



TRUCKIES IN FIGHT OF THEIR LIVES



Photo: TWU WA

Anna Pha

Seven thousand Toll drivers are in a battle to save their jobs and working conditions. After a long campaign, they had no option but to take national strike action. They went out on Friday 28th August for twenty-four hours and the possibility of further action remains.

Toll is attempting to create a two-tier workforce with all new employees on lower wages and in insecure employment. It would then squeeze out its permanent, higher paid employees in a race to the bottom.

Toll was still refusing to guarantee job security at the time of writing, but negotiations with the TWU were continuing. The drivers deliver products for large corporations like Amazon, Dan Murphy's, K-Mart, and Bunnings.

An overwhelming ninety-four percent of voting Transport Workers' Union (TWU) members supported the action in a ballot for "protected action" under the Fair Work Act. Toll refuses to guarantee that future work will be allocated to full-time employees ahead of lower paid, outside labour-hire. It is also trying to impose fixed term contracts of

three months to two years for all new workers. These workers would be on lower wages and inferior working conditions, without the certainty of ongoing employment.

The union said the striking drivers received support from members of the public, fellow unionists, and Members of Parliament from around the country. Messages of support can be found on Twitter at #TruckieSolidarity.

The two-tier system would have the impact of dividing the workforce industrially, with the future employment prospects of labour-hire and contract workers dependent on their submissiveness and compliance. The ability of the union to organise, bargain, or take industrial action would be weakened. It would be a race to the bottom.

FORCED TO TAKE ACTION

"Toll workers were forced to take the last resort option to go on strike last week because their jobs are being smashed. To do nothing would be to wait like sitting ducks for the jobs they've skillfully done for decades to be given away to the lowest common denominator. If workers had accepted this, their jobs could have been contracted out

moments after signing on the dotted line," TWU National Secretary Michael Kaine told the *Guardian*.

"Toll workers need guarantees that they won't be sliced and diced Qantas-style and replaced by a cut-price, underemployed workforce. They didn't want to go on strike, especially during a pandemic, but they were forced to protect their jobs."

Toll is also demanding that overtime entitlements for part-time workers who work additional hours up to a total of thirty-eight be scrapped. This is indicative of what lies ahead. At present they are entitled to penalty rates if they work additional hours. The TWU refuses to accept this attack on penalty rates, which would enable the company to classify workers as part-time, but in practice work them full-time without their penalty rate entitlements.

"UBER FOR PARCELS"

Since the entry of Amazon, the world's largest online retailer, into the Australian market in 2020, competition has been ruthless as it builds up its own logistics company so as to avoid using other companies such as Toll. The lack of regulation in the industry

has facilitated Amazon's entry, with its own company, AmazonFlex, undercutting other delivery companies using a highly exploitative method of employment that makes Uber look like an amateur.

Amazon's profits have boomed during the pandemic, rising by a whopping 224 per cent to US\$8 billion (A\$11 billion) in just the last quarter! But there appear to be no limits to its greed and how far it will go in squeezing workers for every extra dollar while driving competitors to the wall.

AmazonFlex employs drivers using a gig economy model, which ABC Investigations recently exposed. The program interviewed Alex Ayliff and Ryan McBain – two Flex drivers.

Ayliff reported on the precarious nature of his work, with his livelihood depending on a smartphone app telling him when to show up for work to collect parcels for delivery. "I could wake up tomorrow with an email saying that my agreement with AmazonFlex has been terminated," he told the ABC.

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RENEWABLE ENERGY TO MEET 100% CONSUMER DEMAND AT CERTAIN TIMES OF THE DAY BY 2025

Renewable energy is proving its reliability in serving Australia's east coast, according to the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO). Previously, AEMO identified shortfalls in electricity generation, including possible blackouts in NSW following the closure of coal-fired power stations over the next five years.

However, in its 2021 report, AEMO found that "primarily due to a combination of newly committed generation, storage, and transmission developments," that "the previously identified reliability gap in New South Wales is no longer forecast."

These developments, said AEMO chief Daniel Westerman, were due to "significant renewable energy investments, and well-progressed dispatchable generation projects (which include pumped hydro, gas plants, and battery storage) [that] will all help replace retiring coal and gas plants."

Because of these investments, AEMO has found that "[r]enewables will meet 100% of consumer demand for electricity at certain times of the day by 2025 if large-scale wind and solar development continues at current rates." (ABC)

In fact, because of the uptake of renewables, where roof-top solar could supply up to seventy-seven per cent of electricity demands at some points in the day in the next five years, the electricity grid won't have a supply problem but a demand problem. The reduction in the minimum amount of electricity needed in the network will cause issues for coal and gas-fired power stations that have minimum operating restrictions.

However, against this backdrop, federal Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction, Angus Taylor has been attempting to get the states and territories to realise his plan to get electricity retailers to pay coal and gas-fired power generators to keep operating.

Taylor and the federal government want to introduce a Physical Retailer Reliability Obligation (PRRO), which would ensure that enough energy is available in the National Electricity Market (NEM) at all times to fill gaps when renewables cannot meet demand.

However, states and territories remain to be convinced. A spokeswoman for the Victorian government stated that "[t]here has been no agreement on a specific model, including whether coal should be eligible for payments," adding "In assessing any model, Victoria will be guided by the need for a well-managed transition that aligns with our strong emissions reduction targets."

Echoing similar sentiments, ACT Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction, Shane Rattenbury stated that "our future energy policies must focus on supporting this transition, on clean technologies, and definitely not on propping up coal generators."

Taylor, however, has insisted that the PRRO is necessary, telling federal parliament: "Our manufacturers, our households, our small businesses need to know when they flick the switch, when the sun has gone down, that the lights will still go on,"

But recent research by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis and Green Energy Markets states that "[a]ll states across the NEM have enough power capacity for the next decade to meet the strict reliability standard of satisfying more than 99.998 per cent of demand."

Thus, despite some great targets being met in regards to our energy consumption, the Morrison government is still eager to hold onto an outdated energy source that is hurting our planet. We must ensure that we do not lose these gains made, particularly given the Morrison government's inadequate climate targets.

TRUCKIES IN FIGHT OF THEIR LIVES

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Known by some drivers as "Uber for parcels", workers never know when their next four-hour block will be, whether they will receive a violation warning or be cut off the app – as in sacked. For some drivers Flex is their only source of income.

They use their own vehicles, although AmazonFlex dictates the type of vehicles they must use, the work to be done, and like Uber, the company claims the drivers are contractors and not employees. Hence, they are not paid sick or annual leave, must pay their own superannuation contributions, provide their own vehicle, and cover running costs including car maintenance, fuel, parking costs, and insurance.

They are expected to deliver all their allocated parcels within a fixed number of hours, usually between three and four. If that proves impossible, they are left with a choice: work additional, unpaid time to finish the round or return the undelivered goods and receive a warning. Warnings are followed by the sack after a certain unspecified (to drivers) number.

At times it can be impossible to finish within the four hours such as when the traffic is heavy or because of the nature of the drop-off points. Safety becomes an issue when drivers are racing against the clock.

It is a reign of fear, fear of rejecting parcels that won't fit in a car without blocking the driver's vision, fear of not meeting the specified deadline, fear to speak up.

SACKED BY A COMPUTER

McBain's experience is one that all drivers fear. He received an email saying, "Due to violation(s) of the Amazon Flex Independent Contractor Terms of Service [...]. You are no longer eligible to participate in the Amazon Flex Platform."

He told the ABC that it made him feel as though he was being fired by a robot. "not once did I speak to a human," he said.

The unregulated model harks back to the days of the master-servant relationship, a model that is creeping into more and

more industries and bypasses the industrial relations system and statutory rights of workers. The model wipes the gains of more than a hundred years of struggle by trade unions and workers. Amazon makes arbitrary decisions, with no accountability. Workers have no rights. When expenses are taken into consideration, their income is usually below the minimum wage.

AmazonFlex with its appalling working conditions and low wages is driving a race to the bottom.

DEREGULATION A KILLER

Other transport companies are feeling the competitive pressure from Amazon. Toll is not the only one.

"While we implore Toll to fix this, none of it would be happening if the federal government had the right regulation in place to ensure transport supply chains are adequately funded by wealthy retailers, manufacturers and oil companies at the top," TWU NSW/Queensland Secretary and lead Toll negotiator Richard Olsen said.

Add to this the competition from Amazon, the transport companies negotiating with the union and treating their workforce as employees are being squeezed in both directions. The unregulated entry of Amazon with its gig-economy model was facilitated by the Coalition government who had previously abolished the Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal that regulated the sector.

In the five years since then, 205 truck drivers and almost 1000 people total have been killed in truck crashes. At present it is running at around one driver a week, making it one of the deadliest occupations along with work in the building and construction industry.

