



COVID-19 GLOBAL RESPONSE REQUIRED

Anna Pha

The pandemic is ravaging India with more than one million new cases every three days – a figure which is undoubtedly a gross underestimate. The number of new cases is surging on the African continent and in Latin America while a handful of high-income countries, including Australia, stand in the way of expanding the production of vaccines.

The divide between low- and high-income countries could not be more stark.

At the time of writing, 1.06 billion vaccine doses have been given worldwide. The EU, US and UK make up only 10.8 per cent of the global population but have purchased or have on order 50 per cent of all vaccinations. Whereas Africa, with 17.2 per cent of the world's population, has only received 1.5 per cent of vaccinations. (*The Conversation*)

At this rate of vaccination, global herd immunity will not be reached until 2023 or 2024 or even later. That is assuming no new mutations emerge that are beyond adaptation of existing vaccinations.

“MORALLY UNCONSCIONABLE”

“[Put] very simply the current inequities in access are both morally unconscionable and profoundly injurious to human health and well-being, and they demand immediate action,” World Trade Organisation (WTO) Director General Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said in response to a letter from 250 non-government organisations from around the world.

The signatories include medical, people's health, trade union, human rights, indigenous, women's, trade justice, and other organisations. Those from Australia include the Australian Council of Trade Unions, AID/WATCH, Maritime Union of Australia (Victorian Branch), Public Health Association of Australia, and the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network.

The letter expresses concern over the present emphasis on industry-controlled bilateral agreements as the primary approach to addressing global production constraints and supply shortages of vaccine for COVID-19. Rich countries are signing deals with pharmaceutical companies for the supply



of vaccines. Distribution is restricted and decentralised leaving many low-income countries extremely vulnerable without a supply of vaccine.

URGENCY

If global herd immunity is to be acquired then, speed and global distribution are of the essence. “The recent emergence of rapidly-spreading variants makes the rapid and equitable rollout of vaccines all the more important,” World Health Organisation (WHO) Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned.

The longer it takes to vaccinate people in third world countries the greater the risk of new, more deadly strains emerging. Health experts around the world are warning of the dangers if vaccination is not sped up and made accessible globally.

HOARDING BY RICH COUNTRIES

One billion doses, even allowing for considerable wastage, should more than cover two vaccinations for the EU's 448 million people. Yet the EU has 1.885 billion confirmed purchases and another one billion potential purchases. That is enough to fully (two doses) vaccinate the population three times over.

The US has confirmed purchases of 1.21

billion and another 1.3 billion potential purchases – a total of 2.51 billion doses for a population of 328 million. That's almost four times what is needed at this point in time. The hoarding of vaccines and monopoly on advance orders by the EU and US alone removes 3.843 billion jabs from the market or enough vaccine for more than 1.9 billion people.

But hoarding is not the only barrier to distribution and access. Big Pharma is also obstructing global distribution with its monopoly over the vaccines, protected by WTO rules.

INHUMANE BARRIER TO DISTRIBUTION

The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights – referred to as the TRIPS agreement – guarantees powerful global corporations a monopoly over innovations, inventions, products, and processes for a minimum of twenty years. To protect these “intellectual property rights” corporations take out patents. The only way other companies or governments can access that “intellectual property” is through a licence issued by the company – at a price if they can afford it.

For example, CSL in Australia is producing the AstraZenica vaccine under licence. It must pay for the licence which specifies

the conditions of use, such as quantity that can be manufactured, where it can be sold, who it can be sold to, etc. There is no transparency as to any of these conditions or the price paid.

Under some agreements the technology holder maintains control over the vaccine component (active ingredient) and prevents the licensee from manufacturing it, hence creating dependency on the technology holder for the supply of the vaccine component

“These agreements also depend on the ‘willingness’ of the technology holder to license at all and as such are failing to mobilise global manufacturing capacity and diversifying supply options, on transparent terms that prioritise boosting global supply of the vaccine components and the final product. For instance, Moderna and Pfizer have yet to enter into license agreements with developing country manufacturers allowing for technology transfer and manufacture to supply developing countries,” the letter to the WTO stated.

Pfizer plans to shift some production to manufacturing booster doses for rich countries even while some low- and middle-income countries have not had an initial vaccine. It also intends to raise the price of its vaccine to an estimated US\$150-175 (AU\$194-226) per dose in what it considers the post-acute pandemic phase.

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DOBSEEKER: MORRISON'S ATTACK ON WORKERS

The war on workers continues. The Morrison government has created The Employer Reporting Line allowing “employers to report jobseekers for declining or voluntarily leaving a ‘suitable’ job, demonstrating ‘misconduct’ during a job interview, or failing to attend one, and submitting an ‘inappropriate’ job application” (SBS). The new hotline has been dubbed “Dobseeker” by its critics.

Speaking on the new hotline, Minister for Employment Stuart Robert justified the hotline by telling the unemployed that “[y]ou have a responsibility. You just can’t sit on the JobSeeker payment and expect your neighbours to cover that lifestyle”

Talking to SBS, one JobSeeker recipient, Jay, noted how he didn’t eat three meals a day and rarely goes out. He asked, “What kind of a lifestyle is that?” The answer is that it isn’t one.

One might decide to argue that such a hotline serves to reduce unnecessary government spending. Yet, if spending was a concern, why would the government dump millions into setting up the hotline? It is obvious that this is just another ploy by the Morrison government to demonise the poor and unemployed. Furthermore, how does such a hotline help get people employed?

ALP deputy leader and employment spokesman Richard Marles, wondered the same thing, stating that the hotline was “a bad idea from the start” and “does nothing to get Australians secure jobs.”

Australian Unemployed Workers Union spokesperson Kristin O’Connell, speaking to SBS, felt that “there is no need for the hotline, considering the ‘infinitely small’ number of people who turn down work.”

Australian Council of Trade Unions president Michele O’Neil said the expanded scope of the hotline “creates a very wide range of subjective reasons that could result in people being cut off payments.”

Yet, the government is keen to present those who do not accept jobs with unacceptable conditions as “bludgers” – a tactic that has run forever within Australia’s bourgeois media.

However, the hotline has even proved to be controversial within the Liberal Party room. MPs, such as Bridget Archer, have even publicly acknowledged the unusually cruel nature of the hotline.

Archer felt that the hotline’s approach was “very simplistic” and only serves to “further demonise jobseekers, which is just unnecessary in my view,” further stating that “the whole system of mutual obligation for jobseekers is well overdue for some reform.”

People should not have to look over their shoulders for fear that possible job interviews could cause them to lose their benefits. Employers already possess the dominant position within the power dynamic between themselves and workers. This hotline only enhances their position, giving the bosses a mafia-esqe ability to “make an offer they can’t refuse” to the unemployed with the unspoken threat that if they don’t accept jobs with unacceptable conditions that their benefits could be taken.

This is just another example of how the Liberal party is a Party of the bosses, of the capitalist ruling class. This government is not concerned with “jobs”. It is concerned with maximising the profits of capitalists at the expense of the conditions of the working class.

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ATTEMPTS TO REMOVE BARRIERS THWARTED

“We believe that the way forward should be to remove barriers towards the development, production and approval of vaccines, therapeutics and other medical technologies necessary for the prevention, containment and treatment of the COVID-19 pandemic, so that more manufacturers, especially from developing countries, may independently contribute to the global supply. Global supply should not be dependent on the purely commercial prerogatives and exclusive rights of pharmaceutical companies holding the technology. There is simply too much at stake,” the letter said.

In line with these sentiments, in October last year the Indian and South African governments sought a temporary waiver of patents on COVID vaccines by the WTO to facilitate production in more countries, including some third world countries that have the capacity to do so.

WTO decisions are made by consensus. The proposal is strongly opposed by the EU, Switzerland, US, UK, Japan, and Canada – countries where Big Pharma is based – and so far, Australia has withheld support. The waiver has the support of more than one hundred member countries.

