



Alice Springs

A lesson in neglect and discrimination

Denis Doherty

Bans on alcohol sales in the Northern Territory were lifted on July 16, 2022. Almost six months later, the media is filled with alarmist stories of an Indigenous "crime wave." Police reports indicate property offences jumped by almost 60 per cent over the past 12 months, while assaults increased by 38 per cent and domestic violence by 48 per cent.

The situation is serious and complex, but it is hardly a surprise.

It has been common knowledge for decades. In 2006 the ABC program *Lateline* reported:

"There are calls ... for genuine partnerships between government and communities aimed at addressing decades of abuse and neglect by government agencies in a way that also addressed the terrible legacies of colonisation, genocide, dispossession and racial discrimination."

In May last year Congress (the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, the main health organisation for Aboriginal people in Alice Springs) warned: "At a stroke, many Northern Territory communities, town camps and Community Living Areas will lose their legal protection from alcohol abuse."

"The 'rivers of grog' will once again flow through our communities. The effects on the broader community through increased crime, antisocial behaviour and violence will be of great concern."

Scattered around Alice Springs are the town camps which are occupied by Pitjantjara, Arrernte, Walpiri and other communities who make up the majority of the Aboriginal people in the town.

Town camps often have poor quality housing that is overcrowded and under-resourced. Often several houses have to share toilet and washing facilities.

Some Aboriginal people live in the suburbs of Alice Springs, most often in public housing. At the other end of the spectrum are Aboriginal rough sleepers.

When the "crisis" became news, the NT Government's Police Minister Kate Worden claimed: "Our primary focus was to talk to those takeaway alcohol retailers to see how they can contribute to making Alice Springs a safer place to live."

As if alcohol retailers will voluntarily restrict their sales for the sake of the greater good! This is nonsense and shows just how our governments serve business, not the people.



Note the dwelling in poor condition and the number of people living in it. Aboriginal Housing is a desperate need in Alice Springs. Photo: CPA

The people in Alice Springs are betrayed by their politicians who fly in, make a few comments, and fly out.

Prime Minister Albanese flew into Alice Springs and went straight to bureaucrats from the Council, NT Government and Federal government as well as ALP politicians.

Where were the consultations with the Indigenous people? Where was the respect for the organisations that for decades have battled alcohol issues in Alice Springs?

Congress covers health, the Central Australian Land Council manages land issues and mining. Tangentyere Council provides local council services for Aboriginal homes as well as some community-based services including dealing with domestic violence. The Traditional Owners (TOs) are also crucial to solving problems like the recent incidents.

The PM left the town after agreeing to strict restrictions on alcohol sales and pledging \$2 million for Tangentyere Council's domestic violence program.

YOUTH ISSUES

The only youth services in Alice Springs are the library and the town pool. Youth worker Charlotte Mardling asked the Alice Springs Town Council, "What are the current services, programs and diversionary activities that are on offer to the young people in this town ... to divert them from anti-social

behaviours? Are there plans for skateparks, youth centres, etc?"

The Alice Springs Mayor had to admit there are not any such services and none are planned.

Contrast that with the new youth detention centre costing \$24 million.

Contrast it with the fact that Council installed a baseball pitch for Pine Gap workers and reports that staff members had great times playing golf with "Aussies".

EMPLOYMENT

The NT government is building houses in remote areas using a modular method with the housing built in town and bolted together in the field. This destroys any opportunity for employment of local people.

Former NT Labor politician Scott McConnell says: "You can't have large towns that have effective unemployment rates north of 90 per cent. We must work on a participatory economy."

EDUCATION

Education opportunities for Indigenous young people are limited by their backgrounds which are disorganised by poverty and disadvantage, leading to poor attendance rates and poor academic performance.

The NT Education Department demands that US history is taught in Alice Springs High Schools for the children of Pine Gap workers.

INCARCERATION

In the NT, almost every child in the Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre or in Don Dale is Indigenous. Some of those kids are ten-year-olds. US Marines in Darwin who commit serious crimes such as rape are extradited to the US and treated leniently.

With leadership by the Indigenous people themselves, the problems arising from deep-seated trauma and the many decades of neglect could be solved.

It will require funding for teams of educators, social workers, and health workers, working with generations.


It will need more addiction rehabilitation centres, Indigenous social clubs run by Indigenous people.

Massive expenditure on housing and women's refuges is essential.

If there were serious attention to and funding for these and more programs, we could at last see some end to the suffering and social disconnect.

The largest spy base in the world operates happily alongside the massive injustices inflicted on the Indigenous people. Pine Gap gets \$300 million a year from the Australian government while the local people eke out lives of deep poverty and disadvantage.

Who is committing the crimes? ★

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Guardian

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The power of internationalism

27th January marked the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Paris Peace Accords, the agreement which ended the US war on Vietnam. From 1955 to 1973, the United States waged one of the harshest wars in modern history against the Vietnamese people, as part of its aggressive Cold War anti-communist foreign policy.

During the war, the US military dropped more bombs than were used in all of World War II. It also deployed chemical weapons, napalm, and cluster bombs, and sent hundreds of thousands of draftees to kill or be killed, usually against their will. Millions of Vietnamese people were killed, maimed, and poisoned, the legacy of which is still unfolding today. The war was spread to Laos and Cambodia, with more death and destruction.

Along with Australia's participation in its subservience to the US, the imperialist attempt to maintain dominance over Vietnam failed. To this day, the US war in Vietnam marks one of the biggest military and foreign policy disasters in the history of the United States.

It also marks one of the great victories of socialism and anti-imperialism. Against all odds, the Vietnamese people were able to defeat the world's mightiest military, from the world's richest country. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam, foreign imperialism was defeated, and national liberation and unification were achieved.

BACKGROUND

Midway through 1964, American TV showed North Vietnamese patrol boats in the Tonkin Gulf. Within two days it was claimed they had attacked two US destroyers, a claim later shown to be another deliberate lie. President Lyndon Johnson asked Congress for the power to "take all necessary measures to repel an armed attack against the forces of the United States to prevent further aggression." The Tonkin Gulf resolution was approved by Congress by a vote of 416 to 0 and the Senate by 88 to 2.

In Australia, the Menzies Government introduced conscription, which they called the National Service Act, giving it the power to send conscripts overseas.

Six months later, Menzies announced that Australia would join the United States in its war against the "Communists of Vietnam," because they were a "direct military threat to Australia." No official declaration, just a bald statement to shore up Australia's alliance with the US, although our involvement technically began in 1962 when Australia sent a small contingent of 30 "military advisers," dispatched as the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV), also known as "the Team.

US imperialism's military interventions in Asia are a trail of defeats; Korea, left divided but still a defeat for the big power.

The Paris Peace Accords – signed by the United States, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam), the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam), and the provisional revolutionary government of the Republic of South Vietnam – was the culmination of negotiations that began in 1968.

During the talks on the accords, the United States kept delaying the signing, as the US continued its attempt to carry out its stated objective to "bomb the North into the stone age". When it became clear that the US effort was futile, Washington finally agreed to sign the accords, ending what was, until Afghanistan, the longest war in US history.

ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT

In Australia there was a huge campaign against conscription initiated by five women – Jean McLean, Joan Coxsedg, Irene Miller, Chris Cathie, and Jean McLaine. They were arrested and jailed for 14 days in Fairlea Women's Prison in Melbourne for handing out anti-conscription pamphlets while on government property.

Opposition to the war grew, with huge moratoriums, marches, sit-ins, pamphleteering, lectures, street theatre, vigils, petitions, work stoppages, and public meetings held across Australia.

The withdrawal of Australia's forces began in November 1970 under the Gorton government when eight Royal Australian Regiments who had completed their tour of duty were not replaced. A phased withdrawal followed and when the Whitlam government was elected in December 1972, it immediately abolished conscription and pulled Australia out of the war and by 11th January, 1973, Australia's involvement was over. Approximately 60,000 Australians served in the war, including ground troops, naval forces and airmen, with 521 killed and 3,000 wounded. Since then more have died of cancer, a result of agent orange.

But for the US, the war dragged on until 1975 with its ignominious defeat. Estimates of US military personnel who served in Vietnam vary from 2.6 to 3.8 million. There are 57,939 names of those who died or are missing as a result of the war written on Washington's Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

It was a war Washington never forgot nor forgave, considering it an insult to its national pride. As a consequence, Vietnam was punished by a trade blockade and by political and economic isolation which lasted for more than two decades. It was also being punished – like Cuba – for not having a full-scale capitalist parliamentary charade.



Anti-Vietnam War Demonstration, outside Central Police Court, Liverpool Street, Sydney, 1965. Photo: *The Tribune* via NSW State Library Catalogue (CC BY 4.0)

The signing of the Paris Peace Accords was celebrated in Vietnam with one major theme throughout the week of commemorations that victory in the war belonged not just to the Vietnamese people. Rather, it was an international victory – a victory of all peace-loving and progressive people of the world against injustice and imperialism. Speaker after speaker talked about the importance of the international peace movement that stood by Vietnam in nearly every country in the world.

Vietnamese war veterans and survivors of US bombings became extremely emotional when thanking the international groups for their support during the war. There was a special thanks offered to US military veterans who returned home to spread the word about the unjust and criminal nature of the war and to rally support for its end.

Those of us today who want to fight for peace and to stop imperialism must follow in the footsteps of those that fought through the 1960s and '70s. We must learn the importance of broad, progressive movements. We must learn from their immense dedication to the cause of peace. And we must learn the strength of internationalism.

Today, the international peace movement is weak and fractured. But a mere 50 years ago, it helped to end one of the bloodiest and longest wars of the 20th century. It can be done again today.

Acknowledgements *People's World*
Acknowledgements Joan Coxsedg

GLOBAL CLIMATE STRIKE

12pm Friday 3rd March
Sydney Town Hall

Invite your friends

On March 3, students, workers, teachers, parents and grandparents will take to the streets of Sydney as a part of the Global ClimateStrike! The climate crisis has not disappeared with the defeat of Scott Morrison's government. 2022 was a year of climate breakdown. Climate extremes are happening at an increased pace across Australia – the disastrous floods in the Kimberley are just the latest example.

The Albanese Government's current 43 per cent target is inadequate and relies on an emissions trading scheme that allows polluters to buy their way out of reducing emissions. Alarming, the government is also supporting a series of major new fossil fuel projects like the Scarborough gas project in WA, the Middle Arm gas hub in the NT and the Santos Narrabri Pilliga Gas Project in NSW.