A Senate inquiry into the industry tabled a report on 26th August making ten strong recommendations for reregulation of land transport. The first of these was for the government to establish and empower "an independent body that will, in consultation with industry, set universal and binding standards (including binding standards with respect to pay)."

This body will "ensure the safe performance of work and eliminate unsafe economic and contracting practice [and] apply to all road transport supply chain participants, including transport operators, online/on demand operations, and workers (regardless of their employment or work status), and throughout supply chains."

The body will also act as a dispute resolution body with general powers to resolve disputes.

The Senate committee importantly recommends "providing the capacity for registered industrial organisations, such as trade unions and employer organisations, to carry out inspections and enforcement through transport supply chains."

The TWU is calling on the government to implement the recommendations of the Senate Committee.

"The deadly recipe of wage theft, control and threat of the sack has been laid bare at AmazonFlex. Worker Alex Ayliff using AmazonFlex as his only source of income was left with under \$18,000 in annual earnings after expenses. Workers like Ryan McBain are dismissed by a bot with no warning, no explanation and no right to challenge the sacking," Kayne said.

FURTHER ACTION

The TWU told the *Guardian* that further action ballots are currently being held across four other major transport operators – FedEx, StarTrack, Linfox and Bevchain – over similar attacks on job security. There are now more than 15,000 truck drivers heading towards industrial action to protect their job security, wages, and working conditions.

"It is an abomination that billionaire retailers like Amazon are smashing profit records while ripping off transport supply chains and crushing the jobs of the truck drivers who've risked the health of their families to deliver parcels and keep shelves stocked," Kaine said.

The Communist Party of Australia expresses its solidarity with the Toll and other truck drivers affected by the pressure on their job security and conditions. ✪

Special Appeal Reds go Green

The *Guardian* is running a special appeal with the aim of raising \$10,000 for solar panels. The panels will not only make substantial savings in electricity bills but also put into practice our commitment to a sustainable future. They involve a substantial cash outlay, but we believe that every measure we can take to reduce carbon emissions is important. It is not enough to preach "green." We must act "green!"

We are looking to *Guardian* readers and CPA members and supporters to assist us with this important project.

Every contribution is appreciated, no matter how small or large.

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THE FIGHT CONTINUES



Hannah Middleton

Fifty-five years ago, on 23rd August, 1966, about 200 stockmen and their families walked off the Wave Hill cattle station, owned by British Lord Vestey, in protest at the appalling wages and conditions they were forced to endure. The walk-off also followed more than eighty years of massacres and killings, stolen children and other abuses by early colonists

Wave Hill station had relied on forcing Aboriginal people to work for rations since 1883, when the station was first established. Across the Northern Territory, even where Aboriginal workers did receive wages, they were much lower than those white workers got.

The story of the first days is still often told – a column of men, women and children, the older children and adults helping to carry the babies and the younger ones when they got tired, their blankets and what little other possessions and food they had been able to bring with them; a noisy crowd, excited, some happy, some frightened, some worried, surrounded by their dogs as they walked through kilometre after kilometre of rough bush country.

By the end of the month most of the strikers had moved to a temporary camp on the banks of the Victoria River near the Wave Hill Welfare Settlement. In March 1967, they moved 11 kms to Daguragu on the banks of Wattie Creek. The place they chose is land traditionally owned by the Gurindji and is close to several important sacred sites. There is also a permanent supply of good water.

It became clear that they wanted more than equal wages and working conditions. They had never given up their land and now they wanted it back and they wanted control of their lives.

Their initiative, consistent courage, dignity, perseverance, and determination to win their struggle were amazing. Bribes, trickery, delaying tactics, threats, and every other manoeuvre did not move them.

ROLE OF CPA

The Communist Party of Australia played a critical role, using its considerable influence to mobilise and educate support for the Gurindji. Prominent among them were Darwin CPA members and union activists Brian Manning and George Gibbs.

However, the cold war and anti-communism were still influential. Many in government and the cattle industry were racist and did not believe Aboriginal people could organise a strike on their own. Describing the people at Daguragu as tools in the hands of manipulative political agitators gave the government an excuse to dismiss their demands.

HISTORY OF RESISTANCE

The Gurindji struggle did not come out of a void – Aboriginal protest actions had been developing since the late 1930s.

The first-ever mass strike of Aboriginal people took place in 1939 when over 150 people left Cummeragunja Station in protest at their cruel treatment and exploitation. They walked 66 km, crossing the border from New South Wales into Victoria, defying the rules of the New South Wales Protection Board.

On May Day 1946 Aboriginal people walked off pastoral stations in Western Australia's Pilbara region. The strike leaders and organisers were Aborigines – the best known were Dooley and Clancy McKenna – but also included one white man, the communist Don McLeod. Station owners were shocked by the organisation, solidarity and determination of the strikers.

Similar actions were attempted in the Victoria River Downs region in 1946-47 and 1951. Protest actions were taken at Wave Hill Station in 1949, 1952 and 1955; Coolibah Station in 1947; Victoria River Downs Station in 1947; Montejinnie in 1948 and Camfield Station in 1965.

In December 1950 and again in January 1951 Aboriginal workers in Darwin went on strike. The North Australian Workers' Union in Darwin, with the Darwin CPA branch at the forefront, organised financial and other support from throughout the continent for the striking Aborigines and their families and for the legal costs of their defence.

GURINDJI PERSISTENCE

The government and pastoralist bosses assumed that the Gurindji would not be able to survive. But thanks to their spirit and to solidarity, they were able to stay camped at Daguragu.

CPA members made an essential contribution to developing the movement in solidarity with the Gurindji. Working people, students and others were brought together and given leadership by the Communist

Party. Two communists, Frank Hardy and Hannah Middleton, wrote books about the walkoff, helping to publicise and popularise the Gurindji struggle.

The struggle lasted for nine years until finally, in 1975, the Labor Government handed the Gurindji the lease over a fraction of their traditional land. Gough Whitlam travelled to Daguragu to hand the deeds to Vincent Lingiari, pouring sand into his hands to symbolise the return of land.

The success of the Gurindji land claim was a victory against a powerful industry and a hostile government. Without their courage and determination, the ongoing struggle for land rights would be far less advanced.

GOING BACKWARDS

However, after some years of gradual improvement, things have gone backwards. Many of the reforms the Gurindji fought for with great personal sacrifice and with the support of many Australians is being negated by governments ostensibly committed to Close the Gap.

Despite the Labor Government's reforms and funding programs, self-determination on the ground often did not result in real consultation, let alone Aboriginal control over Aboriginal futures.

The Gurindji made it clear they wanted a school at Daguragu. They believed that western education, supplemented by education in traditional law, was essential for the community. However, in late 1974, the government approved a major expansion of the existing school at Kalkaringi. This continued the policies of the previous Liberal governments to develop Kalkaringi as the preferred alternative to Daguragu.

As Professor Jon Altman points out: "Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory are once again being mistreated and exploited [...]. People's labour is again exploited, they live in poor housing, their welfare entitlements are insecure and they have limited means to appeal as their community organisations are depoliticised and disempowered."

In June 2007 Daguragu and other Northern Territory Aboriginal communities were massively damaged by the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act – the Intervention. The government sent police and soldiers into Aboriginal communities. The Intervention was replaced by the similar Stronger Futures policy in February 2012.

Governments, mining corporations, pastoralists, and other powerful forces were intent on destroying self-determination and Aboriginal control over land. Their aim was to regain ultimate control over the land and resources. Governments took steps to drive communities out of their homelands and smash land rights.

They had always wanted to wipe Daguragu off the map and to move the Gurindji to Kalkaringi. Services were funded at Kalkaringi – a school, clinic, store and more – to make it a magnet for the Gurindji. The idea was promoted that the Gurindji would inevitably abandon Daguragu. This was then used to justify rejecting or delaying projects that the Gurindji themselves wanted to develop. At the same time, Daguragu was described as an unproductive camp of "fringe dwellers" who did not deserve support.

There was a multi-million dollar theft from Aborigines as their land, buildings, assets and authority were stolen from their community councils. The two communities of Kalkaringi and Daguragu lost up to 250 jobs as a result of the Intervention. Almost no women from Daguragu now have jobs.

Much of what was lost was vital for the provision of essential services – road grading equipment, backhoes, grass cutting equipment, buses, tractors and even fire trucks. There are no longer bus rides into centres for shopping, firewood collection for the elderly or latrine-digging at ceremony camps.

THE FIGHT CONTINUES

True to form and despite everything they had lost, the Gurindji still resisted. A one-day strike at Kalkaringi in 2010 briefly brought the employment crisis to national attention. Gurindji leaders toured southern cities and union workplaces to appeal for support. Others led protests in Darwin.