These rich countries over-ordered vaccines, and now they are preventing access to low-middle income countries at the WTO.

It is outrageous that these countries and Big Pharma put profits before the lives of billions of people in lower-income countries. It is forecast that Big Pharma will make close to US\$40 (AU\$52) billion in sales from COVID-19 vaccines in 2021. Pfizer has been accused of bullying Latin American governments in negotiations for vaccines, demanding that they put up sovereign assets as guarantees against any civil suits that people who experience bad side effects might file.

In addition, lower income countries have been charged two to three times what the wealthier countries are paying for the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine. (newrepublic.com)

AUSTRALIA

In an open letter, more than seven hundred health professionals and academics in Australia have called on the Morrison government to play a leadership role at the WTO for the removal of barriers to increasing vaccine production,

diagnostic tests, oxygen and other equipment. The letter was co-written by Public Health Association of Australia and Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF).

“To stem the pandemic, we must immediately address it where it is the biggest threat. The longer COVID-19 circulates unconstrained, the higher the risk of new variants. If we only focus on vaccinating Australia, we’ll prolong this pandemic for Australians. The new mutations, such as in South Africa and India, are more resistant to vaccines and could undermine global vaccination gains,” Jennifer Tierney, MSF Australia Executive Director says in the letter.

The Australian government is providing ventilators, PPE, and oxygen for India and Papua New Guinea and other financial assistance for the Indo-Pacific region. But it could and should do more. At the domestic level, it has shut out desperate Australian citizens, who fear for their lives and wish to return to Australia. The refusal to bring them home is political and racist. The threat of a jail term for anyone who does return, is proving counterproductive. Bring them home now! Move as quickly as possible to build dedicated quarantine facilities.

The government must show leadership internationally.

CLAIMS DON'T STACK UP

Big Pharma attempts to defend the system of patents and high monopoly prices charged, claiming they need to recoup research costs and risks that a vaccine or medication might not be successful. That to do otherwise would act as a disincentive to innovation.

Trade Minister Dan Tehan repeats the line of Big Pharma: “we’ve got to make sure that there are some protections in place for the millions of dollars that has gone into the research to create these vaccines.”

Really! Most of the research is funded by the public purse and the production is by the private sector which pockets the profits. For example, the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine was around 97-99 per cent funded by public money.

MONOPOLY PROFITS

Big Pharma is monopoly capital at its worst. Their conduct is criminal. The motive force driving all pharmaceutical research, development, production and distribution should be for public good, not profits. Private, monopoly ownership and control over vaccines and other

medical products is in conflict with the human rights of people. “Intellectual property” should be shared globally and made accessible to all governments for the benefit of their people.

Pfizer has almost doubled its sales projections for the vaccine this year, from US\$15 billion to around US\$26 billion and is already preparing for possible annual booster shots. The corporation’s CEO Albert Bourla has described the pooling of intellectual property as “dangerous” and “nonsense.” There have been more than three million recorded COVID deaths and the number is set to rise.

“I need to be blunt: the world is on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure – and the price of this failure will be paid with lives and livelihoods in the world’s poorest countries,” Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus WHO Director-General warned.

“The recent emergence of rapidly-spreading variants makes the rapid and equitable rollout of vaccines all the more important.” Ghebreyesus described the need for rapid action as “a strategic and economic imperative.”

The WHO launched the COVID-19-Technology Access Pool (C-TAP) initiative calling on pharmaceutical companies to commit to transparent, non-exclusive global voluntary licensing. It was stillborn as Big Pharma rejected the proposal.

At present, governments and the lives of people around the world are held to ransom by Big Pharma. Production and distribution of vaccines depend on the willingness of Big Pharma to sign bilateral agreements with countries.

GOVT MUST ACT

All pharmaceutical companies should be owned and democratically run by the public sector. CSL, a major Australian producer of vaccines including AstraZeneca’s COVID-19 and flu shots, should be restored to public ownership.

Public funding of R&D should be restricted to public institutions with the innovations belonging to the public sector. The practice of social risk and private profit should end.

Australia should play a leading role at the WHO, WTO, and other public fora by advocating the free transfer of technology and sharing of knowledge and know-how with lower income countries, in fact with all countries.

Failure to cooperate and share technology and know-how is self-defeating. No one will be safe until everyone is safe. ☺

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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MORRISON

Seamus Carey

Scott Morrison's address to the April national conference of the "Australian Christian Churches" Pentecostal group raised many eyebrows. While his religious affiliation was always public knowledge and so much of the content should come as no surprise, it is still quite an experience to see our head of government in a free-form ramble about God's greatness and glory, "rais[ing] spiritual weapons," and "the evil one."

Morrison has generally succeeded at keeping the strange details of his beliefs out of direct public view. Australia is lucky to have a long-standing secular political culture, and this sort of publicity is something uncomfortable even for many of his fellow believers. Questions arise around the expansion of American-style religious political influence and lobbying, the separation of church and state, and the nature of the office of Prime Minister.

His travel costs to attend the conference were taxpayer-funded, so let's see what we paid for.

Much attention was paid to Morrison's description of receiving a message from God in the form of a picture of an eagle, and of his covert "laying on of hands" on unsuspecting victims of natural disaster. But the speech gave further clues as to the Prime Minister's political ideology, and how it is shaped by and shapes his religious beliefs.

Morrison said, "I can't fix the world. I can't save the world." But, he "believe[s] in someone who can."

Such a view might serve to explain his behaviour during the 2019-20 bushfire crisis, as that someone can, unlike the Prime Minister, be present in Australia and Hawaii simultaneously. Looking at his response to the pandemic, we might further glean that this someone can only act through state governments, not federal – a

mysterious way indeed, but not for us to doubt.

Referring to the writings of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks but offering a view of his own, he said "you can't replace community with governments, the market, with other institutions, you can't. You can't replace the family, you can't replace marriage, you can't replace the things that are so personal and ingrained and come out of us as individuals with systems of power or systems of capital. These are important things but they can't replace community."

It's a rare thing to see a Liberal party figure admit that there's anything the market can't do. But alas, this is no heretical departure from neoliberal market fundamentalism – it is only a deeper level of it. While the profound revelation of Thatcherite-Reaganite nonsense was "you can't expect anything from the state – you can expect it from the market instead," Morrison here admits that you can't even expect it from the market! You can expect it only from "community," namely the community of believers, and God acting through them.

"That's where I want to be, and a church that believes in community and creates community. And the essence of community is each individual understanding that they're valued, that they're unique."

Morrison also seems to identify community with "things that [...] come out of us as individuals." Things that come out of us as individuals, like ... community? Now to be fair, it's not too unusual an argument to say that community proceeds from the individual – we've heard that before. But it demands a little more explanation if this concept of community is set in opposition to "systems of power" like government and the market.

If Morrison's own concept of government is something that is unavoidably distinct from things that "come out of us as individuals," does he have any concept of democracy that makes sense in the context of his liberal-individualistic



outlook? It seems instead from this outlook that government is an ineffable, mysterious force of its own, and so too is the market. These things, unlike the God-given "ingrained" nature of individuals and the family, are all-too-human creations, inhuman in their artificiality.

Morrison took aim at "identity politics." Further fleshing out the picture of his strange concept of the individual, he diagnoses identity politics as not being an excess of individualism, but a deficiency of it:

"There is a fashion these days to not think of Australians as individuals, there is particularly, I think, amongst our young people, and I worry about this [...] it's called 'identity politics'"

"[...] there is a tendency for people not to see themselves and value themselves in their own right as individuals. And to see themselves only defined by some group and they get lost in that group and

you know when you do that you lose your humanity. And you lose your connection, I think, one to each other and you're defined by your group, not by, I think, I believe who God has created you to be. [...]"

"That's why people start writing stupid things on Facebook and the internet, being disrespectful to one another and we all know how that is corroding and desensitising our country and our society, not just here but all around the world. I think it's an evil thing. I think it's a very evil thing and we've got to pray about it, we've got to call it out and we've got to raise our spiritual weapons against this because it's going to take our young people. [...] social media has its virtues and its values and enables us to connect with people in ways we've never had before, terrific, terrific. But those weapons can also be used by the evil one and we need to call it out."

