US-China talks.

turn, Minister Yang countered that the US does not have the qualifications to speak to China in such a condescending manner. It is indeed condescending coming from the global hegemonic United States, a country with ongoing human rights concerns, and political interference in nations around the world.

Interestingly, it is uncommon for Chinese officials to criticise other countries, and it is perhaps unlikely this would have resulted under different conditions. Firstly, how the US officials engaged when the Chinese ministers were guests in their country was deeply insulting and provocative, rather than following shared protocols. Secondly, China is making massive strides in making fruitful ties with nations worldwide and continues to develop its own country peacefully. It is in a stronger position than it has been in the

past, and has more confidence to defend its own interests.

For instance, at the Boxer Protocol in 1901, an unequal treaty was signed when eight Western powers invaded China. The treaty allowed Western troops to be stationed in China and forced Beijing to pay the equivalent of ten billion dollars in today's value of silver. However, due to shifting power dynamics, Yang was able to point out the hypocrisy of the US at the Alaska summit, citing examples such as the Black Lives Matter movement, the Capitol Riot, and endless US-led wars. The US can no longer dictate discussions on matters of domestic concern.

A hopeful outcome of the summit was the long discussions held in private following the opening remarks. Martin Sieff, Senior Fellow, American University in Moscow remarked that when private meetings tend to last for

longer than expected, it often means that both sides seek to understand each other and make progress. This means that rules could be established and some level of diplomacy and cooperation on shared issues such as the pandemic, climate change and economic stability could be managed.

However, Sieff also remarked that there are concerns with the US being able to change its outdated perspectives. "They are not looking at China as it is - they are looking in terms of their own assumptions, which were not even true then, or ten or even thirty years ago." Perhaps there is hope in the presence of shifting power dynamics, for a lessening of tensions between the nations, however, this may be overly optimistic following these deepening contradictions. ✪

REPORT: BRISBANE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2021

Alexander Denton

The 2021 IWD event for the Brisbane branch of the CPA was held as a joint activity with ASLA (Australian Solidarity with Latin America) on 7th March at the Redbrick Hotel in Brisbane.

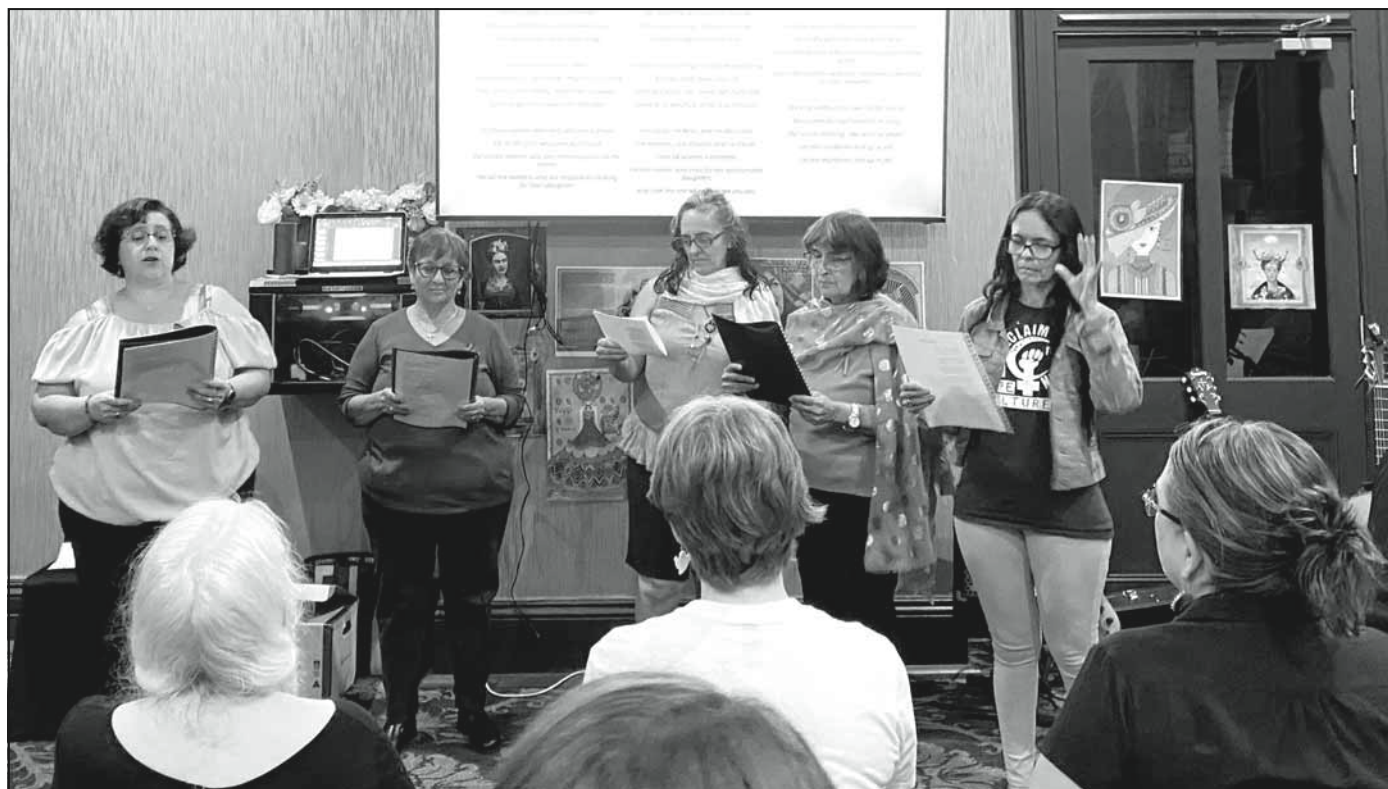
The event was presented by Karla Orellana, a member of both ASLA and the CPA. Comrade Charli gave a greeting from the CPA, and comrade Adela gave a greeting from ASLA.