Photo: School Strike 4 Climate (CC BY 2.0)



Sydney Vigil

STOP USA BLOCKADE ON CUBA

Join us in Sydney to demand that the USA stops the blockade on Cuba with the right to self determination.

Also stop other blockades like Venezuela and Gaza.

4:15 pm Friday February 17
50 Miller Street North Sydney

Creeping encroachment on press freedom

Anna Pha

The Labor government has announced that it will hold a national roundtable with media organisations and “key stake holders” to discuss press freedom reform. The review comes at a time when journalists and whistle-blowers are being subjected to heightened persecution and intimidation.

“Reforms will be informed by the reports on press freedom by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security of August 2020 and the Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications of May 2021,” the government said.

“The Albanese government has already commenced a comprehensive review of all Commonwealth secrecy offences, as recommended by the Intelligence and Security Committee, which will specifically consider whether existing secrecy offences adequately protect public interest journalism.”

The following examples of creeping encroachment on press freedom and whistle-blowers illustrate that Australia’s security has not been threatened. Rather than governments have been embarrassed and crimes committed.

ASSANGE

Julian Assange, cofounder of Wikileaks, published a series of leaks from former US Army intelligence officer Chelsea Manning including the *Afghan War Logs*, the *Iraq War Logs*, and *Cablegate* exposing US war crimes.

He has been held in the high-security Belmarsh prison in England for the past three years after a long period in the Ecuadorian embassy. He faces extradition to the US on espionage charges; if convicted he would face the rest of his life incarcerated.

“Julian Assange’s work with WikiLeaks was important and in the public interest: exposing evidence of war crimes and other shameful actions by US soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan,” Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance Media federal president Karen Percy said.

“The stories published by WikiLeaks and its mainstream media partners more than a decade ago were picked up by news outlets around the world. The charges against Assange are an affront to journalists everywhere and a threat to press freedom.”

In response to questions by Independent MP Monique Ryan, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said: “The government will continue to act in a diplomatic way, but can I assure the member for Kooyong that I have raised this personally with representatives of the United States government. My position is clear and has been made clear to the US administration that it is time that this matter be brought to a close.”

Bringing something to a close is not the

same as seeking to have the charges lifted and Assange brought back to Australia. There is no evidence that Albanese has made any serious attempts to do so.

A series of Freedom of Information requests to the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and Attorney-General have found that no entreaties were made to the US.

DAVID MCBRIDE

David McBride, a former Australian Defence Force lawyer faces criminal charges for leaking to the ABC information on alleged war crimes committed by a small group of Australian troops in Afghanistan which led to the Brereton Review and its shocking findings. Up to now no charges have been laid against the military involved, but McBride’s criminal charges have not been dropped.

Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus has the power to end the prosecution against McBride but has not.

ABC RAID

On 5th June, 2019 the Australian Federal Police (AFP) raided the Sydney offices of the ABC. They scanned emails and documents connected to the reportage of alleged war crimes.

The “crime” that ABC’s Dan Oakes and Sam Clark is said to have committed was revealing in a 2017 series called the *Afghan Files* on at least 10 incidents between 2009 in which Australian special forces troops allegedly shot dead insurgents and civilians including a 6-year-old child.

ANNIKA SMETHURST

The next day, the home of News Ltd journalist Annika Smethurst was raided. She had revealed that the electronic spy agency, the Australian Signals Directorate (ASFD), was proposing that “emails, bank records and text messages of Australians could be secretly accessed by digital spies without a trace, provided the Defence and Home Affairs ministers approved.”

“The June Federal Police raids on the ABC headquarters and journalist Annika Smethurst’s home were another chilling demonstration of how excessive government secrecy, increasing authoritarianism, and a creeping surveillance state are undermining press freedom and the ability of whistle-blowers to expose wrongdoing,” the Australian Law Research Centre said.

BERNARD COLLAERY

Former Australian Defence Force (ADF) lawyer Bernard Collaery and Witness K, a former intelligence officer, were charged in 2018 and their homes raided following allegations that ASIS had bugged the East Timor negotiating team during negotiations over oil and gas reserves in the Timor Sea, thus disadvantaging the East Timorese.

Witness K was given a three-month



Julian Assange is an Australian journalist who faces lifelong imprisonment for doing his job.

suspended sentence for conspiring to reveal classified information about an alleged spying operation. He had pleaded guilty.

The Labor government dropped the charges against Collaery in July 2022.

IMPACT OF “ANTI-TERROR” LAWS

When police raided the ABC offices they held a warrant giving them the ability to “search,” “alter,” or “delete” documents found in the ABC computer systems. This was possible under one of the so-called “anti-terror” laws that had been passed with bipartisan support. These laws have wide-ranging ramifications well beyond anti-terrorism.

The *Data Retention Act* requires telecommunications companies and internet service providers (ISPs) to retain telecommunications data for at least two years. It gives law enforcement agencies the power to access data without a warrant.

There are other laws to enable these agencies to compromise confidential sources that provide information to journalists. These include the *Assistance and Access Act*, *Identify and Disrupt Act*, and the *International Production Orders Act*. The latter enables data stored in overseas jurisdictions to be shared.

There is also legislation making it an offence to reveal what happens in immigration detention.

Dr Diarmaid Harkin of Deakin’s School of Humanities and Social Sciences said: “Journalists are an important group who need to consider these laws, but these powers can also be used on lawyers, activists, politicians, and political opponents as well as other individuals.”

Journalists are worried about surveillance of their contacts and fear they would lose more sources if greater protections were not afforded to the media.

“These surveillance powers, which among other things allow for greater retention and

access to people’s private metadata, have been used by law enforcement and government agencies to compromise journalist’s private communications, at times without the proper authorisation,” Harkin said.

The raids, secrecy, and various laws such as collection of metadata, and actions of police and courts reduce the willingness of whistle-blowers to come forward, and the ability of the media to report actions of governments and private sector.

“The Albanese Government believes a strong and independent media is vital to democracy and holding governments to account. Journalists should never face the prospect of being charged or even jailed just for doing their jobs,” Albanese said.

Julian Assange is an Australian journalist who faces lifelong imprisonment for doing his job. Albanese, if you really mean it, then see that Assange is brought home and the pursuit of whistle-blowers such as McBride cease NOW, and they receive compensation for all they have been through!

“Whistleblowers and public interest journalism are vital to the health of our democracy. Australians have a right to know what our governments are doing in our name. Australian whistleblowers and journalists have revealed misconduct ranging from police corruption to kerosene baths in aged care and the inhumane treatment of people in immigration detention. Courageous people who expose wrongdoing should be encouraged to come forward and protected when they do so. Instead, they are being threatened with a prison sentence,” the Human Rights Law Centre noted.

Without protection of sources and whistle-blowers, public interest journalism is impossible, and democracy – as limited as it is under capitalism with its media monopolies – is undermined.

The review provides an opportunity for the government to repeal the anti-democratic laws and introduce strong protection for whistle-blowers and media sources. ☺

100 RED YEARS

An online exhibition of the history of the Communist Party of Australia’s 100 years

Visit:

www.100redyears.org

“an informative and fascinating look at the comrades’ work over the last 100 years.

Designed to inspire and educate.”

Left behind

Refugee advocates had called on Prime Minister Albanese to use his recent visit to Papua New Guinea (PNG) to ensure that no refugees or people seeking asylum are left behind in PNG.

There are only around 90 refugees and asylum seekers left in PNG from the more than 1000 initially taken to Manus Island in 2013. But they have suffered terribly; many of them are now in urgent need of physical and mental health treatment.

One Iranian refugee was recently hospitalised for over two months with severe mental health problems. Another Bangladeshi refugee, Alamgir, has liver, kidney and dental problems, as well as debilitating mental health issues.

Another African refugee has been chronically ill and regularly hospitalised with a serious gallbladder problem that requires surgery outside of PNG, yet he has been waiting months for treatment.

"The truth is all of them are in a bad way," said Ian Rintoul spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition, "All of them need help. Bodies and souls have been destroyed by Australia's offshore detention policies."

Tragically, the Albanese government has been repeating the Morrison government's excuses, insisting that they have no responsibility for the refugees in PNG, since the Morrison government's attempt to wash its hands of the refugees with a contract signed in secrecy in 2021 handing them over to PNG.

But that agreement does not absolve Australia of its moral and legal responsibilities. The United Nations Committee Against Torture insists that Australia "maintains legal responsibility because [the refugees and asylum seekers] remain under Australia's effective control."

Labor has a particular responsibility. The deal brokered by the Rudd Labor government in 2013 created the horror of offshore detention on Manus Island and introduced policy that denied offshore refugees resettlement in Australia.

"The deal that dumped asylum seekers from Australia in PNG was only possible because of the neo-colonial relationship between Australia and PNG. Labor granted independence to PNG in 1975. Albanese should do the 'adult thing,' take responsibility and bring the remaining refugees and asylum seekers to Australia.

"Some are waiting for third-country resettlement,



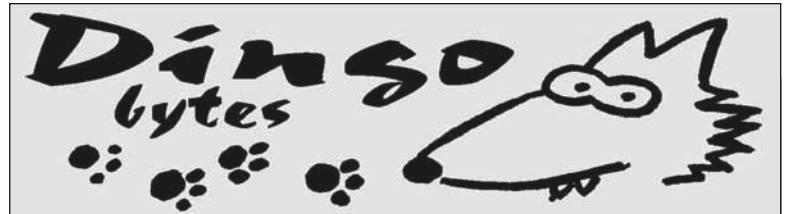
Photo: John Englart – flickr.com (CC BY-SA 2.0)

but some who were accepted by the US have already waited for four years with no idea of when they will eventually be able to get on with their lives."

Father Giorgio Licini, general secretary of the Catholic Bishops Conference of PNG and the Solomon Islands, who has close contact with the refugees in Port Moresby, said, "Refugees in PNG are in an awful situation. Australia has a moral responsibility to those they sent here. They are particularly vulnerable. They have no right to stay in PNG and there is no guarantee about their future. Australia should do the right thing, and take them."

"The Albanese government says it is moving to address the legacy issue of permanent visas for refugees in Australia. The legacy issue of refugees in PNG also has to be fixed if Albanese is going to be true to his word that Labor would not leave anyone behind," said Rintoul.