He gives no indication of what these "stupid things" are, other

than that his audience is assumed to have a certain interpretation.

While we Communists are critical of what we call identity politics, it is clear from the recent political context that Morrison's use of the phrase is imported from US right-wingers, and seeks to denigrate political action around issues such as race, gender, and sexuality. A further clue to this is his specific concerns about "young people," the largest demographic in the recent surge in activism around these issues.

Because Morrison believes so strongly in the individual, and in God's plan for them, he is able to end up *laissez-faire-er* than *laissez-faire*. Not even stopping at the usual liberal claim that our present capitalist system of economy and government are capable of solving all social problems, to Morrison it's even unnecessary to claim that they can. ✪

It's a rare thing to see a Liberal party figure admit that there's anything the market can't do.

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TWU TO AMAZON, ALDI, BUNNINGS: MAKE TRUCKING SAFER OR FACE ACTION

Transport Workers' Union Statement

The Transport Workers' Union will today announce action in the coming months against some of the biggest global retailers Amazon, Apple and Aldi, as well as domestic brands IGA, Kmart and Bunnings in a bid to make trucking safer and fairer.

The union is serving claims on over fifty major retailers warning of their responsibility to ensure that they are paying transport operators enough to guarantee that their goods are being delivered safely. The plan for action and protests comes as enterprise agreements for thousands of transport workers expire in the coming months, with operators already revealing they can't meet modest pay claims because of the squeeze by retailers.

TWU National Secretary Michael Kaine at a major speech at TWU National Council in Darwin will outline the action, stating lifting standards and saving lives is at the heart of the plan.

"There are far too many truck crash deaths where fatigue, faulty brakes, loads not strapped down properly and even stimulants to stay awake are a factor. At the heart of this is an industry on its knees because the major retailers at the top continually squeeze transport operators and drivers to the point that safety is thrown out the window. Retailers like Amazon and Aldi can boast about big profits but Australians are dying because of it and we won't cop it anymore," he said ahead of the address.

"We will work with retailers which want to see change so that no transport worker in their supply chains feels the pressure to drive a faulty truck, speed, work long hours or skip their rest breaks. But for those who are not interested in addressing the slaughter on our roads and which refuse to accept their role, workers across transport operators will unite to take action, and we will not relent," he said.

In the last five years, 885 people have died in truck crashes, according to the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics. In the same period, 183 transport workers have died on the job, the highest by far for any industry, according to Safe Work Australia.

Retail profits globally have boomed since the pandemic hit with Amazon last week announcing profits up 224 per cent to US\$8 billion in just the last quarter. Apple said its



profits have more than doubled to US\$23.6 billion while Aldi's annual revenue in 2019 was \$US109 billion.

Coles and the TWU signed a charter in December on standards in road transport and the gig economy. It involves a formal consultation process between the TWU and Coles to ensure an ongoing emphasis on safety and to establish mechanisms through which safety issues can be identified and addressed.

Aldi has refused similar engagement with transport workers. The wealthy retailer lost a Federal Court case in December aimed at silencing truck drivers speaking out about safety in its supply chain. The ruling followed evidence and testimony from drivers about being forced to work fatigued, being ridiculed and pushed out of their jobs for speaking out, not paid proper rates or super. Drivers have also spoken out about a lack of weighing systems to gauge when trucks are overloaded, of flooded and badly lit loading docks, of blocked fire exits and rotten meat left lying around.

The TWU is also seeking legislative change to lift standards in road transport, including the gig economy, in the form of an independent tribunal with the powers to investigate risks to safety and make binding orders addressing them. ✪

ANMF LAUNCHES NEW NATIONAL AGED CARE CAMPAIGN: "IT'S NOT TOO MUCH"

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation Statement

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) has launched its new national campaign aimed at ensuring that aged care is a priority in the upcoming 2021 Budget and that the Morrison Government introduces urgently needed laws that mandate safe staff ratios in every nursing home, 24/7.

The "It's Not Too Much" campaign features a series of radio and TV commercials and a website, asking Australians to help influence the Morrison Government to legislate staff ratios, to stop the suffering and neglect of elderly nursing home residents.

Mobile billboards will also circulate across the electorates of five of our key politicians: the Prime Minister Scott Morrison, the Treasurer Josh Frydenberg, the Health and Aged Care Minister Greg Hunt, Opposition Leader Anthony Albanese and Shadow Treasurer Jim Chalmers.

Acting ANMF Federal Secretary, Lori-Anne Sharp, said today: "Our aged care residents and those who care for them need the Morrison Government to act. Surely, it's not too much to ask that residents receive basic care they need and deserve in their later years of life. But, as the Royal Commission found, older Australians living in nursing homes are suffering because of dangerously low staffing levels in many private aged care homes. And that must change."

The ANMF's recommendations for immediate action are:

- Mandate staffing ratios in nursing homes;
- Legislated requirements for clinical governance, leadership and expertise in aged care;
- Legislated transparency and accountability for taxpayer funding for aged care providers;
- Guaranteeing workforce capacity and capability;
- Registration for unregulated aged care workers.

"Every day the Morrison Government delays taking action to address chronic understaffing in nursing homes is another day that residents will continue to suffer. And another day that staff (the majority of whom are women) continue to be overworked and undervalued. We must address this crisis immediately and mandate safe staffing ratios," Ms Sharp added.

"When additional funding is allocated to aged care in the 2021 Budget in response to the Royal Commission recommendations, the Morrison Government must ensure that for-profit providers are using additional taxpayer funds for its intended purposes – providing additional staff with the right skills mix so that they can deliver the care that elderly residents deserve"

To donate a little of your time and help elderly Australians living in aged care, visit www.itsnottoomuch.com ✪



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OP-ED: AFGHANISTAN, WILL THE US LOSE THE WAR AS WELL AS THE PEACE?

Eileen Whitehead

It's little wonder that Joe Biden wants to get his troops out of Afghanistan. To date, the cost of invading Afghanistan has cost 2.26 trillion USD, according to Brown University research. Of course, in addition to this will be the lifetime care cost for American veterans wounded since 2001, and whatever the future interest payments are on money borrowed to support this war.

It has been estimated that approximately 241,000 people have died thanks to this invasion: 71,344 civilians; 2,442 American service personnel; 78,314 Afghan military and police; and 84,191 fighting on the other side. These figures do not take into account the thousands more injured or permanently disabled.

For Australia, the financial cost of sending Australian troops (from 2003 onwards) to Afghanistan is estimated at about 2.5 billion AUD, but the total cost of operations in Afghanistan comes to 9.3 billion AUD, and Australia's total military budget in 2014-15 was 29.3 billion AUD. Even more telling are the deaths emanating from our involvement in this thankless war – forty-one Australian soldiers killed and 260 injured during the conflict – outstripped by the suicides of defence force personnel on returning home. So far 292 have taken their own lives.

Since 9/11, the US has been involved in the invasion of Iraq, and also interference in Syria, Yemen, Somalia and elsewhere: often inveigling Australia to join in its conflicts, all of which result in the people there being left with catastrophic levels of poverty, economies in chaos, and now, with the added burden of the pandemic, health care in crisis. Nearly 3 million Afghan refugees have fled their country to escape the violence, making Afghanistan one of the world's biggest sources of refugees, and over 2 million Afghans have been internally displaced.

We should all be choking on our beers when Americans like Tod Walters, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, comes out with statements such as "Everything we do is about generating peace. We compete to win [...] and if deterrence fails, we're prepared to respond to aggression, primarily through NATO." An absolute indication, if ever one were needed, that NATO does not merely advise or train Afghan troops, but goes much further.