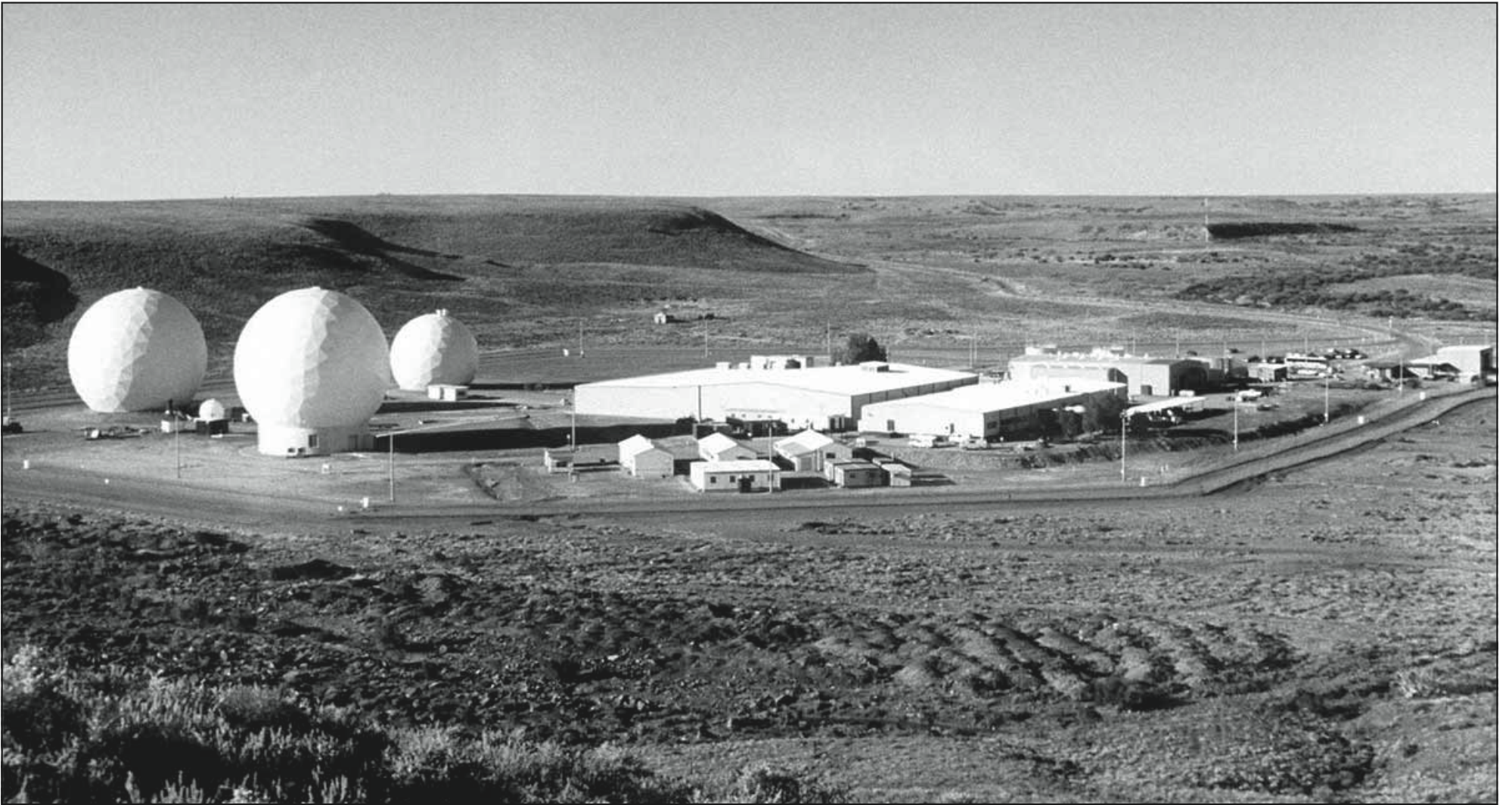
The Venue was filled to capacity as members of the CPA and ASLA gave readings and sang songs from the International Working Women's Movement, dealing with the struggles of women from all across the globe.