Hundreds of PNG refugees, now in Australia, US, New Zealand, France and other European countries have recently written to the Home Affairs and Immigration ministers urging them to act urgently to transfer sick refugees from PNG to Australia. ✪



How to fund endless war? That is the question. That 'tis better to grab workers' retirement funds to build Australia's military industrial complex and pour trillions of dollars of superannuation into the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction in service to the global bully and in collaboration with Ukraine's fascists. Australia's capering PM and his dance of death with Ukraine's Volod Zelenskyy for regime change in Russia is part of Australia's role as the spearhead of the planned war of containment against China. Australia has the world's fifth largest pension "market", over \$4 trillion, set to grow to \$8 trillion over the next 20 years.

And while on the drive for war profits, imperialism's lawless strike force NATO and its nuclear missile systems put Russia's western border under continual threat. Over the past decade Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, Romania, and Estonia have provided a home to these weapons, maintaining a constant war footing. This is in complete violation of agreements made at the end of the cold war that NATO would not expand eastward. NATO's expansion now includes not only Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic – in 2004 seven additional countries were added. NATO once numbered 12 members; now it comprises 28. NATO is looking to include Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine as members, completely encircling Russia with nuclear arsenals.

The Community and Public Sector Union has welcomed the news that one group of the ACT Government's lowest-paid staff will receive wage increases of more than 10 per cent per annum over the next three years but says Chief Minister Andrew Barr's job is far from done with thousands of workers including low paid workers being left behind. All workers in the ACT Government have wages that aren't keeping up with their electricity bills, their rent and mortgage increases, or their weekly grocery bills. The CPSU is telling the Chief Minister to confirm that this pay rise also applies to all of the lowest-paid workers such as school assistants, wards people, administration clerks, security workers, healthcare, and community service workers. These low-paid public servants show up for our community every day and did the hard yards protecting Canberra during COVID. "The work the ACT Public Servants do is often difficult and dangerous work. This work must be recognised by Andrew Barr immediately."

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: Let's get to the crux of opposition to the Voice in parliament. Land is a major source of wealth – its use for sheep, cattle and farming; the natural resources in and on it (gold, oil, bauxite, copper, diamonds, timber); as real estate and for tourism. All this and more makes land one of the country's most valuable assets. For Aboriginal communities to own and control even some small part of the land infuriates big business which is committed to owning or leasing all the valuable assets of this country in order to make the maximum private profit.

We can't afford support!

Results from the SANE Bridging the Gaps Survey shows the Federal government must listen to people who live with complex mental illness.

A new survey of 1,000 people affected by persistent and severe mental illness and trauma gives a shameful snapshot of a system that fails to be affordable, accessible, or adequate.

The survey was conducted by SANE, the national organisation representing Australians affected by complex mental health issues. SANE shared these findings at a Federal government forum on mental health access and equity last week.

Respondents revealed that growing gap payments for psychological and psychiatric services, and a complex National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) pathway, have resulted in a shocking number of people not receiving any form of mental health support.

The majority of respondents were living with three or more diagnoses, yet many were struggling to access basic mental health care through an overburdened public system.

The revelation that 23 per cent have been turned away from services because their needs are too complex reinforces recent data showing increases in mental health presentations at already crowded hospital emergency departments.

SANE CEO, Rachel Green said those affected have been forgotten and it's time for initiatives like Better Access to be driven by those with lived experience rather

than mental health providers and policymakers.

"The Better Access initiative has always been a blunt tool to provide universal care for the majority and hasn't adequately supported those with complex mental health needs," Green noted.

"This SANE Bridging the Gaps Survey demonstrates that addressing wait lists and excessive gap payments is one element in the need for a system overhaul and a Federal government commitment to support those with complex and ongoing needs."

KEY FINDINGS

- 11 per cent are not receiving any form of mental health support because they cannot afford it.
- 40 per cent of respondents are NOT accessing any psychological care and more than 50 per cent said they needed MORE access to psychology.
- 63 per cent have three or more diagnosed mental health conditions that require more than one mental health professional but 34 per cent have access to only one.
- 23 per cent have been turned away from services because their needs are too complex
- 85 per cent are not receiving NDIS services.
- One in three psychologists have closed their books to new patients and the median gap co-payment for psychological care has increased to \$90 per session.

"The current single-lane system is unaffordable and inaccessible for those who need it most and would have the greatest benefit, according to the government's own recently released evaluation," said Green.

"The current 'one-size-fits-none' Better Access scheme must evolve to incorporate a pathway for greater and more multidisciplinary support for those with complex mental health issues, trauma and associated disadvantage.

"We need better options, where access to support meets need and provides opportunities for comprehensive early intervention and continuity of support – rather than being skewed towards those with the ability to pay."

More than a million Australians are affected by complex mental health, which includes but is not limited to, major depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and eating disorders.

SANE is the leading national mental health organisation for people with persistent, recurring or complex mental health issues and trauma. It provides a range of free digital and telehealth services to support them and their families. Led by the voices of its community, SANE drives change to improve the lives of those living with complex mental health and end stigma and discrimination.

www.sane.org ✪

Invasion Day rallies demand “Treaty before Voice”

Hannah Middleton

As many as 100,000 people took to the streets with rallies and marches in every state and territory on Invasion Day, 26th January.

Protestors held signs and wore t-shirts saying “always was, always will be Aboriginal land.” Others called for an end to deaths in custody.

The referendum on whether to enshrine the Voice in the Constitution was a major theme in the protests across the country with many speakers and banners opposing the push for constitutional recognition and calling for a no vote in the referendum.

Protests organised by Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance demanded that Indigenous sovereignty not be granted by a vote from mostly non-Indigenous people.

SYDNEY

Sydney’s protest, held on Gadigal land at Belmore Park, attracting over 10,000 who listened to speakers on land rights, deaths in custody, the stolen generations, and opposition to the Voice to parliament and then marched to the Yabun Festival in Victoria Park.

Gomeri woman Gwenda Stanley, who helped organise the Sydney rally, said the theme was “sovereignty before Voice.”

She criticised the referendum as a waste of money that could have been better spent on grass roots Indigenous communities.

MELBOURNE

Melbourne’s packed Invasion Day rally was held on Naarm land at Parliament House. Banners and placards read “we deserve better than just a voice,” and “vote no to referendum.” Aboriginal elder Gary Foley criticised the proposal for the Voice, labelling it “lipstick on a pig”. He called for a treaty to be made a priority over the referendum.

Melbourne rally organiser Meriki Onus, the sister of Greens Senator Lidia Thorpe, said the theme of “Treaty before Voice” had been adopted by a meeting of local activists. Aboriginal people demand more than “crumbs” from this country, she said, adding “We demand a treaty. We demand our land back. We demand an end to Aboriginal deaths in custody.”

Lidia Thorpe told the thousands strong rally: “This is a war, a war that was declared on our people more than 200 years ago. “Do we want to become an advisory body to the colonial system? We deserve better We want real power and we won’t settle for anything less.”

Bundjalung woman Lizzie Jarrett told the crowd: “The system is not for black people.

“We don’t want a voice, we have a voice. We don’t want a whitewash,” she said. “When it comes to the time, vote no to the referendum.”

Melbourne comrades attended the Invasion Day rally in two capacities – as marshals volunteering with Workers Solidarity to ensure that the rally went smoothly, and keeping an eye out for attacks on the rally, looking after the health of the marchers, and as participants in the march and rally, marching under the banners of “Sovereignty Never Ceded” and “Don’t Celebrate Invasion.” This year’s Invasion Day in Melbourne reportedly had the largest turnout so far.

BRISBANE

Thousands of people gathered at Queens Gardens and then walked to Musgrave Park, with roads being shut down throughout the Brisbane CBD.

Many people wore “treaty now” and Aboriginal flag shirts, and demanded a treaty and an end to black deaths in custody.

Gomeri Kooma woman Ruby Wharton said “We’re hoping that a lot of the participants and people that come along to our Brisbane Invasion Day rally walk away with a deeper understanding that we don’t want a referendum into constitutional recognition.”

“We want our land back. We want an end to deaths in custody. We want an end to intergenerational trauma,” a rally organiser said.

“We have a voice, those bastards in Parliament haven’t been listening. What we want is justice, what we want is self-determination and sovereignty.”

ADELAIDE

Over 2,000 protesters gathered in Adelaide’s Victoria Square before marching behind a large banner reading: “Treaty before Voice.”

Marchers called for changing the date, an end to youth imprisonment, and no more deaths in custody.

ACT

Hundreds of people marched from Canberra’s city centre to the Aboriginal Tent Embassy outside Old Parliament House in what was called a “Sovereignty Day” protest. Signs protesting against the proposed Voice to Parliament led the march.

Nioka Coe-Craigie, daughter of two founders of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy 51 years ago, said “Constitutional recognition will silence our voices in this country.”

Protestors chanted “Too many coppers, not enough justice. No justice, no peace. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.” ✪



Melbourne



Perth



Brisbane



Sydney



Perth



Melbourne

PEACE NOTES

Hannah Middleton

We face two crises which could ultimately destroy humanity and our planet – nuclear and climate Armageddon. A report – *Climate Collateral* – documents how military spending accelerates climate breakdown.

Military spending and arms sales have a deep and lasting impact on the capacity to address the climate crisis.

Every dollar spent on the military not only increases greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, but also diverts financial resources, skills and attention away from tackling one of the greatest existential threats humanity has ever experienced.

Moreover, the steady increase in weapons and arms worldwide is also adding fuel to the climate fire, stoking violence and conflict, and compounding the suffering for those communities most vulnerable to climate breakdown.

The trajectory of military spending and GHG emissions are on the same steep upward curve. Global military spending has been rising since the late 1990s, surging since 2014 and reaching a record \$2,000 billion in 2021.

Yet the same countries most responsible for large military expenditure are unable to find even a fraction of the resources or commitment to tackle global heating.

The richest countries most responsible for the climate crisis are spending 30 times as much on their armed forces as they spend on providing climate finance for the world’s most vulnerable countries, which they are legally bound to do.

Between 2013 and 2021, the richest countries spent \$9.45 trillion on the military compared to an estimated \$243.9 billion on additional climate finance.

A 2020 report by Tipping Point North South estimated that the carbon footprint of the global militaries and associated arms industries was around five per cent of the total global GHG emissions in 2017.

If the world’s armed forces were ranked together as a single country, they would be the world’s 29th biggest oil consumer.