Within days of taking office, the Biden administration signalled it would not abide by the US-Taliban agreement, citing the importance of supporting a "stable,

sovereign, democratic, and secure future for Afghanistan": the same language used whenever the United States and NATO conspire to destabilise foreign countries hostile to US and European capital. Now the US and European Command and NATO, together with the Afghan forces they finance, appear to be shifting from their "so-called" terrorist campaign to a "peace-building" campaign! Which, to anyone appreciating the strategic location of the region, would appear to be simply a cover for the real objective of fighting a new Cold War against Russia, China, and any other country in the region not aligned with the US/European Imperialist consensus.

China's increasingly rapid influence in Afghanistan is, no doubt, of concern to the US. Beijing has long been worried about the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), known to have bases in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, as the threat of ETIM fighters and other jihadists entering Xinjiang through the Wakhan Corridor could radicalise Uyghurs there. China's Ministry of Defence has admitted that they are engaged with Afghanistan in joint law enforcement operations in these border areas.

China has always maintained close ties with the Afghan government, signing the Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Good Neighbourly Relations with Kabul in 2006 and, in 2008, winning a 3 billion USD contract to extract copper from the Mes Aynak mines in Logar province. Unfortunately, the Mes Aynak project has failed mostly because of the poor security situation in the country.

Beijing has stepped up its engagement with Kabul in the last six years, as it is imperative that an unstable Afghanistan does not derail its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as well as its China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, both of which depend on a stable region. It is in this context that China's role as a peace broker, aid donor, and investor as well as its military role in Afghanistan must be seen.

Because of the constant warring, Afghanistan's production of export goods has seen the railway line linking China's Jiangsu province with the Afghan rail port of Hairatan, running empty from Afghanistan to Uzbekistan on its return route. China is Afghanistan's biggest foreign investor today due to its interest in resource extraction and infrastructure building. It extracts oil from the Amu Darya basin in the north and, in the telecommunications sector, China's role has grown from supplying Afghanistan with telecom equipment in 2007 to the construction of fibre-optic links in 2017.

In order to aid stability in the region,



address its own security concerns and realise its economic ambitions, Beijing has provided 240 million USD (2002-2013); in 2014 – 80 million USD, pledging an additional 240 million USD over the next three years. In 2017, China extended 90 million USD towards development projects in Afghanistan's Badakhshan province alone.

China's BRI would increase Afghanistan's road and rail infrastructure, providing the landlocked country with links to more markets. However, until the country can peacefully go into production road and rail lines, it will suffer the same fate as the Jiangsu-Hairatan rail link. So how successful can China be in stabilising the country? Because it has not been seen as an oppressor, its role as a facilitator has been acceptable both to the government and the Taliban. It is also Pakistan's closest ally and in meetings with the Quadrilateral Coordination

Group (QCG) and the 6+1 Dialogue, China brings ideas and expertise which aid its brokering efforts. Also its inducements of regional trade and economic development aids co-operation from both Pakistan and Afghanistan, whilst not being averse to cutting deals with the Taliban.

China's role in Afghanistan is growing, yet its influence there remains limited compared to the US. While China has been able to establish ties, not only is Washington's influence over the Afghan government considerable, but the Taliban also wants to talk with the US.

A peace process in Afghanistan cannot move forward without the US and China working together, but won't get far if there's a repeat of US drone strikes, like the one which killed Taliban commander Mullah Mansour, in 2016 and caused the collapse of the QCG effort. ✪

Special Appeal Reds go Green

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May 15, 1948, marks the anniversary of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians being driven from their homes, and hundreds of Palestinian villages were destroyed. This was followed by the Declaration of Independence creating the Zionist state of Israel.

Tea, coffee & biscuits will be served

Queries: 0431 275 434

REPORT: MAY DAY ACTION

SYDNEY

Demonstrators rallied on May Day to protest development plans at Willow Grove in North Parramatta.

The site would be dismantled and relocated in order to construct a second Powerhouse museum. A green ban could see Willow Grove saved. For the first time in its history, May Day was held in Parramatta instead of the city so that workers could protest the proposed move.

In a statement the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), outlined its desire to honour community concerns.

"These Green Bans mean no work can be done to destroy these historically significant sites," said CFMEU NSW Secretary Darren Greenfield. "If the Berejiklian government wants work on the museum to proceed they need to sit down with the local community, listen to what they say and come up with a plan that preserves these buildings."

A statement from the North Parramatta Resident Action Group echoed these concerns.

"It has become increasingly clear as reports and documents have become available under pressure from community, museum professionals and heritage experts that Parramatta is not getting the museum it was promised but a monster flexible event space with residential levels that will demolish our already diminishing heritage assets with Willow Grove and St Georges Terraces."

MELBOURNE

Since May Day is not recognised as a public holiday in Victoria, the Melbourne May Day rally is traditionally held on the first Sunday in May to allow workers and their families a chance to attend. This year rallies were held on both Saturday the 1st and Sunday the 2nd of May. On Thursday night, the 29th of May, a wreath laying ceremony was held at the eight Hour Monument on Victoria Street, followed by an international solidarity event at Trades Hall. The Melbourne branch of the CPA were in attendance at both of these events.

The Sunday May Day rally included speakers on various issues such as the right to unionise, independent foreign policy, proper, humane, and welcoming treatment for refugees and migrants, support for Australian First Nations peoples, and action on the climate crisis. There was also community singing, a BBQ, and various leftist organisations and unions in attendance. The March proceeded through Melbourne CBD, bypassing the State Library of Victoria and continuing up Bourke Street, concluding back at the Trades Hall on the corner of Victoria and Lygon Streets where more speakers were heard. The celebrations were well attended and a heartening show of working-class solidarity.

PERTH

UnionsWA had already planned a parade for May Day where there was to be no speeches or chants but it took one COVID case and a 3-day state lockdown to end most May Day celebrations in WA.

Workers' solidarity WA and the CPA revived the tradition of a May Day Toast some six years ago, and this year the event was again planned to be held at the workers' pub 43 Below. While it was unable to go ahead, the CPA was determined not to walk away from this important tradition. With only a day or two to organise, the event went online.

Key note speaker historian Dr Peter Limb took us on a walk through the chequered history of May Day. He spoke of the influence of the CPA in shaping May Day in Australia and a rising militarism leading to bans. Numerous attempts were made to bury May Day such as using a shift to state Labour days. In WA, the MUA revived May Day as a militant action in response to banning CPA banners and encouraging corporate floats. Other guest speakers included Daniel Gasparri, Chargé d'Affaires in Canberra from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Gasparri expressed his solidarity with Australian workers. We stand in solidarity with the Bolivarian revolution and demand the end of the economic sanctions, said Vinnie Molina, convenor of Workers' Solidarity WA. They toasted workers' rights and demanded an end to vaccine profiteering and for the rebuilding of solidarity among workers in Australia and around the world.

2021 is an important year for workers' struggles in WA with the 75th anniversary of the longest strike in Australia history that saw 800 Aboriginal workers from twenty-seven stations across 10,000 square kilometres stop work, starting 1st May 1946. Staying out for three years the end of the strike saw Aboriginal workers win the award wage and set the stage for future strikes like Wave Hill in 1966.