After fifty-five years Gurindji families still live at Daguragu and their struggle for survival and independent development has not died. The new generation may have different dreams but they revere the heroes of the Walk-Off.

Australian governments have tried again and again to destroy their hopes and to force the people to move to Kalkaringi or further afield. They have not succeeded. A community remains at Daguragu. Their resilience and tenacity are amazing.

The fight continues! 🌱

GREEN BAN LIFTED ON SYDNEY HERITAGE SITE

E Lennon

Despite a four-year campaign, Willow Grove and St George's Terrace will be removed in accordance with the NSW state government's plan to build the new Powerhouse Museum on the land.

North Parramatta Residents' Action Group (NPRAG) Secretary Suzette Mead gave a speech online to more than a hundred CFMEU construction and general NSW delegates. In the speech she highlighted everything achieved during the campaign, despite the outcome.

"We are certain that if the NSW Premier had not mismanaged the pandemic response that you would all be standing with the community today, arms linked protecting Willow Grove. CFMEU and community put up a significant fight and that is a historical achievement," Mead said in her speech.

"This campaign has laid the foundations for struggles to come against corruption in planning and the alienation of community voice by elected representatives that are meant to represent us, not corporate spivs.

"This four-year-long campaign for community has shown the government that we mean business and will mobilise with our allies far and wide to fight back. I hope that this will inspire other communities to dare to struggle for better outcomes for our heritage and environment for next generations."

On 24th August, NSW Minister for the Arts Don Harwin announced that the green ban was lifted.

The Minister for the Arts welcomed the news, talking up the business opportunity. What his statement neglects to mention is the history that this proposed museum would erase.

"The union's decision to lift the ban comes after our lengthy discussions and I welcome it," Minister Harwin said.

"The government is looking forward to announcing the main contractor for the construction of the Powerhouse Parramatta in the near future.

"Powerhouse Parramatta will be the first State cultural institution in Western Sydney. It will be a magnificent science and technology museum that will delight families and greatly contribute to the Parramatta community."

Willow Grove and St George's Terrace are the home of the Burramattagal people of the Dharug nation. The land has been a key part in allowing traditional owners to connect to Country. In colonial times, Annie Gallagher, the homeowner of Willow Grove, was one of the few riverside property owners who allowed Dharug people to access the river and Country. It is a likely resting site for their ancestors.

After Annie's time, Willow Grove was a maternity hospital. In this era of the site's



history, women from all walks of life gave birth there. This part of its history too adds to the significance of the site.

Last year, an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment found cultural belongings on the site and in surrounding area. When the excavation begins, there is no assurance that any more objects will be preserved or given to the Dharug people.

Meanwhile NSW Government, claims that the decision was made in conjunction with community consultation. It also claims that it will consult "a broad-based community reference group" on the best outcome for Willow Grove's relocation. It's quite clear that members of the community have already given the NSW government advice—to leave the site alone.

Other business stakeholders came out to declare victory when the green ban was lifted. The Museum Trust President, Peter Collins, said that the removal of the green ban was the right decision. He said it was right for "many communities of Western Sydney and the NSW economy." What specific communities Powerhouse Parramatta will benefit; Collins didn't specify. Mention of traditional owners is absent from most

of these officials' comments. This includes Powerhouse Chief Executive Lisa Havilah who also broadly claimed that it would benefit Western Sydney's "many diverse communities."

The CFMEU removed the ban after increased pressure to get the construction industry running after the NSW government restricted it in lockdown. This, combined with residents' inability to protest dealt the final blow to the campaign to keep Willow Grove by the river.

"The leadership shown by the CFMEU in this struggle is a beacon for the entire union movement. The MUA was proud to stand in support of the CFMEU Green Ban, as we will every single time we are called upon to do so," said MUA Sydney Branch Secretary Paul Keating.

NPRAG Secretary Suzette Mead went on in her speech to underscore that the effort was not in vain, despite the negative outcome.

"The fight shown by Parramatta locals is exceptional," she said. "It is this principled, fighting spirit that inspired the Union movement to get involved. The CFMEU decision to back them with a Green Ban is a demonstration of their deep commitment to

community-control over our public spaces and a rejection of the rampant developer greed rife in NSW."

The Willow Grove campaign exists within a strong history of union green bans in NSW, most famously the Builders Labourers' Federation (BLF) green bans in the 1970s that saved many heritage, cultural, and natural sites across Sydney. Political and financial motivations to lift green bans push back and sometimes succeed. However, green bans remain an important tool in standing up to governments and taking important sites out of private hands.

In 1981, Jack Munday wrote on the importance of environmentalism in the struggle for socialism.

"Ecologists with a socialist perspective and socialists with an ecological perspective must form a coalition to tackle the wide-ranging problems relating to human survival," wrote Munday in his book *The Green Bans and Beyond*. "Such survival is based on a way of living in harmony with the rest of nature. My dream and that [of millions] of others might then come true; a socialist world with a human face, an ecological heart and an egalitarian body." ☺

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Punishment and surveillance

SENATE GRANTS INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES MORE POWER

Valentin Cartillier

Three national security bills have been rushed through Parliament this week allowing for greater police and intelligence agency powers. The *Surveillance Legislation Amendment (Identify and Disrupt) Bill 2021*, which included sixty amendments to existing legislation, was supported by the Liberals and Labour. However, the Greens party had some reservations about the heightened police powers. The Bill passed the Senate on 25th August.

The *Surveillance Legislation Amendment (Identify and Disrupt) Bill 2020* (the *Identify and Disrupt Bill*), greatly extends the online power of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC), allowing both agencies to:

“disrupt data by modifying, adding, copying or deleting data in order to frustrate the commission of serious offences online; and make minor technical corrections.”

The Bill amends the *Surveillance Devices Act 2004* to allow for police to apply for:

“network activity warrants to enable the AFP and ACIC to collect intelligence on serious criminal activity by permitting access to the devices and networks used to facilitate criminal activity.”

Finally, changes to the *Crimes Act 1914* will allow for:

“account takeover warrants to enable the AFP and ACIC to take over a person’s online account for the purposes of gathering evidence to further a criminal investigation; and make minor amendments to the



controlled operations regime to ensure controlled operations can be conducted effectively in the online environment.”

These amendments are proposed to undermine the anonymity afforded to people on the dark web in an effort to combat illegal activities which occur there. However, Greens Senator Lidia Thorpe has stated that:

“Unsurprisingly, the two major parties are in complete lockstep with each other and are leading us down the road to a surveillance state.”

This rhetoric is far from alarmist. As we’ve already seen in *Guardian* #1967 “WA police access COVID app” and *Guardian* #1955 “ASIO obscures political ideologies”,

government agencies aren’t immune from abusing powers once access has been granted. ASIO has been casting a wide net over what it considers to be “ideologically motivated violent extremism,” and various police forces throughout the country have been far from scrupulous when it comes to accessing the data of civilians to assist them in criminal matters. These amendments don’t just apply to the AFP and ACIC, they also increase the powers of ASIO. Effectively these amendments allow for three very serious breaches of a citizen’s privacy.

- *The Foreign Intelligence Amendment Bill 2021* allows ASIO to monitor Australian citizens it believes to be acting on behalf of a foreign power
- The *Identity and Disrupt* bill allows

police to take control over a person’s online account to modify it in able to obtain evidence, even if the person in question is not suspected of a crime

- The *Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment (Sunsetting Review And Other Measures)* renews existing counter-terrorism powers, including the ability to hold people in “preventative detention.”

The speed with which all of these amendments were rushed through is a cause for alarm. With expanded policing and surveillance powers comes a far greater scope for abusing them. It creates a one-way street where the state is allowed access to all of our data while the working class is not afforded the same power. ☹

Electrical Trades Union (ETU) Statement

WOMEN’S AMENITIES SHOULD BE MANDATORY ACROSS AUSTRALIAN WORKSITES TO BOOST FEMALE PARTICIPATION

The Electrical Trades Union is launching a campaign to boost the number of women in male dominated occupational industries, calling for women’s amenities to be mandatory on worksites across Australia.

The ETU’s “Nowhere To Go” report found women make up just two per cent of the electrical industry nationally and two per cent of the ETU’s 61,000-strong membership.

The report outlines the significant obstacles women face within the industry and makes a number of recommendations on how to increase female participation including but not limited to:

- Legislating minimum requirements for workplace amenities which ensure they are regularly serviced, accessible and suitable
- Ensuring women are included in advisory groups and/or reference committees to determine priorities and assess progress in improving

education and compliance within male dominated occupational industries

- Establishing a singular point of contact for all employees to report gendered safety issues
- Implementing female apprentice meetings and mentorship programs.