The armed forces of the richest countries increasingly boast of their efforts to address climate change. A closer look, however, suggests this is more hype than substance:

The military has been unable to find adequate fuel alternatives for the transport and equipment used in operations and exercises – which make up 75 per cent of military energy consumption. Jet fuel alone accounts for 70 per cent of the fuel used by the military, followed by naval propulsion and, to a lesser extent, land-based vehicles.

One year’s military spending by the top 10 military spenders would pay for promised international climate finance for 15 years.

Together with other proposals for financing – such as an end of fossil-fuel subsidies – there is more than enough money to fund mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage.

Faced with the climate crisis and the signs of reaching dangerous planetary tipping points, there is an overriding imperative to prioritise climate action and international cooperation to protect those who will be most affected.

To tackle the biggest threat to human security, the climate emergency, we need *all* countries to work together to prioritise climate over militarism. There is no secure nation without a climate-secure planet.

Climate Collateral is published by the Transnational Institute, Stop Wapenhandel, Tipping Point North South and Global Campaign on Military Spending. For a copy of the report, go to www.TNI.org

US imperialism and the gangs of LA

Graham Holton

By November 2022 over 58,000 people, accused of having gang affiliations had been arrested in El Salvador, filling up its already overcrowded prisons. Most arrests were without warrants, a serious human rights violation. The crack down, called the *Régimen de Excepción* (State of Exception), follows the high murder rate that peaked on 26th March, 2022, with sixty-two deaths on that day. The gangs competed for control of territory in more than 90 per cent of the municipalities in El Salvador.

Conversely, in Los Angeles, California, the “gang capital” of the USA, there are over 8000 gangs, with 200,000 members. Many of these are Salvadorans, who had been deported “home,” to a country ripped apart by a long history of civil war and genocide. There they formed gangs, took over the drugs trade, and returned to the USA more violent than before. Latinx (strong cultural and language connections with Latin America) are not “predisposed” to forming violent youth gangs.

What is not discussed is that these gangs are a direct result of US neo-colonialism in Central America. It is this hidden, excluded history that needs to be known to understand the consequences of the US’s nefarious activities.

In the 1980s and 1990s the US State Department and the Department of Defense used “low intensity” wars, also called a “total war at the grassroots level,” in Central America, to contain “communism.” In El Salvador it resulted in 72,000 deaths, the mass migration of over 500,000 people, the destabilisation of family and social structures, increased the corruption of government officials, while worsening the everyday life of ordinary Salvadorans.

Latinx fled to the USA, as the “land of opportunity,” with one in nineteen workers being undocumented. Latinx do the jobs that White Americans refuse to do, working in agriculture, as labourers and as nannies. Latinx make up 14 per cent of the US’s population of 325 million. Over 1.4 million Salvadorans live in the USA, 20 per cent of Salvador’s population of 6.6 million. Los Angeles has the second largest Salvadoran population, outside of El Salvador, remitting money back to their families, greatly helping the national economy. For the US State Department, the chickens are coming home to roost.

US neo-colonialism, through the globalisation of labour and capital, plays an important part in the cycle of crime; LA gangs are deported to El Salvador and then return to LA. It controls how people perceive themselves and their relationship to that self-definition. Studies of criminality and delinquency fail to see the dialectical relationship, between poverty, the prison system and deportation resulting in the formation of urban street gangs.

This excluded history begins with the US military involvement in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua in the 1980s, under President Reagan. It directly led to mass migrations fleeing poverty, violence and corruption. Aviva Chomsky writes in *Central America’s Forgotten History* (2022), that these historical memories have been suppressed, with the US government accusing Central America of creating its own poverty, social unrest and violence. This image of Latinx with its youth violence is common in American popular culture.

The film, *The Black Board Jungle* (1955) starring Glenn Ford and Sidney Poitier, shocked the American audience when it was first released in cinemas. The sound track begins with Chuck Berry’s “Rock Around the Clock,” which began the Rock and Roll craze. It was the first film to examine the problem of juvenile delinquency in schools. It was followed



Photo: Shane McCoy / US Marshals, Office of Public Affairs – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

by *West Side Story* (1961) and *The Cross and the Switchblade* (1970).

The TV series, *Welcome Back Kotter* (1975 to 1979), is a comedy bearing the same ethnic stereotypes. Dan Leopard describes *The Black Board Jungle* as “the conceptual template for an examination of otherness,” the other being Puerto Rican and Mexican immigrants. These films brought to the public attention the problems that the stereotyped Spanish-speaking immigrants were “causing” in White communities. The reality was that young men found it difficult to fit into an overtly racist USA. Social problems at home and in the community led to clashes with police and jail time. This failed to provide any solution to their poverty.

Mass migration to the US began in the Mexican Revolution (1910 to 1920), when 1.4 million died, and 350,000 crossed the border as refugees. They faced racism, riots, and lynchings. Between 1890 to 1930 over 8000 people were lynched, mainly African Americans, and Hispanics. Mexicans were rounded up and deported in the 1930s, during the Great Depression. In the 1950s over one million Mexicans were deported under operation “wet back.”

These political attacks led to the formation of the Chicano movement (Spanish speakers who had been in the US for generations). Its leaning towards communism brought the attention of the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) in the 1950s. In 1956 FBI Director J Edgar Hoover created COINTELPRO to investigate them.

“They utilise cleverly camouflaged movements, such as peace groups and civil rights groups to achieve their sinister purposes. While they as individuals are difficult to identify, the communist party line is clear.” As Enrique M Buelna makes clear in *Chicano Communists and the Struggle for Social Justice* (2019), the Chicano communists and their supporters were important in the workers’ struggle. Activists such as the Mexican-American Communist Party USA (CPUSA) leader Ralph Cuarón, a member of the National Maritime Union, played an important part in assisting the Latinx. The mass deportation solution continued, only increasing poverty and social unrest.

The reason for the large number of “illegal” immigrants since the 1980s, was President Reagan’s proxy wars against “communism” in Central America. The situation worsened in 1997, after President Bill Clinton declared a “war on drugs,” that greatly

increased incarceration rates and deported criminals back to their “home” country. President George W Bush set up a special anti-gang force in El Salvador, resulting in increased violence, with millions fleeing as refugees.

Under the Obama administration’s policies, there was a surge of unaccompanied minors to the US. In 2015 President Donald Trump attacked mass immigration in his now infamous speech. “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems to us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”

For Trump’s America the number one border problem was the MS-13 (Mara Salvatrucha), which is accused of committing brutal murders, rape and drug trafficking. Steven Dudley writes in *MS 13: The Making of America’s Most Notorious Gang* (2020) that in reality it is a minor organisation, a surrogate community, *el barrio*, involved in petty drug dealing. It reinforces its internal bonds through violence. Gangs are social structures with a shared ethnicity or culture, which solidify their bonds by violent acts. In 2017, only 228 members of the MS-13, were amongst those 527,000 illegal immigrants who crossed into the US. It was certainly not the major invasion Trump fabricated. Deported back to El Salvador, they formed gangs for self-preservation, ending up creating a major problem, calling themselves *marabunta*, army ants.

Under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), it is illegal for an employer to hire an individual they know is not legally authorised to work. These employment laws do not protect undocumented workers, leaving them open to deportation by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency. An employer may risk a fine if it sends a message to undocumented workers to accept the working conditions of employers, or be deported. The US federal minimum wage is US\$7.25 per hour, but many do not even receive that. Laws such as the Gang Violence and Juvenile Crime Prevention Act, STEP (Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act of 1988), and Proposition 184 (the three strikes act was passed in 1994), impacted gang members by the threat of deportation.

When Nicaragua’s Somoza regime was overthrown in 1979, Reagan claimed that

communism was “at our doorstep.” It was the first revolutionary government in Latin America to gain power since the Cuban revolution of 1959. The US poured millions of dollars into Central America. In the CIA manual, *Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare* (1984), the US aim was to target “the minds of the population” to win them over. It failed. By 1985 over 60,000 Salvadorans had been killed, predominantly by the government’s death squads, in the *Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front* (FMLN) insurgency.

In 2002 a US court held two retired US-based Salvadoran army generals responsible for the civil war atrocities. Two years later the Organisation of American States (OAS) human rights court voted to re-open an investigation into the 1981 massacre of hundreds of peasant families in the village of El Mozote. In 2009 former Marxist rebel, Mauricio Funes of the FMLN party, won the presidency. It was the first time in twenty years that a leftist president was elected.

In June 2019, President Nayib Bukele launched a plan to increase military and police numbers to combat the power of the gangs. The Bukele administration held secret negotiations, but they failed. In March 2022 a state of emergency was declared, following a spike in homicides. The arrests put 83 per cent of the 70,000 gang members behind bars. Domestically, the crackdown has been popular among Salvadorans weary of gang violence.

Human rights groups expressed concern that the arrests were arbitrary and had little to do with gang violence. Several US government representatives also expressed concern about the methods used. On 3rd November, 2022, Osiris Luna Meza, the Minister of Justice, announced that the government would begin destroying gravestones belonging to gang members to prevent them from becoming shrines to glorify the memory of dead criminals.

The US government has maintained a convenient collective amnesia about its actions in Central America, and the great human tragedy it helped create. No mention is made by the Salvadoran government that their problem began with US intervention in the 1980s. The history of violence and social upheaval, that the US directly caused, is excluded from discussion, instead placing all the blame on El Salvador and the Salvadoran communities. ❄️

Into the crusher: Gaza's rubble recycled

Khuloud Rabah Sulaiman and
Israa Sulaiman

This past August, Ahmed Amir, 34, stood atop the wreckage of a residential building in the northern Gaza Strip town of Beit Hanoun.

In the scorching sun, he smashed giant blocks of rubble with his hammer, breaking them into smaller pieces and loading them onto the back of a truck.

Amir works for a construction company that recycles the debris and rubble left behind by Israeli attacks on Gaza – a business that shows no sign of letting up.

Israel's three-day attack at the beginning of August 2022 killed at least 49 Palestinians and destroyed or damaged 2,000 homes throughout Gaza, including the building that Amir was scavenging on behalf of his employers.

"I'm conflicted between being glad that I got a job and upset that it came at the cost of other people losing their houses," Amir said.

Amir had been unemployed for more than five years before getting this job in May 2021, shortly after another Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip destroyed over 2,200 homes.

Before, Amir said, "I hardly ever got work and had to borrow money from my relatives to support my family at subsistence level."

Now, he works 12 hours a day for \$15. The company he works for, he said, employs its workers on a short-term contract basis and doesn't provide them with health insurance even though the job itself is quite dangerous.