The Pilbara strike is an example to all workers that we win when we organise and dare to struggle. In WA, we were pleased in 2021 to toast to Unity, Peace, Solidarity and Collective action ✳



Melbourne



Adelaide (Photo: Fernando Gonçalves)



Sydney

IS ACROSS THE COUNTRY



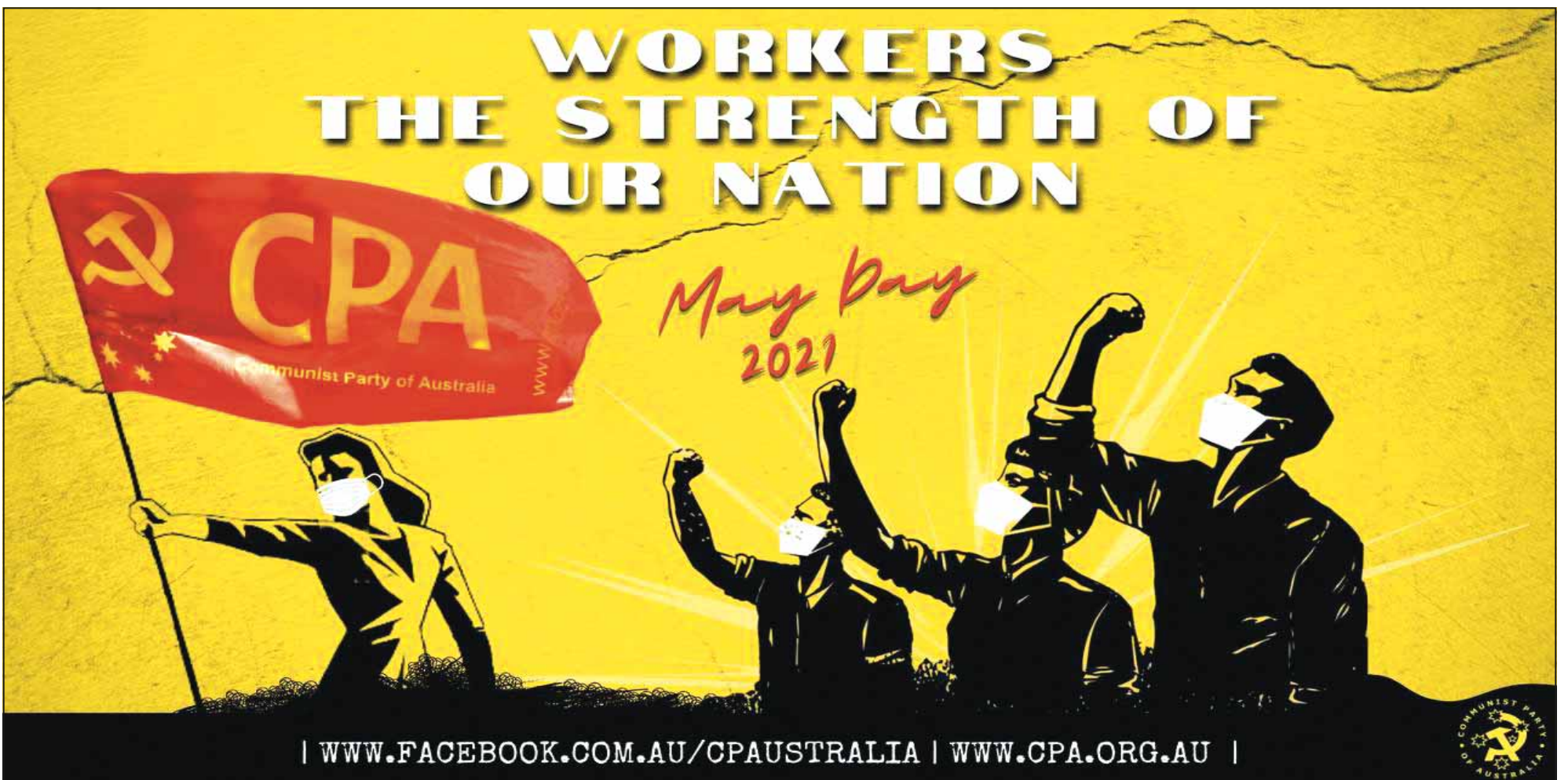
Sydney



Melbourne



Newcastle



MOVE UNDERWAY TO RESCUE ANTI-COMMUNIST

Vijay Prashad

A full generation has elapsed since the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) collapsed in late 1991. Two years earlier, in 1989, the socialist states of Eastern Europe gave way to a capitalism that forced its way in – the first salvo came when Hungary opened its border with Austria.

Three months later, on the 15th of June, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev told the press in Bonn (West Germany) that the Berlin Wall “could disappear when the preconditions which brought it about cease to exist.” He did not list the preconditions, but he said, “Nothing is permanent under the Moon.” On the 9th of November, 1989, the Berlin Wall was indeed opened under orders of the German Democratic Republic’s (East Germany’s - GDR’s) ruling party, the Socialist Unity Party.

The capitalist West Germany, which like so many other capitalist countries, had long accused socialist states of “exporting socialism,” then itself joined the capitalist countries of the world in exporting capitalism into what had been the socialist GDR. Rather than live peacefully alongside a socialist GDR, West Germany, by October 1990, absorbed the GDR into itself.

Upon unification, the structures of the GDR had to be demolished. Headed by the Social Democratic politician Detlev Rohwedder, the new rulers created the Treuhandanstalt (“Trust Agency”) to privatise 8,500 public enterprises that employed over four million workers. “Privatise quickly, restructure resolutely, and shut down carefully,” Rohwedder said. But before he could do this, Rohwedder was assassinated in April 1991.

He was succeeded by the economist Birgit Breuel who told the *Washington Post*, “We can try to explain ourselves to people, but they will never love us. Because whatever we do, it’s hard for people. With every one of the 8,500 enterprises, we either privatise or restructure or close them down. In every case, people lose jobs.” Hundreds of firms that had been public property (*Volkseigentum*) fell into private hands, and millions of people lost their jobs; during this time, seventy per cent of women lost their jobs. The stunning scale of the corruption and cronyism only came out decades later in a German parliamentary inquiry in 2009.

Publishing companies and millions of books were confiscated. Mark Twain’s classics were among them. Public libraries were emptied, and books that people could get for tiny sums of money were trashed. Many of them, reminiscent of the days of the Nazis, were actually burned to make way for the incoming West German publishing companies. Political purges were orchestrated to remove thousands of professors and teachers



Erasing East Germany: The ship named "Berlin Capital of the DDR" has the initials of the German Democratic Republic painted over at a shipyard in Hamburg in September 1990. (Photo: Christian Eggers)

who were not pro-capitalist from their positions in schools and universities.

Not only did the public property of the GDR slip into the pockets of private capital, but the entire history of the country vanished in a haze of anti-communist rhetoric. The only word that remained to define the 40 years of GDR history was *stasi*, the colloquial name for the Ministry for State Security. Nothing else mattered. Neither the de-Nazification of that part of Germany – which was not conducted in the West – nor the impressive gains in housing, health, education, daycare, and social life occupy space in the public imagination.

Some policies that the GDR pioneered only live on in other countries. To a large extent, Finland and other Scandinavian countries copied the GDR’s approach to daycare, which, ahead of its time, surpassed even the daycare proposals of the Biden administration’s Family Plan. In the GDR, daycare was a true part of the infrastructure and encompassed everyone from six months up to eighteen. The older youth were cared for in excellent sports, theatre, and social clubs. Young parents could pursue full-time careers while the children had healthy activities to occupy their time. Disillusionment and crime were not the choices young people had to make in the GDR.

How many people realise that on weekends US soldiers stationed in West Berlin spent their time off in the East, where their small change purchased excellent meals, good beer, and entrance to countless recreational activities?

There is little mention in the history books today of the GDR’s contribution to the anti-colonial struggle or the socialist construction experiments from Vietnam to Tanzania. All this vanished, the earthquake of the reunification swallowing up the achievements of the GDR and leaving behind descriptions of an imagined land of social despair.

Few realise that in opinion poll after poll – whether in the 1990s or the 2000s – large numbers of people living in former East Germany look back longingly for the GDR past. This *Ostalgie* (“East nostalgia”) remains intact, reinforced by the greater unemployment and lower incomes existing today in the eastern part of Germany.

In 1998, the German parliament set up the Federal Foundation for the Study of Communist Dictatorship in East Germany, which set the terms for the national appraisal of socialism in the GDR. The organisation’s mandate was to fund research on the GDR that would portray it as a criminal enterprise rather than a historical project. Fury governed the historical undertaking. The

attempt to delegitimise Marxism and socialism in Germany mirrored attempts in other countries in Europe and North America that hastened to snuff out the reappearance of these movements. The ferocity of efforts to rewrite history suggested a fear of a return of support for socialism in powerful circles, especially in a more democratic form.