ETU National Secretary Allen Hicks said “Ensuring workplace amenities and in particular, workplace toilets, are available and suitable should be a minimum requirement of every workplace but this is often not the case.”

“For women in historically male dominated occupations, the challenge is particularly stark, with women’s amenities frequently treated as an inconvenience, improperly or irregularly serviced or not provided at all,” said Mr Hicks.

“This has forced women to take drastic action, risking their own health, safety and hygiene through practices like drinking less water or deliberately delaying their menstrual cycles.

“Further, women face major barriers when attempting to address these issues, through the prevailing stereotypes and myths about women in male dominated workplaces.

“This contributes to workplace cultures that are non-inclusive and historically masculine with a tolerance of inappropriate behaviours including bullying, aggression and the objectification of women.

“Meanwhile, these same industries face a skilled worker shortage and rely on migrant workers to fill the gap.

“Instead of relying on overseas workers, we should be boosting the workforce participation of women, who make up 50 per cent of our population.

“Research has shown time and time again that one way for us to increase participation is to provide amenities and make sure women aren’t left with nowhere to go.”

ETU member “Marie” said “The single biggest issue in four years that I have ever faced on a

construction site is every single construction site caters only to men, you never get a toilet.

“The first thing I would do when arriving on site is try and find a toilet and make sure it is not down a dark alley or in a position where the girls would not be safe.

“We have our personal safety to take care of as well.”

The “Nowhere To Go” report also makes the following recommendations:

- The creation of regulations and prescribed codes of practice which account for the different risks and hazards presented by different industries and ensuring the codes of practice address the difference in amenities uses and access needs for both men and women
- Regulators should develop checklists as guidance for establishing adequate workplace amenities or when performing workplace inspections or audits for the provision of adequate

amenities. These guides could be utilised by entry permit holders, inspectors, workplace delegates, health and safety representatives, safety managers and human resources representatives

- When identifying annual priorities for education, compliance and enforcement, regulators should consult with industry stakeholders to develop targeted campaigns to address improvements to workplace amenities which include a focus on both men’s and women’s amenities
- Personal protective equipment must be either pre-stocked or reimbursed and must be appropriate to the needs of both men and women. Consideration should be given to how employers are required to make safety equipment available which may include handwash, sanitiser and sanitary items. ☹

A DAY IN THE DEATH

John Pilger

The reputation of British justice now rests on the shoulders of the High Court in the life or death case of Julian Assange.

I sat in Court 4 in the Royal Courts of Justice in London Wednesday with Stella Moris, Julian Assange's partner. I have known Stella for as long as I have known Julian. She, too, is a voice of freedom, coming from a family that fought the fascism of Apartheid. Today, her name was uttered in court by a barrister and a judge, forgettable people were it not for the power of their endowed privilege.

The barrister, Clair Dobbin, is in the pay of the regime in Washington, first Trump's then Biden's. She is America's hired gun, or "silk," as she would prefer. Her target is Julian Assange, who has committed no crime and has performed an historic public service by exposing the criminal actions and secrets on which governments, especially those claiming to be democracies, base their authority.

For those who may have forgotten, *WikiLeaks*, of which Assange is founder and publisher, exposed the secrets and lies that led to the invasion of Iraq, Syria and Yemen, the murderous role of the Pentagon in dozens of countries, the blueprint for the 20-year catastrophe in Afghanistan, the attempts by Washington to overthrow elected governments, such as Venezuela's, the collusion between nominal political opponents (Bush and Obama) to stifle a torture investigation and the CIA's Vault 7 campaign that turned your mobile phone, even your TV set, into a spy in your midst.

WikiLeaks released almost a million documents from Russia which allowed Russian citizens to stand up for their rights. It revealed the Australian government had colluded with the US against its own citizen, Assange. It named those Australian politicians who have "informed" for the US. It made the connection between the Clinton Foundation and the rise of jihadism in American-armed states in the Gulf.

ABOUT THOSE WHO TAKE US TO WAR

There is more: *WikiLeaks* disclosed the US campaign to suppress wages in sweatshop countries like Haiti, India's campaign of torture in Kashmir, the British government's secret agreement to shield "US interests" in its official Iraq inquiry and the British Foreign Office's plan to create a fake "marine protection zone" in the Indian Ocean to cheat the Chagos islanders out of their right of return.

In other words, *WikiLeaks* has given us real news about those who govern us and take us to war, not the preordained, repetitive spin that fills newspapers and television screens. This is real journalism; and for the crime of real journalism, Assange has spent most of the past decade in one form of incarceration or another, including Belmarsh prison, a horrific place.

Diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, he is a gentle, intellectual visionary driven by his belief that a democracy is not a democracy unless it is transparent, and accountable.

On Wednesday, the United States sought the approval of Britain's High Court to extend



the terms of its appeal against a decision by a district judge, Vanessa Baraitser, in January to bar Assange's extradition. Baraitser accepted the deeply disturbing evidence of a number of experts that Assange would be at great risk if he were incarcerated in the US's infamous prison system.

Professor Michael Kopelman, a world authority on neuro-psychiatry, had said Assange would find a way to take his own life – the direct result of what Professor Nils Melzer, the United Nations rapporteur on torture, described as the craven "mobbing" of Assange by governments – and their media echoes.

Those of us who were in the Old Bailey last September to hear Kopelman's evidence were shocked and moved. I sat with Julian's father, John Shipton, whose head was in his hands. The court was also told about the discovery of a razor blade in Julian's Belmarsh cell and that he had made desperate calls to the Samaritans and written notes and much else that filled us with more than sadness.

Watching the lead barrister acting for Washington, James Lewis – a man from a military background who deploys a cringingly theatrical "aha!" formula with defence witnesses – reduce these facts to "malingering" and smearing witnesses, especially Kopelman, we were heartened by Kopelman's revealing

response that Lewis's abuse was "a bit rich" as Lewis himself had sought to hire Kopelman's expertise in another case.

NO CONTRADICTION

Lewis's sidekick is Clair Dobbin, and Wednesday was her day. Completing the smearing of Professor Kopelman was down to her. An American with some authority sat behind her in court.

Dobbin said Kopelman had "misled" Judge Baraitser in September because he had not disclosed that Julian Assange and Stella Moris were partners, and their two young children, Gabriel and Max, were conceived during the period Assange had taken refuge in the Ecuadorean embassy in London.

The implication was that this somehow lessened Kopelman's medical diagnosis: that Julian, locked up in solitary in Belmarsh prison and facing extradition to the US on bogus "espionage" charges, had suffered severe psychotic depression and had planned, if he had not already attempted, to take his own life.

For her part, Judge Baraitser saw no contradiction. The full nature of the relationship between Stella and Julian had been explained to her in March 2020, and Professor Kopelman had made full reference to it in his report in August 2020. So the judge and the court knew all about it before the main

extradition hearing last September. In her judgement in January, Baraitser said this:

"[Professor Kopelman] assessed Mr Assange during the period May to December 2019 and was best placed to consider at first-hand his symptoms. He has taken great care to provide an informed account of Mr Assange's background and psychiatric history. He has given close attention to the prison medical notes and provided a detailed summary annexed to his December report. He is an experienced clinician and he was well aware of the possibility of exaggeration and malingering. I had no reason to doubt his clinical opinion."

She added that she had "not been misled" by the exclusion in Kopelman's first report of the Stella-Julian relationship and that she understood that Kopelman was protecting the privacy of Stella and her two young children.

In fact, as I know well, the family's safety was under constant threat to the point when an embassy security guard confessed he had been told to steal one of the baby's nappies so that a CIA-contracted company could analyse its DNA. There has been a stream of unpublicised threats against Stella and her children.

BASED ON A FRAUDSTER

For the US and its legal hirelings in London, damaging the credibility of a

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OF BRITISH JUSTICE



renowned expert by suggesting he withheld this information was a way, they no doubt reckoned, to rescue their crumbling case against Assange. In June, the Icelandic newspaper *Stundin* reported that a key prosecution witness against Assange has admitted fabricating his evidence. The one “hacking” charge the Americans hoped to bring against Assange if they could get their hands on him depended on this source and witness, Sigurdur Thordarson, an FBI informant.

Thordarson had worked as a volunteer for *WikiLeaks* in Iceland between 2010 and 2011. In 2011, as several criminal charges were brought against him, he contacted the FBI and offered to become an informant in return for immunity from all prosecution. It

emerged that he was a convicted fraudster who embezzled \$55,000 from *WikiLeaks*, and served two years in prison. In 2015, he was sentenced to three years for sex offenses against teenage boys. *The Washington Post* described Thordarson’s credibility as the “core” of the case against Assange.