The main song and poems were: *Song Without Fear*, *Curriculum Vitae*, and *Maya Kaqchikel Woman*, with additional music and performances from Jumping Fences and a wonderful addition of Bread and Roses by comrades from the Brisbane Branch.

After the main event comrades and guests had a dinner in the restaurant and continued to discuss International Women's Day and the struggles of women.

All in all, the Brisbane event was hugely successful, and the branch would like to extend its thanks to all the friends, both old and new, who attended the event, especially those who gave a reading of a poem or a musical performance. ✪





INDEPENDENT & PEACEFUL AUSTRALIA NETWORK WEBINAR ON DEFENCE AND FOREIGN POLICY

Eileen Whitehead

The lockdowns brought about by the pandemic have proved there is a silver lining to every cloud. It has introduced me to “zooming” and a wealth of wonderfully informative webinars: this one held on 25th March by IPAN, being no exception.

The two main speakers – Vince Scappatura, a doctoral candidate from the Deakin University’s School of International and Political Studies and Dr Alison Broinowski, AM an Australian academic, journalist, writer and former Australian diplomat – spoke at length about Australia’s current situation as trading partners with China and allies of the US.

Vince Scappatura gave a solid presentation called *The Australian/US Alliance: Military & Defence*, which was primarily concerned about Australia being dragged into yet another conflict with the US. He spoke about the militarisation of the region and the implications for conflict, now that the US empire is in decline and currently fomenting instability in the region by focussing on China in a newly fabricated Cold War.

He referred to the Anzus Treaty formed in 1951 as the cornerstone of Australian security, symbolic of a wider special relationship based on our mutually shared values. However, he saw this as a danger currently when the US continually depicts China as a “threat to open and free regional and global order.”

This has led to a secret defence plan between Australia and the US to counter China’s influence in the region, with a strategic fuel reserve placed in Darwin, making it very difficult for any future Australian Prime Minister to say “no” to the US in the event of a crisis.

Instead of the alliance being between two equal partners, the US is reinterpreting its status as a “protector” in its fabricated depiction of China as a threat to an open and free regional and global order. In his view, he sees the current furor, generated by the US, about the militarisation of the islands in the South China Seas as hypocritical, considering the placement of its bases surrounding China. Furthermore, he sees challenges from China as being exaggerated for political gain.

He spoke of Pine Gap as the most significant US intelligence-gathering facility outside the US, giving Australia “everything and nothing” and hardwiring Australia into US wars whether we choose to participate or not. It makes us a nuclear target and plays a part in America’s great power rivalry with China.

According to the *New York Times*, one of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s primary objectives is to “try to coalesce sceptical international partners into a new competition with China.” And, more worryingly, is Lloyd Austin, US Defence Secretary’s remarks during his conference hearing in January, 2021, affirming his commitment to “a more resilient and distributed force posture in the Indo-Pacific, supported by new operational concepts.” Scappatura sees noises coming from Washington about the Chinese threat to Taiwan as nonsense, as are the fears being sounded about China’s regional economic power and threat to sovereignty.