The Tricontinental Institute for Social Research has partnered with the Internationale Forschungsstelle DDR (IF DDR) to produce the first of a new series, *Studies on the DDR. The first study, Risen from the Ruins: The Economic History of Socialism in the German Democratic Republic*, goes beneath the anti-communist sludge to unearth, in a reasonable way, the historical development of the 40-year project in the GDR. Based in Berlin, the text authors sifted through the archives and memories, interviewing those who helped construct socialism in Germany at different levels of society.

Peter Hacks, a poet of the GDR, said in retrospect, “The worst socialism is better than the best capitalism. Socialism, that society that was toppled because it was virtuous (a fault on the world market). That society whose economy respects values other than the accumulation of capital: the rights of its citizens to life, happiness, and health; art and science; utility and the reduction of waste.” For

Not only did the public property of the GDR slip into the pockets of private capital, but the entire history of the country vanished in a haze of anti-communist rhetoric.

EAST GERMANY FROM HISTORIANS

when socialism is involved, Hacks said, it is not economic growth, but “the growth of its people that is the actual goal of the economy.” *Risen from the Ruins* lays out the story of the GDR and its people from the ashes of Germany after the defeat of fascism to the economic pillage of the GDR after 1989.

One of the least known parts of the GDR’s history explored is its internationalism, wonderfully explored in this study. Three brief extracts make the point:

1. Solidarity Work. Between 1964 and 1988, sixty friendship brigades of the Free German Youth (the GDR youth mass organisation) were deployed to 27 countries to share their knowledge, help with construction, and create training opportunities and conditions for economic self-sufficiency. Many of these projects still exist today, though some have taken on different names, such as the Carlos Marx Hospital in Managua, Nicaragua; the German-Vietnamese Friendship Hospital in Hanoi, the Vietnam Karl Marx Cement Factory in Cienfuegos, Cuba, to name but a few.

2. Learning and Exchange Opportunities. Overall, more than 50,000 international students completed their education at the universities and colleges of the GDR. The GDR’s state budget financed the studies. As a rule, there were no tuition fees, many international students received scholarships, and the GDR provided accommodation for them in student halls of residence. In addition to the students, many contract workers came to the GDR from allied states, such as Mozambique, Vietnam, and Angola, as well as from Poland, and Hungary, seeking job training and work in production. Right until the end, foreign workers remained a priority, with contract workers growing from 24,000 to 94,000 (1981-89). In 1989, all foreigners in the GDR received full municipal voting rights and began to nominate candidates themselves.

3. Political Support. While the West was slandering Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) as terrorists and “racists” and conducting business with the apartheid regime in South Africa – even providing arms

shipments – the GDR supported the ANC, provided the freedom fighters with military training, printed their publications, and cared for its wounded. After Black students in the township of Soweto launched an uprising against the apartheid regime on the 16th of June, 1976, the GDR began to commemorate international Soweto Day as a sign of solidarity with the South African people and their struggle. Solidarity was even extended to those in the belly of the beast: When Angela Davis was tried as a terrorist in the United States, a GDR correspondent presented her with flowers for International Women’s Day, and students led the One Million Roses for Angela Davis campaign, during which they delivered truckloads of cards with hand-painted roses to her in prison.

The memory of this solidarity no longer remains, either in Germany or South Africa. Without the material support provided by the GDR, the USSR, and Cuba, it is unlikely that national liberation in South Africa would have come when it did. Cuban military support for the national liberation fighters at the 1987 Battle of Cuito Cuanavale was crucial for this defeat of the South African apartheid army, leading eventually to the collapse of the apartheid project in 1994.

Organisations such as the Federal Foundation for the Study of Communist Dictatorship in East Germany and the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation (based in Washington) exist not only to denigrate the past and to malign socialism but also to make sure that socialist projects in the present carry the penalty of their caricatures. To advance a left project in our time – which is imperative – is made much more difficult if it must carry the albatross of anti-communist fabrications on its back.

That is the reason why this project, led by IF DDR, is so important. It is not merely an argument about the GDR; it is also, at its core, a broader argument about the possibilities opened by experiments to create a socialist society and the material improvements they create and have created in the lives of the people.

Socialism does not emerge



Cooperative farmers handing over a flag of solidarity with the motto ‘Solidarity Hastens Victory’ written on it to the Ambassador of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, 1972. | Wikimedia Commons

fully-fledged nor perfectly formed. A socialist project inherits all the limitations of the past. It takes effort and patience to transform a country, with its rigidities and class hierarchies, into a socialist society. The GDR lasted for a mere 40 years, half the life expectancy of the average German citizen. In its aftermath, the adversaries of socialism exaggerated all its problems to eclipse its achievements.

Volker Braun, an East German poet, wrote an elegy to his forgotten country in October 1989 called *Das Eigentum*, or Property.

Our quest here is not to reverse direction and exaggerate all the achievements while hiding the problems. The past is a resource to understand the complexities of social development to learn what went wrong and what went right. In collaboration with the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research, the IF DDR project is invested in this kind of archaeology to dig amongst the bones to discover how to improve the way we humans stretch our spines and stand upright with dignity.

People’s World ✪

I’m still here: my country has gone West.
PEACE FOR THE PALACES AND WAR ON THE SHACKS.
I myself have given my country the boot.

What little virtue it possessed burns in the fire.
Winter is followed by a summer of desire.

I might as well get lost, who cares what’s next
And no one will ever again decipher my texts.

What I never possessed, from me was taken.
I will eternally long for what I didn’t partake in.

Hope appeared on the path like a trap

You grope and grab at the property I had.

When will I say mine again and mean we and ours.



The emblem of the German Democratic Republic is projected onto the front of the “Humboldt Forum” building in Berlin, Nov. 4, 2019. The “Humboldt Forum” is the replacement building of the “Palast der Republik” (Palace of the Republic), the former East German parliament. The building on the right is the Berlin Cathedral.



Newly-freed US political prisoner Angela Davis at the Tenth World Festival of Youth and Students in Berlin, 1973.

GENERALS THREATEN CIVIL WAR IN OPEN LETTER TO FRENCH GOVERNMENT

Valentin Cartillier

In France a group of military personnel, both active and retired, have penned an open letter to President Emmanuel Macron warning him of what they see as the perils facing the country. The letter, begun by Captain Jean-Pierre Fabre-Bernadac, currently has over 24,000 signatures, including twenty-five retired generals, around 100 high-ranking serving and ex-officers, and more than 1,000 other military personnel, either active or retired, alongside thousands of others who've pledged support for the letter. The exact numbers of each group are difficult to tell as only the first 1,500 signatures are available on the website, place-armes.fr.

The letter warned Macron of the "perils" of "Islamism" and "anti-racism" facing France and that the country could soon descend into "civil war" because of his weakhanded approach. The letter was published in the right-wing *Valeurs Actuelles* (*Current Values*) magazine which called it a "letter embedded with the conviction and commitment of these men attached to their country."

The letter dramatically begins with:

"The hour is grave, France is in peril, numerous mortal dangers menace her. We who remain, even in retirement, soldiers of France, cannot remain indifferent to the current circumstances of our beautiful country."

The main thrust of the letter is that France has lost its way and no longer holds sacred its traditional values. It lists the various threats it sees to the internal coherence of French society. Usually texts of this nature contain dog whistles but this time the authors brought out the fog horns. The letter refers to inhabitants of the "banlieues," the mainly immigrant areas that ring French cities, as the "suburban hordes," who "scorn our country."

Those immigrants are largely from former French colonies. The letter makes the ridiculous claim that the banlieues have become no-go zones for French law enforcement, where law and order and French values don't exist. Ridiculous indeed seeing as banlieues are some of the most heavily policed areas in the country. The timing of the letter's publication was by no means accidental, as it was published on the 60th anniversary of a failed coup d'état by generals opposed to France granting independence to Algeria under Charles de Gaulle. It is an extremely bitter reality, the very same people who were murdered, oppressed, and often forced to flee in their own countries because of French colonialism find themselves once more persecuted in that same country.