On Wednesday, Lord Chief Justice Holroyde made no mention of this witness. His concern was that it was “arguable” that Judge Baraitser had attached too much weight to the evidence of Professor Kopelman, a man revered in his field. He said it was “very unusual” for an appeal court to have to reconsider evidence from an expert accepted by a lower court, but he agreed with Ms Dobbin it was “misleading” even though he accepted Kopelman’s “understandable

human response” to protect the privacy of Stella and the children.

If you can unravel the arcane logic of this, you have a better grasp than I who have sat through this case from the beginning. It is clear Kopelman misled nobody. Judge Baraitser – whose hostility to Assange personally was a presence in her court – said that she was not misled; it was not an issue; it did not matter. So why had Lord Chief Justice Holroyde spun the language with its weasel legalese and sent Julian back to his cell and its nightmares? There, he now waits for the High Court’s final decision in October – for Julian Assange, a life or death decision.

IN THE LAND OF MAGNA CARTA

And why did Holroyde send Stella from the court trembling with anguish? Why is this case “unusual”? Why did he throw the gang of prosecutor-thugs at the Department of Justice in Washington – who got their big chance under Trump, having been rejected by Obama – a life raft as their rotting, corrupt case against a principled journalist sunk as surely as *Titanic*?

This does not necessarily mean that in October the full bench of the High Court will order Julian to be extradited. In the upper reaches of the masonry that is the British judiciary there are, I understand, still those who believe in real law and real justice from which the term “British justice” takes its sanctified reputation in the land of the Magna Carta. It now rests on their ermined shoulders whether that history lives on or dies.

I sat with Stella in the court’s colonnade while she drafted words to say to the crowd

of media and well-wishers outside in the sunshine. Clip-clopping along came Clair Dobbin, spruced, ponytail swinging, bearing her carton of files: a figure of certainty: she who said Julian Assange was “not so ill” that he would consider suicide. How does she know?

Has Ms Dobbin worked her way through the medieval maze at Belmarsh to sit with Julian in his yellow arm band, as Professors Koppelman and Melzer have done, and Stella has done, and I have done? Never mind. The Americans have now “promised” not to put him in a hellhole, just as they “promised” not to torture Chelsea Manning.

And has she read the *WikiLeaks*’ leak of a Pentagon document dated 15 March, 2009? This foretold the current war on journalism. US intelligence, it said, intended to destroy *WikiLeaks*’ and Julian Assange’s “centre of gravity” with threats and “criminal prosecution”. Read all 32 pages and you are left in no doubt that silencing and criminalising independent journalism was the aim, smear the method.

I tried to catch Ms Dobbin’s gaze, but she was on her way: job done.

Outside, Stella struggled to contain her emotion. This is one brave woman, as indeed her man is an exemplar of courage. “What has not been discussed today,” said Stella, “is why I feared for my safety and the safety of our children and for Julian’s life. The constant threats and intimidation we endured for years, which has been terrorising us and has been terrorising Julian for 10 years. We have a right to live, we have a right to exist and we have a right for this nightmare to come to an end once and for all.”

Consortium News ✳

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WHY DO WE WORK? – PART TWO

Editor's Note: Part 1 of "Why Do We Work?" was published in the *Guardian – The Workers' Weekly* #1969

Barry Murray

Work, like inequality, appears to be a permanent feature of human existence into the foreseeable future. Psychologically, humans do not feel well if they are not working. Or so the story goes.

And work, as we said earlier, is continually reinforced by the language of power. "An honest day's work for an honest day's pay." Ask the working poor about that. Then we hear, "He or she is a great worker" – ironically, a common refrain after someone dies.

On average, two days' work with your employer covers your wages; and the rest of the money you generate for the next three or four days goes to the boss. Is there anything honest about that?

It's amazing how many people who are employed are startled when you say that to them. They never quantified it quite like that. Why? They were never told; and because they need a job to survive. They are under pressure with living every day and have no time for "fancy analysis." And even if or when they did work it out, what were they going to do about it? They have to go to work!

They are in a trap – a wage trap and, worse, a debt trap. Debt seriously curtails the notion of revolution.

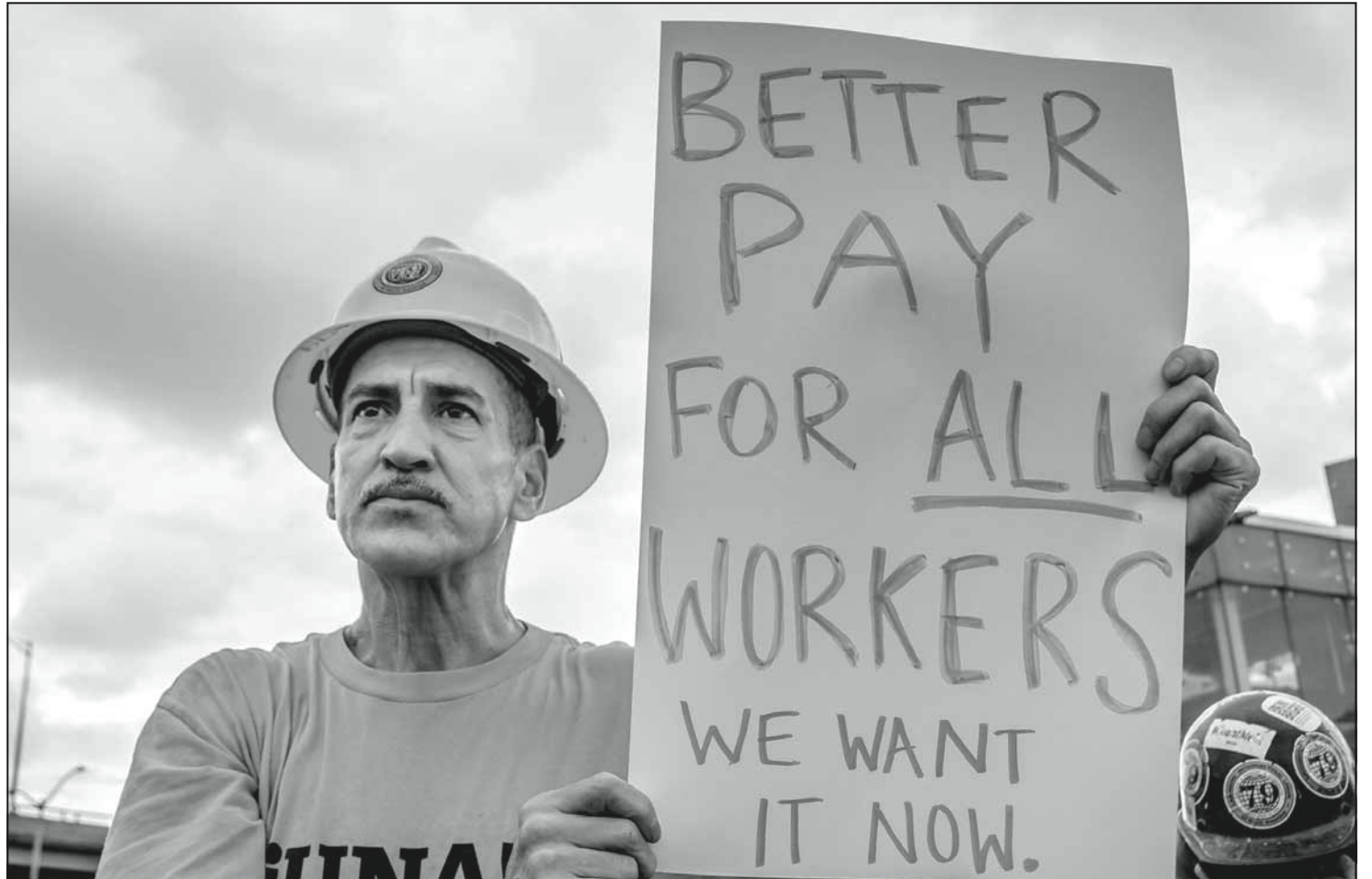
And then, when workers find themselves unemployed they are under even more pressure to pay bills. So another job is not a case of "some time, maybe": it's vital. But that's not the case for the average business or employer.

Once a business runs into difficulties there are many options for survival or graceful exit. There's the "socialism of government" for business for a start. Or another business buys it. The banks or investors can come to the rescue. Or the owners just go bankrupt, pay no-one, and walk off into the sunset with, potentially, accumulated profits and the working capital from the business, then pop up under a new business name shortly thereafter.

These moves are usually well planned in advance. The latter tactic is as old as industry and capitalism itself; and it's facilitated by laws and government. There are no such choices or avenues for the now unemployed workers.

As we saw in the recent Debenham's case,* not even the rightful redundancy will be paid. The state, its henchmen and police will enforce the will of the company concerned, and they do. We see this also in the case of the proposed Dalradian gold mine in Greencastle, Co. Tyrone. The Public Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) take the side of big business. They try to harass, intimidate and prosecute those opposing a highly polluting industry. But that's not because they have the workers' interests at heart. No consideration there of the effects on people's health, or the serious damage to our climate by capitalism.