There is the ever-present risk of structural collapse since the buildings have not been completely levelled. At the least, falling debris can land workers in the hospital with a broken leg or arm.

Amir believes the whole business is a cruel trick of fate. It does not seem just that one of the few sources of employment for residents of Gaza, with its 44 per cent rate of unemployment, is among its ruins.

ISRAEL'S BAN ON CONSTRUCTION SUPPLIES

According to Naji Sarhan of Gaza's public works and housing ministry, Gaza's rubble-scavenging business dates back to the time of Operation Cast Lead. Taking place in

late 2008 and early 2009, Cast Lead began a series of major Israeli attacks. During it, Israel destroyed or damaged over 11,000 housing units.

Amid this destruction, the Gaza authorities devised a plan to reuse debris from destroyed buildings, said Sarhan.

This reuse was essential since Israel has banned imports of so-called dual-use materials, which includes many building supplies, as part of its 15-year blockade on Gaza. And despite the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism – an arrangement overseen by the Israeli government that is supposedly intended to facilitate reconstruction – reconstruction has been proceeding slowly.

All the debris that Amir collects will be transported to a crusher and then reconstituted into concrete blocks for reconstruction efforts or new building projects.

Meanwhile, workers like Muhammad Medukh, 25, scavenge for another valuable building component: iron.

Medukh lost his job at a garment factory in 2012 and has worked in the rubble salvage business since the summer of 2014, when Israel launched yet another major attack on Gaza. Despite sustaining multiple work injuries from falling debris, such as leg and arm fractures, he could not afford to take time off.

"I had no alternative but to accept this position," he said. "Anything is better than nothing."

NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION

Debris is also turning into a profitable business for some.

Muhammad Abu Jabba, 48, who runs numerous construction ventures, quickly adapted to the new economic environment and shifted his business focus to recycled rubble.

"Necessity is the mother of invention," he said, stating that with so many Israeli restrictions on construction supplies, there were severe shortages of cement and iron.

As a result, in recent years, his cement block factory had decreased production by around 70 per cent due to the Israeli blockade. With the recycling of debris, his factory's production has seen an increase in



A Palestinian resident walks amongst the rubble of a destroyed building in Gaza. Photo: United Nations Photo – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

production by 30 per cent following the most recent assaults in 2021 and 2022.

Abu Jabba said that Israel tries to "hinder the recycling process because they don't want our factories to operate and the city to be rebuilt."

He said Israel had even added stone crushers to the list of banned import items, but that his company "made local crushers out of used equipment and created roughly 20 tons of [concrete] per day."

In addition to providing employment opportunities, recycled building materials are also cheaper. Abu Jabba said that a locally produced cinder block costs \$22 compared to \$31 for an imported block.

Even with cheaper materials on offer, many Gaza neighbourhoods have still not been rebuilt. Only 40 per cent of the completely demolished residential units from Operation Cast Lead have been rebuilt, according to Sarhan.

WHAT IS THE REAL COST OF RECYCLED MATERIALS?

The cost of rebuilding Gaza is not cheap. A 2021 study by the World Bank, European Union and United Nations estimated that Gaza's immediate housing reconstruction needs totalled up to \$160 million.

While that study downplays Israel's direct

role in the destruction, it also estimates that total reconstruction (before the 2022 Israeli attacks) would cost \$345-485 million.

Sarhan estimates that reconstructing buildings and infrastructure damaged by Israeli attacks in 2021 and 2022 will cost at least \$500 million – but who knows what it will cost after another Israeli attack.

"Israel frequently attacks [Gaza City]," he said. "Then, [after one attack], they launch another attack on the city after it has been restored. But this time, [in August 2022], Israel attacked the city before we had repaired half of the structures that had been devastated in the aggression of 2021."

Each time Israel attacks Gaza, the reconstruction efforts begin anew. That's why contractor Samir Saad said the demand for recycled material keeps going up in Gaza.

"Since we began recycling, many residents have chosen to utilize recycled building materials to rebuild their structures since they are half as expensive as imported ones," Saad said.

"I understand it is only a short-term improvement because the city won't see real growth unless building materials are freely and regularly allowed to enter the city," he added.

Even then, he said, Gaza's true rebuilding needs were far from covered.

The Electronic Intifada ★

To save the forests, recognise Indigenous lands

Joseph Lee

Recognising and demarcating Indigenous lands leads to reduced deforestation and increased reforestation. That's according to a new study that looked at more than 100 Indigenous territories in Brazil's Atlantic Forest and found that legal recognition of those lands can have real, and measurable, impacts on centuries of deforestation.

"Our study contributes to an emerging body of evidence suggesting that rights-based policy for Indigenous lands can improve environmental outcomes," said Marcelo Rauber, a co-author of the paper and researcher at the National Museum of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. "Known in Brazil as *demarcação*, the legal recognition of Indigenous Peoples' land rights provides Indigenous Peoples with territorial autonomy, which supports efforts to address long-standing human rights violations,

land grabs, biodiversity loss, and climate change."

The Atlantic Forest stretches along Brazil's Atlantic coast into Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina and once covered over one million square kilometres. Due to hundreds of years of deforestation, the Atlantic Forest has been reduced to less than a tenth of its original size – a fragmented collection of forest spread across nearly 200 Indigenous territories, most of which do not have legal recognition, and urban areas, including Rio de Janeiro.

The SOS Mata Atlantica Foundation, an organisation working to restore the forest, says what remains of the Atlantic is home to more than 20,000 species – 6000 of which do not live anywhere else in the world – and contains nearly 25 per cent of all threatened species in Brazil. It is also a key source of water for cities and communities nearby but has been deforested at a much higher rate than the Amazon. Researchers found that

formalised land tenure and territorial recognition were necessary for improved forest outcomes, however, most Indigenous land in Brazil lacks that legal status. Since 2012, only one territory in the Atlantic Forest's study sample has been granted demarcation status, and while many communities have begun the process, official recognition has been slow. According to the study, that has a real impact on forest health.

For years, researchers and activists have been alarmed by former president Jair Bolsonaro's policies, which led to a steep deterioration of environmental and Indigenous rights. Bolsonaro, who pledged not to demarcate any Indigenous land, removed environmental protections and encouraged agribusiness development that led to both murders of Indigenous land defenders and high deforestation rates. In 2020, for example, deforestation in the Atlantic Forest increased by 30 per cent.

"Demarcation is important

because it is not only a social issue but also a spiritual, traditional, and cultural issue," said Jurandir Karai Djekupe, a Guarani Mbya leader from the north of São Paulo. "It's something that encompasses everything."

For generations, Indigenous communities in the Atlantic Forest have sought territorial rights to fight extractive industries and land grabbers. Now, under Brazil's new President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Indigenous communities say they may finally gain access to the legal tools necessary to protect their land, rights, and the environment. Since taking office, President Lula's administration has begun reversing many of Bolsonaro's policies.

Rayna Benzeev, the study's lead author, says the government must now ensure that the government agency responsible for Indigenous land, FUNAI, has the resources and political support to demarcate and protect Indigenous land throughout the country. "The new administration has an opportunity to turn this

trend around by upholding the Brazilian constitution and granting Indigenous peoples with territorial autonomy and self-determination rights," Benzeev said.

However, Jerá Poty Miriam, who is a Guarani Mbya leader from the Tenondé Porã territory, says while Indigenous communities are hopeful the new administration will keep its promises, they are committed to holding President Lula accountable.

"Protecting our territory means protecting our own life because we depend on it," said Jerá Poty Mirim. "The demarcation guarantees the continuity of those cultures that respect and protect nature."

This article was reposted from *Grist.org* in *People's World* ★

France goes on general strike



Photo: Valentin Cartillier

Emmanuel Macron's government has once again put forward the policy of raising the retirement age of French from 62 to 64, and on 19th January, France responded. A general strike was organised across the country with more than one million people taking to the streets – 400,000 in Paris alone.

The Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), one of France's five major union federations, organised mass demonstrations and marches across the entire country. Individual unions are planning their own strike actions to maintain the pressure, with the chemical industry calling for a 48-hour strike, starting on 26th January, and a 72-hour strike, starting on 6th February, along with the mining and energy federation also stating that they intend to support the chemical industry.

The protests were not simply about the retirement age. Like many other parts of the world, the French working class has been burdened with rising inflation rates which

have severely impacted the cost of living, driving up the prices of petrol, food, electricity. This has been met with the demand that wages should be increased to a living wage, keeping in line with inflation. A six per cent wage increase doesn't go far enough when inflation is sitting above 10 per cent.

The entire metro system of Paris was brought to a standstill along with other forms of public transport. Schools were closed as teachers voiced their outrage, with over 50 per cent of primary school and middle school teachers walking out. 46.3 per cent of workers at the state-owned national rail company Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français (SNCF) joined them.

This is not the first time Macron has tried to change the retirement age. His government attempted to increase it in 2019 but abandoned the attempt soon after COVID-19 hit. This time the response was the largest general strike in 12 years. The CGT held another day of action on January 31st.

Despite this reform being deeply unpopular Macron is still determined to go ahead. The "reform" was presented at a news conference during a French-Spanish summit in Barcelona. Macron said: "We must do that reform." "We will do it with respect, in a spirit of dialogue but also determination and responsibility." He went on to state, "I trust that the organisers of these demonstrations will ensure these legitimate expressions of opposition can take place without too many inconveniences for our fellow citizens and obviously without excesses, violence or destruction."

Evidently it has not occurred to Macron that pushing these reforms through during a major cost of living crisis is the actual violence that is being inflicted on the working class. According to a report put out in 2021 by the Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (Insee), 25 per cent of the poorest percentile (those who earn 460 euros – \$AUD712 – a month) of male

workers die before even reaching the current retirement age of 62, as opposed to only five per cent of the richest percentile (those who earn 5790 euros a month).

This reform has a decidedly targeted class character; the ruling class tremble at the thought of the destruction of property and shrug at the preservation of the quality of life.

Furthermore, as many commentators have pointed out, it is simple cowardice on the side of the French government that they are putting the burden of these reforms onto the working class instead of simply taxing France's billionaires two per cent to help manage the economy. This comes as no surprise, as any neoliberal government's allegiance is always towards the wealthy.

Two members of the CPA attended the strikes in Paris. ✪

Taking apartheid to new extremes

Maureen Clare Murphy

There is much liberal hand-wringing over the new Israeli government's shock-and-awe assault on the state's judiciary and other laws and mechanisms that safeguard democracy in the country, even if that democracy was always for Jews only.