Dr Alison Broinowski had some different slants regarding foreign diplomacy, where foreign policy reactions remain negative and bipartisan. She pointed out the importance of popular input into foreign policy and how it’s shaped and determined and felt that we don’t have enough input in Australia. The democratic system is not sufficiently respected so how can we achieve peace when Australian foreign policy is always framed around war: the country was settled by British armed forces; the settlers fought the indigenous people for over 200 years, and

we always supported the British in their wars and invasions. So when the US enters into war it’s now automatically expected that Australia goes too.

A recent survey about people’s opinions of this sycophantic subservience to the US showed that eighty-eight per cent of Australians want change. Therefore foreign policy has to change. The UN Charter states that nations should:

- Practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and
- Unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and
- Ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interests, and
- Employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples.

She also blamed the myth of the “war on terror” from 2001 – which nations have mistakenly acted on and which has created unforgivable death and destruction ever since – saying the Anzus Treaty plays no part in this. She made a valid point referring to Kim Beazley, when Australian Ambassador to the US, realising that the US would defend Australia only if defending its own bases here: hence the US troops in Darwin. By allowing foreign troops on our soil, we have surrendered our sovereignty and independence. Currently, we are just a mouthpiece for the US government and our government must be told that this has to stop. ☘



CUBA'S ECONOMIC REFORMS

Starting in January 2021, Cuba began to implement broad economic reforms designed to increase production and exports, in an effort to mitigate the effects of the US blockade and the coronavirus pandemic. The following article, republished from the Turkish media site Sol ("The Left"), analyses the first month of the reforms and their impact on labour and employment.

In the first month of Cuba's new economic regulations, uncertainties anticipated by the government mostly showed themselves in product prices and employment. On the one hand, the government is trying to contain unforeseen fluctuations in the prices of some items. On the other hand, one of the most positive effects of the new regulations is the desire of many Cubans to work in registered jobs in the formal [planned and regulated] economic sectors. In response to this, the government is focused on creating new employment opportunities.

The economic reforms, which have been worked on for a long time and implemented as of the beginning of this year, basically abolished the dual currency system in the country, increased salaries in the state sector by five times and introduced changes to increase the country's production and exports.

At the end of the first month of the reforms, Cuba's senior state leaders held an evaluation meeting and made new decisions. President Miguel Díaz-Canel shared his findings about problems facing the country, which he clustered under three headings: (1) errors in the implementation of the new regulations, (2) combating the COVID-19 pandemic and (3) food production.

The coronavirus outbreak has complicated the process by which Cuba has been making radical changes to the economy. There have been 240 deaths in the country so far, but the increasing number of cases

in January triggered the government to take new measures.

Díaz-Canel believes that "lack of discipline" is the main reason for the January increase. "We know what we need to do to solve the problem, but we need to work more delicately," he said, noting that people traveling from abroad are not always quarantining and that there is a generally complacent mood in society due to self-confidence.

Experts predict that Soberana-02, one of the COVID-19 vaccines developed by Cuba, will be available domestically by the end of April. BioCubaFarma, the company which manufactures the vaccine, said that they expect Cuba will be "one of the first countries in the world to vaccinate its entire population."

One of the first effects of the economic reforms was an explosion of applications to employment agencies. The head of the business agency in Havana's Diez de Octubre district told Cuban media that while there used to be 10-15 applications a day, the number has now risen to around 80-100 per day.

Prior to the new regulations, many Cubans were reluctant to work in the state sector because salaries were too low. There was a corresponding increase in demand for informal jobs, especially those linked to tourism. This trend was reinforced by the fact that the state provided direct financial assistance to all Cubans, regardless of their economic situation. However, as wages in the formal sectors have increased with the economic reforms, prices have also risen. As a result, it has become preferable to work in registered jobs.

At the same time, the pandemic has had an impact. Many small businesses in the service sector, especially those linked to tourism, have been closed and informal work has come to a standstill. This has also led to longer lines at employment agencies.

In Cuba, the state provides jobs for own who wants to work. Unemployment was just over two per cent prior to the pandemic, but this number mainly included Cubans who chose not to work or who were working informally. Now, this segment is also in search of salaried jobs.