How many workers over the centuries have been quite simply worked to death? This is another part of work that is deliberately kept under the radar. Asbestosis was one of the earliest consequences of



long-term industrial damage to workers. But how long was it hidden, and by whom? Did science know about it very early on? Did doctors notice it too? Was there a conspiracy of silence? How many workers, builders, farm workers and even non-workers have been poisoned or debilitated by industrial chemicals and other industrial processes? How many are now, or will be in the future?

It is well known that, as far as the health and safety bodies north and south are concerned, business, not the workers, comes first. There are any number of potential cover-ups and "nothing to see here" decisions, fuelled by brown envelopes. And all this in the name of profit and greed. The trick is to keep the workers producing ever more profit for the employers and the shareholders.

Surely there must be another way to organise a humane society for all?

At one side of this "work equation" is the worker's income, such as it is. But the other side is the expense of living.

What if a new type of society, a way of living, along with a new type of democracy, was arrived at? We know we want to end inequality, which leads to poverty. We want to end exploitation in any new society that we might strive for. And we want proper human and social rights for everyone. If the engineered "debt trap" was eliminated or drastically reduced, that surely would make a significant difference in how we live our lives and co-exist.

Consider what it might be like if everyone was entitled to a house as a right when they needed it; that they would pay a nominal rent according to their ability to pay. They would have that house for life as of right. Their child or children could automatically

inherit the house. People could move house, "upsize" or "downsize" according to need; all houses built at cost by the state, even one-off houses up in the mountains.

Next, everyone is paid above the living wage. Employers would surely say, "Oh, no, we can't afford that." That's fine; we make your business a worker-owned co-op. The owners can work there too, but not to take all the profits and pay the minimum wage. If you don't want to work there, that's fine too. You will get a state pension above the living wage, and off you go.

And if you don't accept either option then you will be taxed at a level whereby the state can top up workers' pay to above the living wage, from your tax contributions. Tax based on turnover, by the way, not on profit; and no government-supported loopholes either.

So how happy would the majority, the poor and working poor be now? Those two moves alone could begin to transform society. The need to work incessantly under duress might well become obsolete. And it would certainly have the potential to end inequality and exploitation.

The question is, Would such changes be transformative reforms? Would people begin to see that a new way is possible?

Anyway, the days of the nonsense about employers "providing jobs" must come to an end. The myth of the great "entrepreneur" is another misnomer, used to justify the enslavement of the poor and working poor. Businesses are established for workers to generate money for the rich and ensure profits, full stop. This guff about "creating employment" and "giving back to the community" is just that: guff, and insidious guff at that. We are cajoled, brainwashed and enslaved

into thinking that the "trickle-down" system will raise all boats, even though we and they know very well it never has, and is not even designed to do so.

Do they, or will they, teach these facts, or contradict this narrative, in our schools and universities? No. And why not? Might it be that the coming generations would say, Stop! Enough is enough; and be fully versed as to why they were saying Stop; that "meritocracy" is a myth; work might just become an anathema, a life of personal development and enjoyment might beckon?

They might decide to learn about co-operation rather than competition. They might even learn about a new type of democracy, a people's participatory democracy, power from the bottom up, not from the top down. Might they even learn about humanity, and end the scourge of the 200-year-old capitalist system we live under? They might even have time to confront the ravages of capitalism on our climate.

Would they decide to take matters into their own hands and secure the means of production? The narrative of power could well be replaced by that of the workers.

In time, maybe humans might decide to thrive rather than just survive, have better physical and mental health, have the time to educate themselves as adults too, have time to work in and build within their communities. Maybe we can turn the developments of automation and artificial intelligence to the advantage of workers? Will not being forced to work to live but instead living a happy, contented, fulfilled life become our new normal?

* Debenham department stores closure. *Socialist Voice* 🌟

On average, two days' work with your employer covers your wages; and the rest of the money you generate for the next three or four days goes to the boss. Is there anything honest about that?

AFGHANISTAN: NO CLEAN END TO A DIRTY WAR



John Wojcik

The Russian Foreign Ministry was the first to announce [last month] that a suicide attack outside Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport killed at least two people and wounded fifteen more. Other explosions in Kabul, including one at a major hotel, were also reported. Later reports had at least fifteen US citizens and Afghans killed.

The Russian report was the first to give the number of casualties from one of the explosions, at least one of which occurred among crowds clustered outside the gates of the airport.

Late Wednesday, 25 August, the US embassy had warned its citizens at three airport gates to leave immediately due to an unspecified security threat. Australia, Britain, and New Zealand also advised their citizens Thursday to stay away, with Australia's Foreign Minister saying there was a "very high threat of a terrorist attack."

An extremist group, ISIS-K, is believed to be behind the bombings. They have carried out a series of brutal attacks, mainly targeting Afghanistan's Shiite Muslim minority, including a 2020 assault on a maternity hospital in Kabul in which they killed women and infants

The Taliban have fought against Islamic State militants in Afghanistan. But ISIS-K fighters were likely freed from prisons along with other inmates during the Taliban's rapid advance. Extremists may have seized heavy weapons and equipment abandoned by Afghan troops.

Despite the warnings from Western officials, however, thousands of Afghans have descended on the airport in hope of scoring a spot in the US-led airlift that has flown more than 100,000 people out of the country over the last few weeks, according to the US government.

The press has jumped all over the airlift, condemning the Biden administration for allegedly botching the operation. Even as they admit that the people of the US overwhelmingly back withdrawal, media commentators emphasise that Americans don't support the "way" it has been done. Admittedly, everyone would prefer a Hollywood ending, but dirty wars simply don't end that way.

At the end of World War II, the newsreels and the movies fed the American people Hollywood endings to that horrible war. Scenes of happy crowds in Western European cities throwing their arms around American liberators marching into their towns and cities abounded. America's wars end with

everyone living happily ever after – that was the message.

After the Vietnam War, Americans received very different images – videos of US helicopters lifting off the roof of the US embassy in Saigon as the last troops were driven out of the country by the Vietnamese liberation forces, finally ending many decades of colonialism and foreign intervention. Thousands of Americans and Vietnamese supporters of the occupation of that country were left behind.

Like that war in Vietnam, the war in Afghanistan was a dirty one from the very first days when the US intervened in that country's affairs. In the 1980s, the CIA backed the fundamentalist forces from which the Taliban eventually emerged – essentially opening the way for an eventual Taliban takeover of the country. Before that, Afghanistan had a progressive socialist government that had put the country on a path to progress and democracy.

It continued to be a dirty war when the US intervened to replace that Taliban government with a puppet US regime allegedly to save us all from terrorism after the 9/11 attacks. The US then bolstered that corrupt and unpopular government for twenty long years, long after it could be claimed (if it ever truthfully could be) that Afghanistan was the

location from which future terrorist attacks on the US might take place.

If anything, the attacks [last month] at the Kabul airport as the airlift races toward an end further strengthen the argument by those who say we should withdraw from this dirty war. The Hollywood happy ending will never come because a tidy "victory" has been, since the beginning, an impossible goal.

You can't interfere in the internal affairs of another country, overthrow a progressive government, install right-wing religious fundamentalists in their place, and then replace them with a corrupt puppet government to do your bidding and expect sunshine and rainbows when it's all over.

Those who say they support withdrawal but not the way it has been done have thus far suggested no alternative exit strategy. That's because there is absolutely no clean way to end a dirty war – a war that cost trillions of dollars and countless lives.

Instead, the carnage will continue for the people of Afghanistan, long after the US has already launched its next war.

People's World 🌍

Like the war in Vietnam, the war in Afghanistan was a dirty one from the very first days when the US intervened in that country's affairs.

AFGHANS RECLAIM SOVEREIGNTY AS US-NATO OCCUPATION COMES TO AN END

Matthew Hole

Celebratory gunfire echoed across Kabul on Tuesday morning, 31st August, as the last US flight took off from Kabul airport, ending twenty years of American occupation in the country. Whilst the future for Afghans remains uncertain in the wake of the US-NATO exit, what is clear to many is that any prospects for peace and development could not begin in earnest whilst the landlocked country was occupied by foreign forces. The Taliban have swiftly taken control of most of the country in a matter of a few short weeks, and the process to hopefully build a more inclusive government is underway.

Much of the reporting in Western media – a media that supported the war throughout these last two decades – has focused primarily on the tenuous withdrawal of the invading forces and to a lesser extent the Afghans who assisted them. A more complete picture can be harnessed when viewing the situation through the lens of the neighbouring countries that have a much larger stake in the ongoing stability of the region: China, Pakistan, Iran, the Central Asian countries* ('Stans'), as well as Russia and Qatar – the latter of which has been closely working with the Taliban over a number of years.