The letter also repeats the criticisms against "anti-racism," and "de-colonial theory," found in a lot of the current right-wing rhetoric in France. For a closer examination of that rhetoric see *Guardian* "Islamic-Leftism: From Conspiracy to Policy" #1957. None of the claims made throughout the letter are substantiated in any way, it



simply leans on the prestige of the former military positions of its signatories to peddle the same tired old anti-Islamic rhetoric and vague appeals to the non-descript "French values" that are supposedly being lost.

Interestingly, the letter also accuses the government of seeking to use the police "as proxy agents and scapegoats" to oppress Yellow Vest protests of recent years, who they see as genuinely expressing their "despair" at the state of French society. Though in the same breath the letter decries the "undercover and hooded individuals [who] ransack businesses and threaten these same law enforcement agencies." In the typical sloppy style of hypocrites, they've shown their hand: they'll defend the right to protest, who may protest and how is at their discretion. The letter ends by boldly proclaiming that if nothing is done, and the government continues its program of tolerance, then there will be an inevitable crisis in which the French army will need to intervene to protect France's "civilisational values" and to "save our compatriots on our national territory."

While it is more difficult for the French government to punish former service members, they are not totally immune from government backlash; they can be stripped of ranks. Defence Minister Florence Parly has announced that active members could be punished under a law that requires soldiers to be politically neutral. How anyone can think that participants within the military industrial complex of any country can be "politically neutral" is beyond comprehension but we can assume here it just means

the military is supposed to remain in lockstep with the will of the government.

This interesting tension between the military and the government was confirmed by Hervé Grandjean, the Defence Ministry Spokesman, who said that the signatories had broken military rules by "openly criticising the government or appealing to comrades to take up arms on national territory." Each of the active signatories will have to face a senior military council with the possibility that they could be "de-listed" or placed into "immediate retirement."

However, there was one government Minister who gleefully and opportunistically revelled in the publication of the letter. Marine Le Pen, leader of the far-right National Rally party, formerly called the National Front, initially showed her support for the letter by publishing her own response piece in the same magazine. In it, she professed her profound agreement with the sentiments expressed in the letter. She even invited the retired generals to back her upcoming 2022 election campaign, saying "I invite you to join us in taking part in the coming battle, which is the battle of France."

The current climate of anti-Islamic rhetoric peddled by Macron's government is playing straight into Le Pen's populist platform, bolstering her chances in next year's election. In the 2017 election, while none of the candidates won a decisive majority in the first round of voting, Le Pen wasn't far behind Macron. Under the French electoral system, this meant that France had to go into a second round of voting, this time

only between Macron and Le Pen. While Macron decisively won this second round he may not get so lucky in the next election.

His current "anti-separation" bill, largely criticised for being anti-Islamic, is giving a lot of ammo to Le Pen's upcoming campaign, with most polls showing Macron and Le Pen standing neck and neck for the first electoral round of 2022, and the other viable candidates lagging far behind, Macron's centrist platform could very easily topple in the onslaught of Le Pen's "cleaned up" far-right populist rhetoric. Ugo Palheta, a sociologist and lecturer at Lille University, summed it up most concisely "The problem is that the farther you extend your reach towards the far right, the more the far right progresses."

While it would be easy to dismiss this letter as simply the disgruntled mumblings of a few ex-servicepeople, it has once again propelled Islamophobic rhetoric back into the French national discourse. Appeals to "French tradition" or "civilisation" in politics are very often used to target those who are deemed as "not-French" or "not French enough," in this case French Muslims. If your interests are genuinely to enhance "national unity" then you wouldn't go about it by demonising already marginalised sections of the population. But then, it's clear that this isn't where the interests of the people who signed this letter lie at all. True unity must come from the solidarity of the international working class and must not be bound by the abstract "patriotic" values of nationalism. ☺

Appeals to "French tradition" or "civilisation" in politics are very often used to target those who are deemed as "not-French" or "not French enough," in this case French Muslims.

A STAR ON THE CHESTS OF 13 TIRELESS CUBANS

Yenia Silva

The honorary title of Hero of Labor of the Republic of Cuba and other decorations were placed on the chests of men and women who have devoted their lives to the homeland, in a ceremony presided over by First Secretary of the Party Central Committee and President, Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez.

"Your example has special significance, as the response of Cuban workers, labourers and professionals, fighting, thinking and working as a country, contributing decisively to the continuity of this beautiful revolutionary work," stated

José Antonio Pérez, member of the CTC (Federation of Cuban Workers) national secretariat.

At the proposal of the Minister of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) and CTC Secretary General, the President issued Decree no.237 granting the title of Hero of Labour of the Republic of Cuba to thirteen *compañeros*, including a posthumous award to Vice Admiral Julio César Gandarilla, former Minister of the Interior. His widow Minerva Sarmiento accepted the title from Díaz-Canel.

Twelve workers were awarded the First Degree Lazaro Peña Order, from different unions and territories; while four former union leaders were granted

the Third Degree Lazaro Peña Order and six health and science workers, members of the Henry Reeve International Contingent of Doctors Specialised in Situations of Disasters and Serious Epidemics, were honoured with the Labour Achievement Medal.

The honorees were accompanied by members of the Party Political Bureau Manuel Marrero Cruz, Prime Minister; Roberto Morales Ojeda, Secretary of Party Organisation and Cadre Policy; and the Ministers of the FAR and Interior, Army Corps General Alvaro Lopez Miera, and Brigadier General Lazaro Alberto Alvarez, as well as CTC Secretary General Ulises Guilarte de Nacimiento, among others.

Heroes & Heroines of Labour:

- Army Corps General Ramón Espinosa Martín
- Brigadier General (R) Marcelo Verdecia Perdomo
- Coronel Nicolás Ponzoa Reyes
- Coronel (R) Eladio Julián Fernández
- Nilia Victoria Escobar Yéndez
- Ramón Conrado López
- Orestes Benítez Fernández
- Héctor Rodríguez Silva
- Alberto Lescay Merencio
- Hilda Reyes López
- Crescencio Ferro Ordaz
- Odel Peña Vázquez
- Vice Admiral Julio César Gandarilla Bermejo (posthumous)

Granma ✪



STALIN FULFILLS POLITICAL DESTINY, COMES TO POWER IN INDIAN STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

An Indian politician named after Joseph Stalin is set to become chief minister of the southern state of Tamil Nadu – a role he has been groomed for since birth – after his party's comfortable victory in state assembly elections.

Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin, 68, born four days before his namesake's death in 1953, is the son of the late five-time chief minister M Karunanidhi, the hugely popular president of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party.

After votes were counted on Sunday, it emerged that the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance – a political coalition of left-leaning parties, including India's two major communist parties – defeated the incumbent ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party, which is a regional member of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's right-wing National Democratic Alliance.

In an emotional victory statement, Stalin said, "It was our aim to get DMK back to power when Kalaigarn [his father] was alive.

But time got the better of us. To fulfill that dream, all of us worked tirelessly. This victory is recognition for all that hard work."

Stalin, who remained in his father's shadow until his death aged 94 in 2018, began his political journey as a 13-year-old DMK organiser. He formed the party's youth wing in 1980 and served as its secretary until 2017. He has also been a former deputy chief minister of the state.

The victory, which brings the DMK back to power for the first time in a decade,

came on the back of a campaign focused on strengthening the state's linguistic identity and autonomy, as well as on promising jobs and growth.

However, Stalin's immediate challenge will be to navigate the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, which is likely to have been exacerbated by the election.

Russia Today ✪

PERSONAL, COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY ON COVID-19 SPREAD MUST BE MADE CLEAR: PM

Vietnam's Prime Minister, Pham Minh Chinh, has requested that the responsibility of individuals and organisations on COVID-19 spread must be made clear, and asked competent authorities to mete strict punishment to any one who violates regulations and has a role to play in the failure of containment.