Díaz-Canel says that they have taken measures to direct this trend towards manufacturing-related sectors. He notes that the biggest task falls to local governments, which are primarily responsible for referring jobseekers to production-related employment in their regions.

The second step towards increasing production was to expand self-employed work. In Cuba, self-employment typically involves running a small business like a cafe, barber shop or mechanical repair shop. Self-employed people are also insured by the state and pay tax on their income.

Prior to the economic reforms, the Cuban state had identified areas open for self-employment, listing 127 activities eligible for these licenses. Labor and Social Security Minister Marta Elena Feitó Cabrera has announced that they will now list activities that are "not self-employed" instead. The Minister explained that they have identified 124 such areas and that applications for self-employment licenses can be made in all fields other than these.

While it is described in Western media as "Cuba opening up to capitalism" rather than a radical transformation, this regulatory change is just designed to simplify things. The state had previously established specific norms, including production and income targets, for each of the 127 approved areas of self-employment. Minister Feitó stated that this "homogenisation" approach created difficulties in real-life, so they are now taking the opposite approach. According to the Minister, people wanting a self-employment license

will present their proposal and set their own goals, and the Ministry will decide the appropriateness of each of these projects on that basis. This approach will help to develop export-oriented sectors – such as technical expertise, architecture, programming and graphic design – which have been increasing in Cuba in recent years and which the state wants to support.

About 600,000 people work in licensed self-employment in Cuba, which is thirteen per cent of total employment. The US blockade and the pandemic have heavily hit activities that depend on street activity (such as cafes) and tourism. With the economic reforms, many people are choosing to work in the state sector instead.

But the Cuban government emphasises that the state must act deliberately to increase employment, economic production and efficiency. Expanding self-employment is part of this. The government has identified work in state employment as key to powering production, especially food production, and avoiding unnecessary employment. As a result, self-employment has not collapsed despite having been hit hard by the epidemic and blockade in the last year.

The five-fold increase in state sector salaries was expected to be accompanied by a devaluation of the peso. The government's intention was that the increase in prices would be less than the increase in wages, so that workers in the state sector would effectively be better off.

While this was achieved in some areas, price increases in certain items were higher than projected. Díaz-Canel said there were problems with some heads of state institutions and companies taking steps that were out of step with the spirit of reforms. He noted that the government will be taking swift steps to prevent this.

People's Voice ☺

SERVING AMERICAN INTERESTS

The visit of the US Secretary of Defence, Lloyd Austin, to India barely two months after the Biden administration took office indicates the importance the United States attributes to India as a defence partner and ally.

Austin was in Japan and South Korea – both close military and strategic allies of the US in Asia – before coming to India. India being next in his itinerary indicates that the Pentagon views India as of the same status as Japan and South Korea. Lloyd underlined this importance during his visit when he described the India-US partnership as a "central pillar" of American policy for the Indo-Pacific region.

That the India-US strategic alliance is centred on the military relationship has been clear from the outset. Successive US

administrations ranging from Clinton to Bush to Obama and Trump have pursued the goal of enlisting India as an ally in the Asia-Pacific region, now called the Indo-Pacific.

In Austin's meeting with defence minister Rajnath Singh, it was agreed to strengthen the defence relationship by utilising the three so-called foundational agreements – LEMOA, COMCASA and BECA. This would lead to the interlocking and growing dependence of the Indian armed forces on the American military. As per Rajnath Singh, the Indian side agreed to enhance cooperation with the US Indo-Pacific Command, Central Command and Africa Command, thereby widening the scope for joint operations and coordination. The Modi government seems willing to serve US hegemonic goals in West Asia and Africa too.

The Austin visit was preceded by the first summit level virtual meeting of the leaders of the Quad – USA, Japan, Australia and India – held on March 12. The Quad, notwithstanding the official posture, is evolving into a strategic forum to counter China. For those who see the Quad as a necessary counterforce to China to safeguard India's security interests after the border clashes in Ladakh in April-May 2020, it must be pointed out that the Modi government had wholeheartedly joined the Indo-Pacific strategy of the United States beginning with the Joint Vision statement issued during Obama's visit to India in 2017. The revival of the Quad during the Trump presidency also preceded the border clashes in Ladakh.