Twenty years, over two trillion US dollars, and over two hundred thousand lives lost, just to have the Taliban replaced with...the Taliban. United States' imperial hubris has rarely been so stark for the whole world to see.

GHANI FLEES FROM KABUL

With the Taliban at the gates and attempting to negotiate a transfer of power from the US-installed government, then President Ashraf Ghani fled the capital with four cars full of cash to the quantum of US\$169 million. The Taliban were happy – and have subsequently been – to work with any figure in the existing government except for Ghani, given his alleged full support for US interests. A power sharing agreement between both sides was refused by Ghani, prior to his escape with state funds. He was refused entry into both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, before landing in Oman and finishing in the United Arab Emirates.

Ghani's government had long been accused of widespread corruption, and his popular support from citizens and even those within his own government had reduced to very low levels. Having been employed previously by the World Bank, it's hard to find friends locally when you are running a neo-colony for the US empire – a situation all too familiar for many citizens of the global south.

ISIS-K: "A TOOL OF THE US"

Fears of a terrorist attack by ISIS – recently described as a "tool of the US" by former Afghan President Hamid Karzai – at Kabul Airport put the military on high alert in the lead-up to the 31st August deadline. Fears became a reality on 26th August, when a suicide bomber launched an attack that killed at least 182 people, mainly Afghan citizens. The US responded with airstrikes against suspected organisers, however, there have been claims that more civilians were killed in the retaliatory strikes.

The Taliban's ability to improve the security situation on the ground will be crucial if they are to avoid the worst-case scenario of the descent into yet another civil war.



THE EMPIRE BLEEDS THE REPUBLIC

Many commentators have been asking if the United States has anything to show for the enormous resources spent in their two-decade occupation, with estimates as high as two trillion US dollars being spent over this period. Afghanistan's economy totals just US\$20 million; meaning 100 times the value of the entire Afghan economy has been spent in maintaining the occupation. So where has this money gone? A cursory glance at the value of US weapons manufacturers' shares tells an illuminating story. Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman share prices went up almost 1000 per cent over this period.

The US had a wide array of self-interested reasons to invade Afghanistan in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks. The Taliban at the time – with only partial recognition internationally from Pakistan and the Saudis – were far friendlier with the likes of Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organisations than they are today. The US's stated aim for invasion was to remove the safe haven that Afghanistan provided to these organisations, notwithstanding the Taliban's offer at the time to hand over Bin Laden to a Muslim country for proper trial, should the US provide evidence of his responsibility for the attack on the World Trade Centre. The US were also seeking to disrupt China's western and Russia's southern economic expansions respectively, which if successful would go a long way to maintaining their unipolar hegemony by preventing the rise of a Eurasian competitor. Improving the human rights situation for women and other oppressed groups was a smokescreen in an attempt to gain legitimacy for the ongoing occupation.

Fast forward to today, and the US's failed imperial actions in Afghanistan mean there has been only one winner over this timeframe – the Military Industrial Complex.

SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANISATION AND REGIONAL SECURITY

The Taliban continue to be labelled as a terrorist organisation by many members of the international community – not just the Anglo-led West, but other independent countries such as Russia, whilst Iran has had a difficult history with the organisation themselves. But their relationship with the Taliban today is far more advanced than it was in the '90s. Iran, for one, has been coordinating with the Taliban over the last decade in what they see as their responsibility

to protect the Shia population of Afghanistan from the terrorist activities of ISIS and Al-Qaeda. Open lines of communication between Russia and the Taliban have now been ongoing for seven years.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation – a Eurasian security cooperation dialogue currently made up of China, Russia, India, Pakistan and four of the Central Asian 'Stans'* – is set to meet in September. There are talks that at this summit, Iran will enhance their observer status to full membership, and there is little doubt that the situation in Afghanistan will be at the top of the agenda. The Taliban's ability to stabilise the security environment of their country will be crucial in ensuring regional security for their neighbours.

The Taliban also need partners if they are going to avoid a complete economic breakdown, which would make internal security impossible, and especially in the wake of the US freezing the \$US9.5 billion Afghanistan had in foreign reserves. These partnerships, primarily with the economic powerhouse of China, will only be possible if the Taliban are able to form an inclusive government that can represent the diverse set of interests within the country.

TALIBAN 2.0 AND THE PROMISE OF AN INCLUSIVE GOVERNMENT

In a press conference held shortly after the fall of the Ghani regime, the Taliban made a range of promises for the creation of an inclusive government. Former President Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah, an Afghan politician who led the High Council for National Reconciliation, are in the process of conducting negotiations on the makeup of this government, neither being members of the Taliban. Afghans are made up of a wide range of ethnic groups: the Pashtuns who make up the majority of Taliban members, are the largest group but are not an overall majority at just forty-two per cent of the population. Then there are Tajiks (twenty-seven per cent), Hazaras (nine per cent) – a Shia population that was previously oppressed under the earlier Taliban administration, Uzbeks (nine per cent), Aimaks (four per cent), Turkmen (three per cent), Balochs (two per cent), and many others. Women will also need to be included within the government if the Taliban are able to achieve much sought-after recognition and the international partnerships that may follow.

Whilst uncertainty remains, a number of positive statements and actions have taken place suggesting the Taliban have moderated considerably since the '90s. Major differences

from this time include women being able to work and go to school, only a Hijab being required as opposed to a Burqa (this is in line with Qatar and Iran), and all previous citizens that assisted the US-NATO occupation forces have been offered amnesty. Pictures have also emerged of Taliban officials attending a Shia Mosque and taking part in their religious ceremony, in what appears to be a sign of increased religious tolerance. It remains to be seen if the Taliban honour their commitments following international recognition.

RECONSTRUCTION AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Like all organisations, the Taliban is not monolithic – it is made up of individuals and groups who will not always see eye to eye. That being said, it's clearly within their interest as a whole to form an inclusive government, that could lead to international recognition, which could then lead to international partners that would enable them to develop their economy, achieve internal stability and put an end to over four decades of warfare.

Afghanistan is home to some of the largest deposits of rare earth minerals – of note being their stores of lithium being the highest quantity in the world, a key mineral that will help drive the fourth industrial revolution. China has been in talks with the Taliban for a significant period now and is the prime country that they would want to partner with given the size of their economy, and their track record in promoting win-win cooperation with many countries across the global south. China is equally interested in a stable and secure Afghanistan, given the small border shared between their Northwest Xinjiang province, which up until four years ago had been a hotbed of terrorist activity.

It is within most people's interests within the region for the security situation to stabilise, an inclusive government to form, human rights to be protected for all minorities, recognition and partnerships formed with anti-imperialist countries, and for the reconstruction of Afghanistan to begin in earnest. Only time will tell if this comes to pass, but the ending of US occupation of Afghanistan must be seen as a preliminary step towards peace.

* 'Stans – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan – the first four of these are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

FREE MENG CAMPAIGN MARKS 1000 DAYS OF INCARCERATION

Thursday, August 26, 2021, marked the 1000th day of unjust incarceration by the Trudeau government of Meng Wanzhou. That's 1000 days during which Ms Meng has been denied her freedom, has not been able to be with members of her family, has not been able to carry on the duties of her very responsible position as Chief Financial Officer of Huawei Technologies, one of the world's leading tech companies, with 1300 employees in Canada.

Meng's ordeal began on December 1, 2018, the date on which Prime Minister Justin Trudeau kowtowed to the request of former US President Donald Trump's to extradite Meng. This was a colossal blunder on Trudeau part's because it torpedoed fifty years of good relations between Canada and China, resulted in China curtailing major economic purchases in Canada (to the detriment of 1000's of Canadian producers) and, because the Trudeau government dithered on the question of Huawei's participation in the deployment of Canada's 5G network, may have threatened the entire future existence of Huawei in Canada. Furthermore, Trudeau's obsequiousness towards Trump embarrassingly called into question the very sovereignty of the Canadian state in front of the entire world, that it would sacrifice its own national interest in the service of its imperial neighbour.

Just six days after Meng's arrest, Trump made it clear that her arrest was a political kidnapping and that she had become a bargaining chip. Indicating he would intervene in US efforts to extradite Meng Wanzhou if it helped him win a trade deal with China, he said, "If I think it's good for what will be certainly the largest trade deal ever made, which is a very important thing – what's good for national security – I would certainly intervene, if I thought it was necessary." That statement, in itself, should have prompted Justice Minister Lametti to reject the US extradition request because Section 4 of the Extradition Act clearly states that "When the offence in respect of which extradition is requested is of a political character [...] extradition shall not be granted." Instead, Lametti approved Trump's request.