At a working session with the National Steering Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control

on May 2, PM Chinh asked the committee to review the pandemic prevention work in the past time, with focus sharpened on analysing responsibilities of organisations, localities, and individuals.

The session was held in the context that the pandemic has become more complicated in the country recently since more people have tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 after coming into close contact with a patient in the northern province of Ha Nam.

As Ba Ria-Vung Tau province, Khanh Hoa province and Da Nang city have failed to follow the Ministry of Health's prevention instructions in recent days, local authorities must work to clarify personal responsibility, he stressed.

Harsh punishment, even criminal liability, must be imposed to any violations of existing regulations, the leader stated.

COVID-19 patients should receive timely treatment; however, he said, anyone who does

not obey quarantine rule, leading to the spread of COVID-19 will be penalised.

PM Chinh ordered sectors and localities to carry out COVID-19 prevention directions of the permanent member of the Party Central Committee's Secretariat, the State President, the Government and the Prime Minister, and most recently President Nguyen Xuan Phuc's direction which requires localities nationwide to kick off preventive

measures to zone off and stamp out the outbreak.

He ordered localities to enhance testing capacity as well as tighten discipline at concentrated quarantine sites, medical stations, and immigration areas.

Additionally, the Ministry of Health must speed up COVID-19 vaccination, and work to approach more quality vaccine sources, he added.

Nhan Dan ✪

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May 18 – Tuesday

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THE FREE TRADE DOGMA**

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• **Steve Murphy**, National Secretary AMWU

6:30 PM Tuesdays – Hotel Harry – Wentworth Avenue Surry Hills

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“VACCINE APARTHEID” AND NEOLIBERALISM ARE HITTING BOTH INDIAN AND BRAZILIAN PEOPLE

As is usual when covering developing countries, mainstream media do not spare horrific images of the Covid-19 crisis in India or Brazil, so as to make people in rich countries realise how well off they are in that respect. In comparison, that is. India and Brazil share deep inequalities and policies that have neglected public health

Such reports do not dig very much into underlying issues, ranging from domestic mismanagement by neoliberal-oriented governments, to “vaccine apartheid,” by which the United States and other Western nations have hoarded tens of millions of COVID-19 vaccine doses they may never use and the raw materials needed to make them as India becomes the epicentre of the disease.

Concerns are rising that an explosive outbreak in India, which recorded more than 400,000 new COVID-19 cases on Saturday, raises the risk of new virus mutations that could threaten the entire world.

“Eighty per cent of the deaths are due to the medical negligence here. What I have realised is, we could have saved them. They were in hospital and they did not get the proper care that they wanted because of the lack of oxygen, lack of medicines, lack of injections, people are dying here,” says Nishant Wadhwan, relative of COVID-19 victim in Mumbai.

In Brazil, the upper house of Parliament opened an inquiry on president Jair

Bolsonaro, for possible “crimes against humanity” in his handling of the pandemic. Like India, the Brazilian government has given priority to keeping the economy running, rather than applying strict restrictions to avoid mass contagions.

Bolsonaro has gone so far as calling those who want to stay at home “cowards,” and threatening to send in the army to prevent federal states and cities from locking down to protect their population.

“There are those responsible and those who are guilty of action, omission, negligence or incompetence. And if that is proven, they will be held responsible. This will be the answer to reconnect ourselves with the planet. The crimes against humanity never expire and are transnational,” said senator Renan Calheiros, the Commission’s rapporteur.

Meanwhile, the US-led Western states have been under mounting criticism for exercising so-called vaccine nationalism and not helping India, which has usually supported Western causes.

The US said last week that it will help India by sending items needed to manufacture vaccines as part of an aid package but has so far not delivered on its promise.

India is battling a devastating second wave of the virus, whereas the country’s new vaccination drive was hampered in some areas by shortages of the shots.

Several Indian states have run out of



coronavirus vaccines amid a surge of new cases in the country.

The United States has hoarded millions of COVID vaccine doses despite growing calls by international health experts for a coordinated global vaccine effort to tackle the pandemic.

The US is “sitting on 35-40mil doses of AstraZeneca vaccine Americans will never use,” Brown University School of Public Health’s Ashish Jha was quoted as saying by *The Indian Express* on Monday.

The UK has bought an extra 60mil vaccines as a reserve, Health Secretary Matt Hancock announced. By Sunday almost 50mil of Britain’s 66.6-million population had received at least one shot.

According to a Bloomberg report, an overwhelming majority of vaccines has been distributed in the richest countries that are vaccinating their citizens at a pace twenty-five times faster than the lowest income countries. *teleSUR* 🇺🇸

NEW REPORT: INS AND OUTS OF THE LIES ABOUT XINJIANG

Under the Western media’s potent attack and malicious smear, Xinjiang, the beautiful Uygur autonomous region, has long been portrayed as the darkest place in the world. Lies about Xinjiang, often through dirty funding, fact-twisting stories and massive smear campaigns, are made by the anti-China forces in the United States, manipulating and encouraging some truth-bending “academic institutions”, rumour-mongering “experts and scholars” and “amateur actors” with no moral scruples.

Their ultimate purpose is to defame Xinjiang, mislead international public discourse and smear China’s international image.

However, truth shall not be tainted, the world should not be deceived and narrative about Xinjiang mustn’t be distorted.

By completing the report “Things to Know about All the Lies on Xinjiang: How Have They Come

About?” China Watch Institute, China Daily’s communication-led think tank, with abundant facts and figures from independent US news website thegrayzone.com and Australian publication *Australian Alert Service*, and a series of press conferences held by the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, reveals the truth about the fraudulent Xinjiang-related “databases” and the so-called “witness testimonies”, exposed the real mastermind behind them and transparentised the ins and outs of the lies about Xinjiang.

KEY FINDINGS

The report listed detailed truths behind the lies about Xinjiang that anti-China forces have been spreading. Layered from their objectives, political means, and how they made up the sources, the report included nine points.

1. As early as in the last century, the United States and other Western countries started to support

separatist and terrorist activities in Xinjiang out of geopolitical purposes in order to destabilise China and contain its development.

2. Adrian Zenz, by piecing together dubious information, irresponsibly claimed that millions of Uyghurs in Xinjiang are under detention. He is a far-right fundamentalist Christian, who bases his research on radical media reports and speculations.

3. The so-called “research findings” published by Zenz and others are full of blatant data faking and fraudulent claims. They confuse speculation with hard facts, blur the lines between propaganda and academic research, and fabricate anti-China narratives based on ideology.

4. A “report” released by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) in March 2020 claims that “more than 80,000 Uyghurs were transferred out of Xinjiang to work in factories across China between 2017 and 2019”. In fact,

this “report” is full of loopholes and lacks the minimum factual basis.

5. When the slanderous claims against China were ready for use, instead of verifying their veracity, some Western media outlets rushed to hype them up. To create fake news, the BBC even went so far as to pay for “evidence”.

6. The Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) is the first organisation to propagate that China has detained millions of ethnic Uyghurs in Xinjiang. With the support of the US government, the organisation used crude and clumsy research methods and the conclusions produced are seriously flawed.

7. The “First Independent Report” on Xinjiang which was widely reported in Western media actually came from an institution funded by a sham university.

8. The World Uyghur Congress (WUC) is an international separatist network. One of WUC’s affiliate organisations, the right-wing Uyghur American Association

(UAA), advocates a hardline China policy, and believes in violent activities to achieve its goals. The US government has supported and subsidised Uyghur extremist organisations through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). In the name of promoting and protecting Uyghur human rights, these organisations attempt to stoke Western hostility against China, with the aim of subverting China and establishing an “East Turkistan” nation-state in Xinjiang.

9. The so-called “Xinjiang Victims Database” poorly put together by anti-China forces is an ill-motivated and baseless project designed purely for political manipulation. *People’s Daily* 🇺🇸



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