Foreign policy and strategic approach is an extension of the internal policies of a country. The

Modi government has stepped up the entire gamut of neoliberal policies domestically which entail greater privatisation and entry of international finance capital in all spheres. The recent moves to open up and privatise the banking and insurance sectors is a longstanding demand of the United States.

The bulk of the public sector enterprises are set for privatisation. Defence production is one area targeted for privatisation. In September 2020, 74 per cent FDI in defence production through the automatic route was enhanced. Fully 100 per cent FDI can also be allowed with prior permission.

The Indian corporates have already entered defence production. The Modi government hopes to get US arms manufacturers to enter into joint ventures with Indian corporates or directly set-up production units in India. The big bourgeoisie in India is hoping for the development of a military industrial complex in the private sector with strong US links. In the meantime, the United States is exercising pressure to ensure that India becomes a captive market for arms and equipment.

The Modi government has already put India in a vice-like grip through the burgeoning military alliance with the United States. The country is faced with a serious loss of strategic autonomy. The United States government has made it clear that India buying the S-400 missile system from Russia will attract sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) passed by the US Congress. Austin

during his recent visit has conveyed the same message, something which the chairman of the senate committee on foreign relations, Bob Menendez, urged him to do when in India.

Already the Trump administration had invoked sanctions against Turkey, a NATO ally, for buying the S-400 missile system. The Biden administration is taking a more hostile and hard stand towards Russia and it is unlikely that it will take a lenient view of India buying the advanced anti-missile system from Russia.

The Modi government is allowing India to be made a catspaw of the United States in its struggle for hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region. Unlike India, the other partners of the Quad – Japan and Australia – despite their differences with China are engaged in extensive economic and trade relations with China. Along with China, they are part of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership which has been signed by 15 countries of the Asia-Pacific.

The Biden administration itself held high level talks with Chinese government leaders in Alaska on March 18-19. The United States is seeking to engage with China in areas of convergence while maintaining its negative posture on other issues.

The Modi government's willingness to subserve American hegemonic designs in Asia stems from the RSS-Hindutva outlook which is deeply pro-imperialist and virulently anti-Communist. Such an approach is inimical to India's national interests and sovereignty.

People's Democracy ☺

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IRAN AND CHINA SIGN 25-YEAR \$400 BILLION COOPERATION AGREEMENT



President Xi Jinping and President Hassan Rouhani.

The 25-year strategic cooperation roadmap provides for comprehensive bilateral collaboration in many sectors.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif signed a 25-year comprehensive strategic partnership agreement in Tehran marking a milestone in bilateral relations between the two countries.

The 25-year strategic cooperation roadmap between the two nations sets out comprehensive bilateral collaboration in many sectors.

According to the official Irna news agency, the final details of the agreement were

finalised Saturday 27th March at a meeting between “Wang, Ali Larijani, advisor to the supreme guide (Ayatollah Ali Khamenei) and the Islamic Republic’s special representative for strategic relations with China.”

Broadly speaking, the pact envisages Chinese investments of around \$400bil in Iran’s energy and infrastructure sectors, in exchange for Tehran guaranteeing Beijing a stable supply of oil and gas at competitive prices.

In a meeting held on Saturday in Tehran, Ali Lariyani and Wang Yi, Foreign Minister of the Asian giant, expressed their satisfaction with the scope of this project.

The two sides also reviewed ways to develop the main aspects of political, economic and strategic ties between the two countries, while stressing the need for close consultations to promote their long-term strategic cooperation.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran decides independently on its relations with other countries and, unlike some countries, does not change its position because of a phone call,” the Iranian authority has made clear.

For his part, the Chinese Foreign Minister reiterated that Beijing’s relations with Tehran will not be affected by the events and will remain permanent and strategic.

Referring to the historic and friendly relations between Tehran and Beijing, Wang stressed the importance of bilateral cooperation under the 25-year strategic partnership agreement and expressed satisfaction with the finalisation of the agreement.

The two sides further explored ways to develop political, economic and strategic ties, stressing the need for close consultations between the two countries to promote long-term cooperation.

The top Chinese diplomat who is in Tehran for a two-day visit also met with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani.

teleSUR ✪

“The Islamic Republic of Iran decides independently on its relations with other countries and, unlike some countries, does not change its position because of a phone call.”



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