There is no end in sight of Meng captivity because no matter how Justice Holmes rules on the US request for her extradition, there are likely to be appeals which may stretch on for years. The irony is that Justice Holmes is fully aware of the lack of legal substance in the



US extradition request which was revealed in the trove of HSBC bank documents which the judge ruled to exclude during the final round of extradition hearings, which ended a few days ago. These documents prove Meng gave HSBC complete disclosure of transactions related to Iran and no fraud was committed.

We note that Justice Holmes remarked during the Crown's final arguments earlier this month, "Isn't it unusual that one would see a fraud case with no actual harm many years later and one in which the alleged victim, a large institution, appears to have numerous people within the institution who had all the facts that are now said to have been misrepresented?"

In other words, it's clear to Justice Holmes as well as Justin Trudeau, his entire cabinet and indeed the whole world, that Meng Wanzhou has committed no crime, whether in Hong Kong, the US or Canada. Moreover, her company, Huawei Canada, has proved to be a good corporate citizen.

Our Cross-Canada Campaign to Free Meng Wanzhou takes the position that Minister of Justice Lametti ought to use his

discretionary power, as provided by Section 23 of the Extradition Act, to end this miscarriage of justice by terminating the extradition and pointless house arrest of Meng. We note that the nineteen dignitaries who penned the Open Letter to Justin Trudeau in June 2020, calling on him to release Meng Wanzhou, also commissioned a prominent Canadian lawyer, Brian Greenspan, to write a legal opinion which found that it was entirely within the rule of Canadian law for the Justice Minister to terminate the extradition of Meng.

For the record, we note that the US request to extradite Meng was based on the false premise of US extraterritoriality, that is to say, attempting to exert non-existent US jurisdiction over dealings between Huawei, a Chinese high-tech company; HSBC, a British bank; and Iran, a sovereign state, none of whose dealings (in this matter) took place in the US, except the unilateral and totally unnecessary transfer of US dollars (unknown to Meng) by HSBC from its London, UK, office to its subsidiary in New York. By requesting Meng's extradition from Canada to the US, Trump was also sending a signal to global

political and business leaders that the US would continue to enforce its unilateral and illegal economic sanctions on Iran which were supposed to have been lifted under UN Security Council Resolution 2231 when the JCPOA (Iran Nuclear Deal) came into effect on January 16, 2016. (The US withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018 before the arrest of Meng). Finally, Trudeau shouldn't have collaborated with Trump because of Trump's malicious intent to cripple Huawei and crush China's high-tech industry.

By releasing Meng today, Canada could show a measure of independent foreign policy and begin to restore friendly political and economic relations with the People's Republic of China, our second-largest trading partner, for the mutual benefit of the Canadian and Chinese peoples.

Our campaign intends to participate in the federal election by challenging candidates on their stands about the immediate and unconditional release of Meng.

People's Voice 🗳️

Trudeau's obsequiousness towards Trump embarrassingly called into question the very sovereignty of the Canadian state in front of the entire world, that it would sacrifice its own national interest in the service of its imperial neighbour.

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XI: TO WALK TOGETHER WITH CUBA TO BUILD SOCIALISM, BE EXEMPLARS OF COORDINATION

Chinese President Xi Jinping said Monday that China is willing to walk together with Cuba in building socialism and be good partners in pursuing common development, in a phone conversation with Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel.

Xi also said China is willing to join hands with Cuba in being good exemplars of anti-COVID-19 fight and good comrades in strategic coordination. Diaz-Canel expressed to Xi best regards from Raul Castro, former Cuban president and former chief of the Communist Party of Cuba. Xi returned his greetings to Raul Castro.

Xi pointed out that under the strong leadership of the Communist Party of Cuba, Cubans have safeguarded their revolution fruits. The socialist cause has never been a smooth journey and Communists always seek survival and development and obtain victory through struggles, Xi said.

China has always believed that every country has the right to choose its own path, and opposes unilateral sanctions or external interference. China supports Cuba to continue on the path suitable for its situation and its struggles to safeguard national sovereignty and security, Xi said, noting China will continue providing the aid Cuba needs to combat the epidemic and improve people's livelihood.

China-Cuba relations have stood the test of time and have become a model of friendship and cooperation between developing countries. No matter how the situation changes, China's principle of developing friendship with Cuba and deepening cooperation in various fields will not change, Xi said. China is willing to walk together with Cuba in building socialism and be good partners in pursuing common development, he said.

Xi also noted China is willing to keep close high-level communications, enhance exchanges on governance of the party and the country, deepen cooperation on epidemic control and push bilateral ties further.

Xi said that the two should enhance coordination on international issues and jointly safeguard the interests of developing countries. China is willing to speak and do things of justice for Cuba internationally.

Latin America observers reached by the *Global Times* said that China and Cuba have similarities in ideology, system and revolutionary history, and have developed ties fighting US-led Western hegemony and ideological containment.

Pan Deng, the executive director of the Latin America and Caribbean Region Law Center of China University of Political Science and Law, told the *Global Times* that China and Cuba are close comrades on the socialist path and fighters against Western hegemony. Latin America is in the US' geopolitical reach, but Cuba has been a model of independence and autonomy.

Pan, who is also secretary general of the Latin American branch of the Western Returned Students' Association, noted Cuba can also be a bridge in China-Latin America relations.

Diaz-Canel said Cuba is willing to play a positive role in promoting China's relations with Latin American countries.

Diaz-Canel appreciated the long-term Chinese support, including medical supplies and vaccines in the battle against COVID-19, which mirrors a brotherhood between the two countries.

Cuba steps firmly on the socialist path and hopes to have inter-party communications and practical cooperation with China, he said.



Cuba will deepen coordination with China, jointly oppose hegemony and power politics, and oppose politicisation and stigmatisation of the pandemic. Cuba firmly upholds the One-China principle and will continue to support China's stance on the topics of core interests such as the Taiwan question and Xinjiang-related affairs, Diaz-Canel said.

Pan noted Cuba had a serious shortage of food and medical materials this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and US embargo. But the livelihood problems were used by some external forces in the US to cultivate a color revolution.

With declining influence in the Eastern Hemisphere, the US has stepped up efforts

to seize the Western Hemisphere, hence enhancing the pace of the "peaceful revolution" of Cuba.

A friend in need is a friend indeed. That's why China provides medical supplies and vaccines, as well as humanitarian aid to Cuba, observers said.

Pan said though Cuba has strong research and development capabilities, its own vaccines faced challenges in manufacturing amid US sanctions and the pandemic.

Cuba started to administer China's Sinopharm vaccines along with its home-grown doses on Sunday to accelerate the inoculation pace, *Havana Times* reported.

Global Times ✪

ETHIOPIA CONFLICT IS SPREADING BEYOND TIGRAY AS A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS UNFOLDS, UN CHIEF WARNS

Ceren Sagir

A humanitarian crisis is unfolding in Ethiopia as conflict spreads beyond the Tigray region, the chief of the United Nations warned on Thursday.

Secretary-general Antonio Guterres told the UN security council: "Inflammatory rhetoric and ethnic profiling are tearing apart the social fabric of the country."

"All parties must immediately end hostilities without preconditions and seize that opportunity to negotiate a lasting ceasefire."

Guterres said that more than

two million people had been displaced from their homes and that millions more were in immediate need of life-saving humanitarian assistance, including food, water, shelter, and healthcare.

"The human price of this war is mounting by the day," he said. "At least 400,000 people are living in famine-like conditions."

He also criticised the de facto humanitarian blockade of the Tigray region and its 6 million residents, warning that food warehouses were being left empty.

He spoke as Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) leader

Debretsion Gebremichael expressed the group's commitment to a negotiated end to the nine-month war that has killed thousands and displaced hundreds of thousands more.

In a letter to Guterres, Gebremichael declared that the group wants an impartial mediator, among other conditions, and warned that the African Union "cannot provide any solution to the war," which he said it "endorsed" early in the fighting.

"The aim is to exterminate Tigrayans by starving them to death," Gebremichael said.

China, a permanent security council member, has expressed its

opposition to external interference in Ethiopia's affairs and, along with Russia, warned that sanctions by individual countries would only worsen the conflict.

This week, the United States imposed a sanction against the chief of staff of Eritrea's defence forces until they remove soldiers from the region.

But at Thursday's meeting, the US expressed concern that large numbers of people would starve to death if food shortages continue.

Ethiopia's ambassador to the UN Taye Atske Selassie told the meeting that the country was

improving the process for the delivery of aid.

"The TPLF is standing between Ethiopia and peace," he claimed, accusing it of being "bent on destabilising" the country.

"We are open to working with all well-intentioned partners," he added.

Due to members' conflicting views, it is unlikely that the security council will be able to take significant action on the crisis.

Morning Star ✪



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