But for those who already know that Israel's democracy is a violent lie, and that it's been a settler colony enterprise maintained through apartheid and military rule from the beginning, there is still plenty to be concerned about. Most obviously for Palestinians, whose removal from their homeland so they may be replaced with Jewish settlers has always been the top priority for the state.

The previous government was dissolved, after all, in order to prevent the expiration of a temporary measure in place since 1967 applying Israeli civil law to Jewish settlers in the West Bank.

By calling for new elections, those emergency regulations were automatically extended, preserving the system of apartheid. And in the fifth election in the space of

three years, in November Israelis elected their most openly fascist government yet.

The current Israeli government coalition's agreements amount to a declaration of intent to commit crimes under international law, according to Adalah, a Palestinian human rights group.

The guiding principles of the new government begin with the assertion that "the Jewish people have an exclusive and unquestionable right over all areas of the land of Israel."

Adalah, which advocates for the rights of Palestinians in Israel, says that the government's intent is "to deepen Jewish supremacy and racial segregation as the underlying principles of the Israeli regime."

The group is calling for urgent intervention by the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice and the reconstitution of the United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid.

In a new position paper, Adalah lays out how the Israeli government's guiding principles and coalition agreements explicitly deny the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.

The initiatives and policies of the government will result in more brutality against Palestinians with even less judicial oversight and no pretence of accountability.

For example, an amendment passed by Israel's parliament in late December makes the Israeli police subordinate to the minister of national security.

Itamar Ben-Gvir's Jewish Power party entered the coalition after striking an agreement with Likud, headed by Benjamin Netanyahu, who has become prime minister once again. The deal lays out Ben-Gvir's intention to restructure the police force and review open-fire regulations.

Expect this to result in even more deaths of Palestinians at the hands of Israel's already trigger-happy police.

Ben-Gvir will meanwhile have total control over the Israeli national guard, established by then prime minister Naftali Bennett last year to "institutionalise the cooperation between armed Jewish-Israeli civilians and the police," as Adalah puts it.

Bennett called for the formalisation of this force following deadly episodes of state violence and mob

terror against Palestinians in Israel during the May 2021 uprising dubbed the "unity intifada."

"Israeli authorities afforded sweeping immunity to Jewish-Israeli civilians for these attacks, including and most egregiously in the case of the murder of Moussa Hassouna," according to Adalah.

Hassouna, a Palestinian citizen, was shot dead in Lydd during May 2021.

Prominent politicians pressured police throughout the investigation of Hassouna's death so that those suspected in his killing would walk free.

Then public security minister Amir Ohana, currently speaker of Israel's parliament, called for the suspects in Hassouna's killing to be released, saying they were a "force multiplier for the authorities for the immediate neutralisation of threat and danger."

The institutionalisation of this cooperation amounts to the establishment of a standby militia to enact violence against Palestinians like that which killed Hassouna.

That such a force exists at all should be of extreme concern. That it will be controlled by Ben-Gvir all the more so, given his instigation

of the May 2021 attacks, and more recent settler mob violence against Palestinians in Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood and in Hebron, where Ben-Gvir lives.

Meanwhile, the Religious Zionist party, led by extreme-right finance minister Bezalel Smotrich, has agreed with Likud that the Shin Bet, Israel's notorious secret police, is to form a special unit to assist police in fighting "nationalistic-motivated crime" among Palestinians in Israel.

Adalah says that this initiative is part of a "particularly insidious ongoing project ... to use real fears in Palestinian communities ... as a pretext for racialised policing."

The group adds that covert Shin Bet activity "is reminiscent of the period of military rule from 1948-1966, and poses a further danger to the basic rights of Palestinian citizens of the state."

Moreover, these new policing policies "amount to an expansion of the two separate law enforcement and policing systems based on racial identity" operating under "the total discretion of openly racist political leaders."

Abridged
The Electronic Intifada ✪

USA

Union fights supermarket giant

Mark Gruenberg

Sharon Simpson worked for 79 hours over five weeks at a Kroger supermarket in Charleston, West Virginia, last August and September.

She never got paid. She got so frustrated, she resigned.

Donald Austin started working last year at a Kroger store in Appomattox, Virginia, and still does. That's even though, for "multiple weeks," he told United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 400, his pay cheques were late and had deductions he never authorised.

Simpson, Austin, and two other Local 400 Kroger workers in Virginia and West Virginia are the public faces of one of two fronts where UFCW is taking on the grocery giant: A federal class action lawsuit against rampant wage theft, the result of new pay system, MyTime, instituted last year. It not only shorted their regular pay but denied them overtime pay, too.

The other is to get the Federal Trade Commission to rule against a mega-merger where Kroger gobbles up the West Coast-based Albertson's grocery chain. UFCW also contested a US\$4 billion "special dividend" to Albertson's shareholders, in Washington state courts, but lost.

That deal almost literally wiped out Albertson's cash reserves, while lining the pockets of a predatory hedge fund, Cerberus Capital Management, the union said. It also smelled of influencing Albertson's shareholders in advance to vote for the Kroger deal.

The result could leave workers and customers vulnerable to the sudden closure of Albertson's 158 stores, Local 400, which is leading that campaign, and its allies told the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). The merger would drive up food prices, which rose approximately 13 per cent last year.

And the unspoken subtext in both cases is that the workers who are short of cash, due to wage theft, or out of jobs, due to the merger, would be predominantly workers of colour.

The mega-merger is bigger and could affect more people in and out of the stores. The wage theft affects at least 1,000, though, and it's still going on, Local 400's court papers say.

"Failure to properly pay workers has occurred and continues to occur in a number of ways, which include but are not limited to:

- missing or late pay cheques;
- pay cheques for amounts less than are owed; and
- unauthorised and/or incorrect deductions or withholdings."

Workers complained to supervisors about non-existent pay cheques and the messed-up payroll system, and Local 400 filed a labour law-breaking (unfair labour practices) complaint with the National Labour Relations Board over its implementation, the union says. Nothing worked.

"We received more than 1,000 reports from Kroger employees experiencing payroll problems. We know for every report we receive there are many, many others that go unreported," Local 400 President Marc Frederici said before

heading for federal court in Richmond, to file the case in January. Local 400 has 13,000 mid-Atlantic Kroger workers.

"Despite using every available avenue to bring these problems to Kroger's attention, the company has refused to correct its payroll system. This is simply unacceptable."

The mega-merger is another matter, and late last year, Local 400 enlisted 25 other organisations in its battle to stop Kroger from devouring Albertson's and closing its stores.

Allies include Musicians Local 40-543, the Baltimore-DC Building Trades, the Centre for Economic and Policy Research, Jobs With Justice and its DC branch, the DC Nurses Association, the Metro Washington Central Labour Council, the National Employment Law Project, Teamsters Local 38 and UFCW Locals 5, 7, 324, 367, 770, 881, 1442, and 3000.

The mega-merger isn't the first time Kroger "demonstrated contempt" for its workers, its customers, and their communities, the coalition told FTC Chair Lena Kahn, a noted critic of monopolies. During the coronavirus pandemic, Kroger "actually closed stores to avoid paying an extra US\$4/hour in hazard pay mandated by local ordinances," they wrote.

"With a far larger market share than it already has, Kroger's callous approach...will only expand and is likely decimate working and living conditions for all industry workers."

And since Kroger bought back \$2 billion of its stock in 2021-22 – benefitting Cerberus – "there is no reason to think that the merged company would suddenly prioritise the living standards of its workers over further enriching its shareholders," their letter adds.

"Consumers – meaning all of us, because every human being needs food to survive – would fare no better. ... In a time of crisis and need, both companies prioritised lining shareholders' pockets before any sense of social responsibility" as the modern-day plague raged.

"People living in poverty will suffer most of all, not only because of skyrocketing prices as competition vanishes but through probable store closures," it added. The number of supermarkets in the US declined by 30 per cent in the last few decades, UFCW said.

Except for New York City, most cities depend "on a handful of grocery chains" for food. Many have "food deserts" in low-income areas. The worst, with 32 per cent of urban residents living more than half a mile from a supermarket, is Memphis, the federal Agriculture Department said – and that was before the pandemic.

"Food deserts, which are common in low-income areas, have contributed to the crisis of food insecurity," says Nailah John of the National Consumers League. "People's nutritional options are often limited to cheaper, high-calorie, and less nutritious food. In eight of the 10 US counties with the highest food insecurity rates, more than 60 per cent of residents are Black."

"Those conditions would worsen with the mega-merger," UFCW and its allies told Kahn.

People's World ✪



Photo: Nicholas Eckhart – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Global Briefs

SYRIA: China's deputy permanent representative at the UN drew attention to the continued stationing and military operations of foreign troops in Syria and called for their immediate end. The illegal plundering of natural resources by foreign troops must stop immediately as well. After entering Syria in 2014, the US forces established military bases in oil-rich regions of Syria under the pretext of fighting terrorist groups and the theft of Syrian oil started. The Syrian Oil Ministry said in August 2022 that the US forces were stealing 80 per cent of Syria's oil production, causing direct and indirect losses of about \$107.1 billion to the country's oil and gas sectors.

CZECH REPUBLIC: A former NATO general has been elected president of the Czech Republic. Retired NATO commando Petr Pavel campaigned as an independent with the backing of centre-right government. In the run-up to the election, he accused his predecessor Milos Zeman of "bringing us to the brink with the pro-China and pro-Russia policies". Pavel pledged to continue supporting military aid to Ukraine and raise the country's defence spending to meet NATO's target of two per cent of GDP.

NETHERLANDS: Under pressure from the US, the Netherlands will restrict export of chip-making machinery to China. The US will extend its export controls to Japan as well. It will prevent selling so-called deep ultraviolet lithography machines, crucial for making some types of advanced chips and without which China's attempts to launch production will be severely limited.

BRAZIL and ARGENTINA: Argentine President Alberto Fernandez and his Brazilian counterpart Lula da Silva confirmed that they were moving forward with the idea of the joint South American currency. The leaders of Latin America's two largest economies decided to "advance discussions about the joint South American currency that could be used for both financial and trade flows thus reducing transaction costs and external vulnerabilities". The new currency, called "sur" (which means "South" in Spanish) will avoid the use of the US dollar in commercial exchanges.

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Cutting a deal with fascists

[All currencies in US dollars]

Paul Scholl

30th January, 2023, marks the 90th anniversary of the corporate-facilitated appointment of Adolf Hitler as Chancellor of a deeply-divided Germany. There is an alarming lesson in this disastrous development for a deeply-divided America today. Cutting deals with fascists to catapult a voraciously power-hungry politician to high national office places a nation in grave peril.

Right-wing German corporate leaders from the *Freundeskreis der Wirtschaft* (Club of Friends of the Economy) did just that in 1933 in the wake of national elections which led to the collapse of a conservative government and an increase in Communist Party representation in parliament.

At secret meetings in January 1933, arranged by the influential banker Kurt von Schröder (now generally recognised as “the midwife of Nazism”), it was eventually agreed after some contentious negotiations that a new government headed by the fascist Hitler was the preferential option of alarmed conservatives and capitalists.

As Schröder himself later testified at the Nuremberg trials: “The general desire of businessmen was to see a strong man come to power in Germany who would form a government that would stay in power for a long time.” Corporate Germany got what it wanted, and the rest of the world had hell to pay during the following 12 years.

Fast forward to January 2023 and the secret contentious negotiations that eventually culminated in Kevin McCarthy’s election as Speaker of the House. The anti-democratic deals cut for that embattled promotion were dictated by a pack of political wolves from the far-right House Freedom Caucus. They did not act alone.

Alarmed by growing trends toward liberalism, even socialism, America’s ruling class seized the moment of a slight Republican majority in the House to call in their chips and demand a return on their political investments.

A review of the mega donors to the congressional campaigns of the 46 members of the House Freedom Caucus (HFC) reveals it as a nasty gang hopelessly beholden to extremist segments of finance capital, reactionary corporations, far-right political action committees, fundamentalist foundations, and the military-industrial complex:

The House Freedom Fund, a major financial trough for far-right House members, lavished more than \$3 million on the campaigns of 33 House Freedom Caucus members, with its Chair, Scott Perry, and its Vice-Chair, Jim Jordan, pulling in more than \$1 million and \$65,000, respectively.

The Club for Growth, a billionaire-funded corporate benefactor for far-right politicians, invested another \$212,000 in Perry alone and more than \$238,000 in other House Freedom Caucus members.

Weapons manufacturers (Lockheed Martin, Northrup Grumman, Boeing, Raytheon) pumped a total of \$776,000 into the coffers of 30 members.

Over \$350,000 was funnelled into the campaigns of 15 HFC members by major banking organisations, such as the American Bankers Association, Mortgage Bankers Association, Bank of America, and Goldman Sachs.

The notorious corporate supporter of all that is neo-fascist, Koch Industries, poured over \$653,000 into the collective campaign war chests of 28 members.

Save America, a PAC [political action committee] formed by the instigator of the January 6 fascist putsch attempt, Donald Trump, threw \$5,000 apiece to 30 of its members.

The Majority Committee PAC, founded by the embattled House Speaker McCarthy himself, injected \$545,000 into the campaigns of 31 HFC members.

28 HFC members shared \$392,000 in campaign donations from Steve Scalise’s Eye of the Tiger PAC.

The Huck PAC, founded by Christian nationalist and former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, helped fund the campaigns of 37 members with \$260,000.

Among the other hard-right

leadership political action committees having donated to several HFC members are Save America/ Stop Socialism; Stop Collectivism or Totalitarian Triumph; Be Victorious Over Democrats; Come and Take It; Hellfire; Patriots in Action; House Liberty Fund; Faith in America; Defend America; Making America Prosperous Again; and Stand for America.

Citizens United Foundation gave a total of at least \$153,000 to eight HFC members, including both its chair and vice chair.

Among the many minor corporate supporters of the HFC is the innocuous-sounding Publix Supermarket. Its heiress, Julie Francelli, was singled out by the House Select Committee on the January 6 Attack, as a major financier, with \$3 million, of the 2021 fascist putsch attempt.

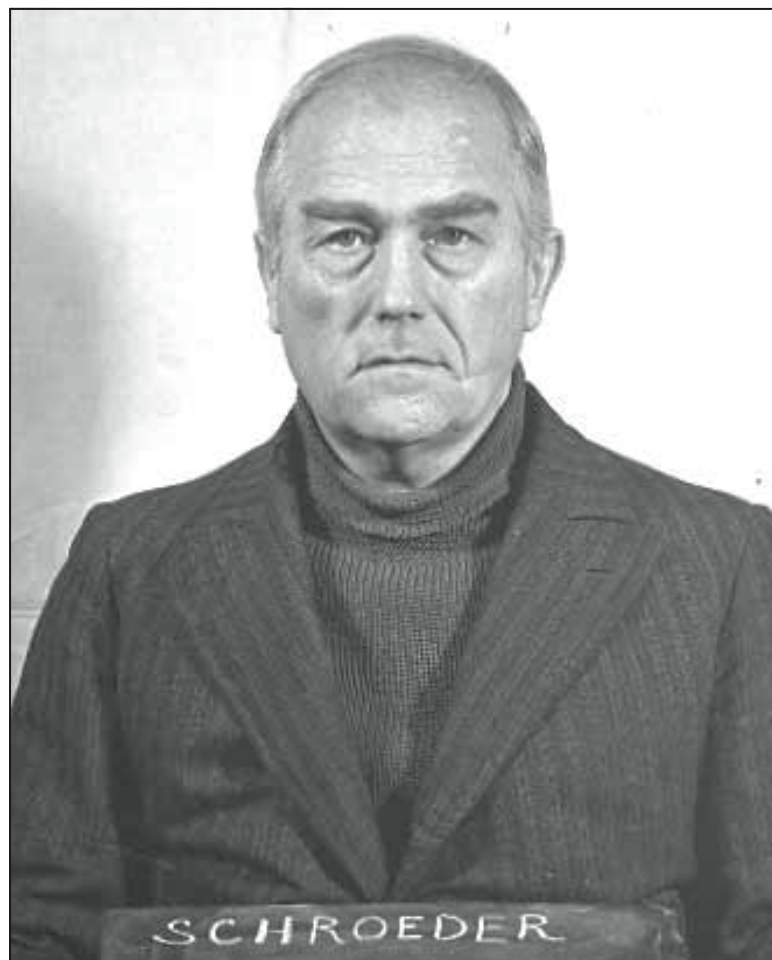
Significantly, not a single labour organisation donated to the campaigns of any House Freedom Caucus member. The financial support for this cancerous caucus came exclusively from capital, from its most reactionary segments.

Given these large amounts of funding from corporate America and its billionaires, it comes as no surprise that the first official action of the duly-constituted 118th Congress was to strip some \$80 billion from the Inland Revenue Service and thereby gravely impair its ability to audit wealthy tax cheaters.

During the raucous debate on this issue, a Democratic legislator (Brad Sherman) adapted a classic line from *It’s a Wonderful Life* to denounce the House Freedom Caucus: “Republicans support this bill because every time a billionaire successfully cheats on his taxes, a member of the Freedom Caucus earns his wings.”

Nor should it be any surprise that many Republicans – the 121-member Insurrection Caucus – wanted to overthrow the results of the 2020 election. Every HFC member, save one (Chip Roy), who was part of the 117th Congress, voted to decertify the electoral college vote of 2021.

Every one is also a rabid supporter of Trump and his fascist MAGA [Make America Great Again] movement. That includes



Kurt von Schröder – now generally recognised as “the midwife of Nazism”. Photo: Public Domain

all six new members: Elijah Crane, Anna Paulina Luna, Mike Collins, Josh Brecheen, Harriet Hageman, and Andy Ogles. One of those new members, Ogles, gave voice to their general intent: “Liberals, we’re coming for you!” Hitler’s Nazi Party had the same intent and pursued it with a vengeance.

In both ideology and praxis, the House Freedom Caucus is the functional equivalent of Germany’s 1930s ruling party. However, there is a major difference between these two fascist forces. The HFC usurped only partial control of our lower house of Congress, not total domination of the government.

While these authoritarian legislators and their right-wing allies are hell-bent on eventually gaining

totalitarian control of the government, they overplayed their hand in their disturbing grasp for power in the 118th Congress and clearly exposed themselves as fascists to anyone with eyes to see.

That revelation, like the violent January 6 fascist putsch attempt two years earlier, gives increasing rise and impetus to its dialectical opposite: a broad-based united front against fascism determined to throw these scoundrels out of office. The struggle to rescue and qualitatively advance our embattled democracy continues, now more earnestly than ever.

People’s World ✪

The right to protest should be law

Floyd Kermod

Human rights and freedom are very popular terms at the moment, and it’s not hard to guess who is accused of violating them in Australian media, usually “autocracies” such as China and Russia. India, right next door to China gets less attention on the human rights score, Egypt, which has a military dictatorship, doesn’t come up very much either.

Closer to home, is a government you might have heard of. It’s called New South Wales, and it has been soundly criticised in a report by Human Rights Watch for anti-protest laws set up in April of 2022. Anyone protesting “without permission” can come in for heavy punishment.

Violet Coco, a climate protestor was sentenced to 15 months in prison for blocking a lane of the Sydney Harbour Bridge for 25 minutes. To put that in perspective, the same bridge was closed for seven hours on 30th January so that Ryan Gosling could film scenes for a movie, presumably posing 16.8 times the threat to the NSW “way of life,” as Dominic Perrottet put it, that Violet Coco did. Ryan Gosling gets to carry on being a successful actor, but for trying to get some action on carbon emissions and protect our actual lives, Coco was refused bail.

This heavy-handed reaction to a traffic disruption was alarming to the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Association and Peaceful Assembly, Clement Voule who said that peaceful protesters should never be criminalised or imprisoned.

NSW isn’t alone in increasing the severity of its response to peaceful protest. Both Tasmania and Victoria have increased jail time and fines for people who engage in the kind of protests that Violet Coco has been locked up for.

In Tasmania people who shut down a workplace can get a 12-month sentence, while in Victoria, deliberately getting in the way of logging can also put someone inside for a year.

Federal Greens Senator David Shoebridge has announced that he will be introducing a bill to enshrine a right to protest in law. In an interview with Sydney Criminal Lawyers, Shoebridge argued that the “ability to gather must not be dependent upon a green light from the police.”

Rather than seriously inconvenience their paymasters in the mining and logging industry, Australian politicians pass laws making it easier to persecute protestors, and as Shoebridge points out, these laws can and almost certainly will be used against First Nations protestors (and we would add, workers). ✪



International Women’s Day, Sydney. Photo: Josephine Donnelly

Japan's dangerous military expansion

Hannah Middleton

On December 16 last year, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced a new defence strategy that doubled Japan's military spending by 2027. The biggest military build-up since World War II includes a plan that will buy missiles capable of striking China.

Defence spending will escalate to two per cent of gross domestic product, equal to the goal the US sets for its NATO allies. The five-year plan will make the country the world's third-biggest military spender after the United States and China.

The decision for aggressive military expansion is in open violation of Japan's supposedly pacifist constitution.

ALARM BELLS

Japan's dangerous military expansion should set off international alarm bells.

This major escalation is the next step in the US "pivot to Asia," aimed at threatening China and attempting to maintain US dominance in the region.

At a meeting, Kishida and Biden are reported to have agreed "to work together to transform Japan into a potent military power to help counterbalance China and to bolster the alliance between the two nations so that it becomes the linchpin for their security interests in Asia."

RADICAL AND DANGEROUS

Asahi, one of Japan's largest dailies, called Kishida's plan a "radical and dangerous departure from the past," accusing the ruling Liberal Democratic Party of "rushing headlong into beefing up the nation's military muscle without developing plans or taking actions to improve the environment for building peace."

The paper attacked the new counter strike capabilities, saying they would "eviscerate the nation's long-established principle of sticking to a strictly defensive security policy."

After World War II, the US occupation force imposed a "pacifist" constitution on Japan; Article 9 prohibits Japan from maintaining an army, navy and air force. To get around this, the "Japanese Self-Defence Forces" have since 1952 been treated as a legal extension of the police and prison system.



Photo: Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF). flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

Mass rallies of hundreds of thousands have mobilised many times in defence of Article 9.

The widespread opposition to constitutional change comes from working people, mobilised by unions and the communist and socialist movements.

OKINAWA

The island of Okinawa, 400 miles from the Japanese mainland, is closer to Taiwan than it is to the main islands of Japan. Okinawa suffers from the negative social, environmental and other impacts of 31 US military bases on the island.

Upgrading of Japan's 15th Brigade on these islands for future electronic warfare, cyber warfare and joint operations on the ground with maritime and air forces is a sign of plans to intervene in the Taiwan Strait.

More than 50,000 US troops remain as an occupying force in Japan. More than half of them are based on Okinawa. Okinawa residents, the indigenous Ryukyu people, have spent decades protesting the constant impacts of the US military in their daily lives.

CORPORATE PROFITS

Mitsubishi, BAE Systems, Raytheon, Lockheed Martin and

other armaments corporations will reap super profits from selling weapons for Japan's rearmament.

Japanese workers will see their services cut to pay for interceptor missiles, attack and reconnaissance drones, satellite communications equipment, F-35 stealth fighters, helicopters, submarines, warships and heavy-lift transport jets, together with 500 Tomahawk missiles and Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles, more naval vessels, fighter aircraft, increased cyber-warfare capabilities hypersonic missiles and advanced fighter jets.

ANTI-CHINA CAMPAIGN

Japan's anti-China propaganda is in full swing with the Japanese Embassy in Canberra leading the anti-China campaign in Australia.

Japanese Ambassador Shingo Yamagami has made the Japanese Embassy the meeting place for anti-China politicians, academics, media, defence officials and selected Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) staff.

This antagonising and demonising of China has got to stop!

China is not a threat to Australia or to any other country, especially Japan.

China is not the enemy. ☺



self determination (self dɪ,tɜ:mə'neɪʃən)

Usually a good thing – who wants to be other-determined? – but "self-determination" can be weaselly depending on what is being done in its name. Claiming that your capital city is and always has been a city that's in someone else's country for instance, as the Israeli government likes to do, goes beyond self-determination to colonisation.

mainstream (meɪn,streɪm)

When it comes to music, "mainstream" just means comfortable, albeit somewhat boring, like an old Eagles song being drummed into the ears of Woolies' workers who were born after the Eagles last tour. When it comes to politics, "mainstream" is a way of signalling that (the politician hopes) most people don't want an argument about something. All the polly has to do is assert that their policy is in tune with "mainstream opinion" without saying exactly who they think the mainstream is, or why that mainstream would agree with them. Like "millions" (see below) mainstream is nice because you don't have to find out how many people agree with you, or if they'd be right if they did.

millions (mɪljənz)

"Wait, what?" I hear you cry "How can a number be weaselly? It's just a number." You have a point. A million of something either exists or it doesn't. Like the "millions of Australians" Peter Dutton has taken to Just Asking Questions for. It doesn't matter that these millions ended his reign as Australia's most authoritarian Defence Minister, or that Dutton never ever gives any proof that any of the millions have asked him to speak for them since they wisely put his government in the waste-paper basket of history. Dutton just somehow knows that millions of Australians want him to Ask Questions, and he'll keep saying that even if millions of Australians tell him not to.

sustainable (sə'steɪnəbəl)

It's a coin toss as to whether "sustainable" is a Weasel Word or just a good idea people pay lip-service to rather than actually doing. "Sustainable" should mean that it'll be possible to keep doing what you've planned to do. It has environmental overtones too. If development is going to be sustainable, that could mean it'll be done at no lasting cost to the environment. In carbon-emissions-friendly Australia, it probably just means there's some green on the sign announcing the giant coal mine, or the gigantic multinational mining company (and generous political donor) has knocked up a solar panel somewhere.

fair (feɪ)

The weaselly sense of fair is when the term is used to studiously ignore a greater unfairness. So when it comes to school funding, Labor politicians stand boldly for "fair funding" while hoping we'll ignore the torrent of cash that "independent" schools have come to see as their birthright, or treat it as a fact of nature the way the "independent" school lobby does.

strong voice (strɒŋ vɔɪs) – being one for ...

Strong voices are a good thing if they're arguing for something that is worth having. A strong voice for Australia's subservient and expensive position in the United States' military establishment would not be a good voice to have. But strong voices for things which are worthwhile are good, surely?

Not when the strong voice just means you'd like something but have no intention of lifting a finger towards getting it. A Labor MP in a formerly safe seat (which has come within a whisker of being a Greens seat in the last few elections) has announced that they're a strong voice for social justice, workers' rights and universal healthcare inside Labor and the Parliament. Action on those things *would* be good, and it's not hard to be better in those areas than the Coalition was, but we're not holding our breaths waiting for the strong-voice haver to achieve anything much. Being a strong voice without taking action can be just a weaselly way of saying that you're inside the tent.

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CPA Sunshine Coast's first meeting

Che Janz

The newest branch of the CPA, the Sunshine Coast, had its first meeting on 9th January. The branch was part of the Brisbane branch before gaining enough members from the towns in the region north of Brisbane to set up an independent branch.

Its members bring very different experiences, due to age and walks of life, with unique knowledge of the Sunshine Coast. The Branch covers the area from Caboolture, Nambour, Maleny to Sippy Downs and Caloundra. This richness allows us to communicate and help the community in our own way, allowing us to bring in new members who see what we are doing.

The Sunshine Coast has a very high number of Pauline Hanson and One Nation voters, who see the Right as their only political support. This means that our branch of the CPA has found potential new members in the area interested in the issues we stand for as a Party among those opposed to One Nation.

The branch provides a much-needed Marxist Leninist party platform as an alternative to the far Right and the major parties, who have failed to address the acute problems of the region: homelessness and the rental crisis; drug abuse; youth unemployment; and the increase in the number of hate crimes. The Right has a great influence on local and state politics. These populists blame the problems on the youth for their own problems, rather than the capitalist system. The poor have become scapegoats, rather than politicians providing solutions to the region's worsening problems.

The branch remains determined to bring the CPA's message to the

region, at a time of desperate social and economic need. Historically, the CPA in Queensland had produced Fred Paterson, an MP who retained his electorate despite the government's Red Scare campaign directed against him with the community supporting him. He provided much needed mutual aid and assistance at their time of need. This is exactly what the Sunshine Coast CPA is recreating.

Che plans to hands out grocery hampers to the large pockets of homeless camps spread across the coast and he volunteers at the local food banks. In the holiday season he plans to buy presents for the children of families in need. Ethan works with the Disability sector. Graham also worked in the sector before retiring last November. Graham grew up on a small farm near Glenview, north of Landsborough. Ethan and Graham are members of the TSU, The Services Union.

Nambour, the historical capital of the Sunshine Coast, was built on the sugar cane industry. With the closure of the local sugar mill the industry died, leaving hundreds out of work. Today Nambour's main industry is fast food and retail. In Caboolture there is not one bank, despite it officially being a city. With the COVID-19 shut down many stores closed their doors leaving "For Lease" signs across the area.

Growing violence is a big problem, as Graham witnessed. The local 7/11 store was held up at gunpoint, and the gunman ran across my roof chased by police with their dogs. Banks and stores have shut down across the region, leaving behind poverty and unemployment, which the politicians are not tackling. This leaves a political gap which the Branch wants to fill.

The Branch contributes financially to Nambour and the area



The CPA Sunshine Coast members attended the Brisbane Invasion Day March. Che is holding the large Aboriginal flag in the rear. The Branch is committed to showing a united front with the Brisbane Branch on the issue of First Nation rights. Alex and Alex, Secretary of the Brisbane Branch on the right, are holding the Land Rights flag. Photo: CPA

by having meetings in the local record store, which the owner has graciously allowed free of charge. Members buy lunches from the small takeaway stores, and visit the local businesses, such as the amusement centre and the bookstore. These small businesses provide jobs and the money helps to pay the recent rent increases. Shop owners have gotten to know us and listen to us speak about the problems with capitalism. They have become friends to the Party.

The first meeting was very productive, setting up our Branch account at a small bank that is very supportive to the community with its philanthropic causes. This is in marked comparison to the Big Four banks that have now left the region. Comrades got to know each other and what each can bring to the CPA Branch.

Having our meetings in Nambour allows everyone to get to know and to see firsthand the issues that confront the community and how

we can help combat them. It is my personal conviction that with our leadership and the Branch's resources we can bring Marxism Leninism to the Sunshine Coast, where we will become a relevant force in the future. We bring a Branch that is strong, united and respected by the community. We already have four new prospective members, one of whom, Oliver, joined the Party on the Invasion Day March, Thursday 26 January. 🇺🇦



From left to right: Graham Treasurer, Che President and Ethan Secretary of the Sunshine Coast Branch. Photo: CPA

The branch provides a much-needed Marxist Leninist party platform as an alternative to the far Right and the major parties, who have failed to address the acute problems of the region ...



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