



# Fight back!

Anna Pha

May Day is just eight days away from the federal budget. All we hear from Treasurer Jim Chalmers are attempts to soften up the electorate for the disappointments that lie ahead, with comments such as “funds are limited and the government can’t do all it might like to do,” or how the “budget will be handed down in the context of an uncertain and volatile global economy, which is precariously placed.”

On all fronts there are crises that need addressing urgently: cost of living, wages, poverty on the rise, public health system, public education, the NDIS, public housing, aged care, early childhood education and care, below-poverty-line social security payments, climate change, and Closing the Gap.

It is nonsense to claim “limited funds” as an excuse for refusing to put people and the climate first. It is a question of priorities. The Labor government has an important choice to make: Will it put the well-being of people and the planet first, or will it persist with its gift to the US war machine of \$386 billion, and to the rich of \$254 billion in tax cuts?

This waste on killing machines and war preparations is outrageous. Likewise, the tax cuts for the rich. The majority of Australians are experiencing a serious recession. Their purchasing power has taken a sharp decline even though the government can point to economic growth – the growth is in profits and for the rich. The inequalities have never been larger.

The Treasurer does say there will be some relief in an “affordable way that doesn’t blow the budget and add to the inflation challenge.” But don’t hold your breath. “Affordable” means not spending what is required where it is required. “Inflation” is a euphemism for not increasing spending.

## WAGES

Wages are in sharp decline after decades of real reductions and stagnation. The cost of food, rental, interest rates on home loans, and power bills have rocketed. Prices of some staple items have doubled. Families, especially sole parents, are struggling.

It is important to support the Australian Council of Trade Unions’ seven per cent claim before the Fair Work Commission to be handed down in June. In the circumstances seven per cent is a modest claim. The National Minimum Wage is \$21.38 per hour or \$812.60 per week.

A two-bedroom apartment in the outer suburbs of Sydney or Melbourne can cost \$500-\$600 per week. Three or four-bedroom rental accommodation costs upwards of \$700. What does this leave you to live on? How can anyone feed a family on what’s left over? Mortgage repayments have risen by more than \$1000 a month on recent loans, leaving many families in a precarious situation.

Women earn on average \$474.40 a week



Sydney Fight Back rally in support of Unions. Photo: Anna Pha.

less than men. “Women’s work” such as early childhood education and care, aged care, cleaning, nursing, and retail is not only lower paid, but tends to be casualised or part-time.

The failure of wages to keep up with the cost of living is very much due to a fall in the rate of trade union membership, and a decline in the militancy of some trade unions. Trade unions have been kneecapped by an ideological campaign waged by the ruling class and by governments with successive rounds of anti-union legislation that virtually outlaw the right to strike.

Breaches of this legislation have seen unions hit by hundreds of thousands and even millions of dollars in fines, and union officials denied the right to enter workplaces to see members, check on safety, or recruit new members.

The struggle for trade union rights is integral to the struggle for a living wage and public services.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

The Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee, set up by the government as the result of an agreement with ACT independent Senator David Pocock, called on the government “to commit to a substantial increase in the base rates of JobSeeker Payment and related working age payments as a first priority.”

Raising the rate to “90 per cent of the Age Pension would improve adequacy and return them to payment relativities of 1999,” the Committee found. According to Treasury it would cost \$24 billion over four years. This is peanuts compared to the cost of war preparations.

An increase in JobSeeker and other social security payments for youth, students, pensioners, and carers would provide genuine security and wellbeing at a fraction of the cost.

As a rich country, Australia’s social security payments are amongst the lowest of any industrialised nation.

The NDIS has been virtually privatised. At the same time those requiring funding and services have been dragged through the ringer attempting to access their rights, participate in society, and live in dignity.

Once again it is the most vulnerable who are neglected, under-resourced and facing more cuts.

## EDUCATION AND HEALTH CARE

The almost three million Australians with student loans will likely see the size of their debt increase by at least six per cent this year. It is appalling that HECS debts are being increased in line with price inflation. Education should be free at all levels from early childhood through to university. Making higher education financially accessible for all would go a long way towards overcoming skill shortages.

Public hospitals are in crisis. Waiting lists grow longer. People are dying waiting for a procedure, or to see a specialist. The essence of Medicare with universal access to bulkbilling is all but a dream.

Nurses are underpaid, overworked and burnt out. But once again, it comes down to government values and priorities. War preparations first, people last.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) around Australia are facing a crisis. Core federal funding has been cut, but demand has doubled since 2018. ATSILS nationwide are calling on the Federal Government to *urgently* deliver a \$250 million emergency support package. In NSW they will be forced to freeze criminal defence services in 13 Local Courts if

the Federal Government doesn’t provide emergency funds.

## TAXES

The low-and-middle income tax offset for people on taxable incomes of between \$37,000 and \$126,000 is set to be abolished. That could see those workers face a tax hike of between \$675 and \$1,500. They cost the government \$7 billion per annum.

Compare that with the stage three tax cuts, which Labor says it still plans to implement. Those on taxable incomes of \$200,000 or more a year will get a tax cut of \$9,075 a year. “More than 50 per cent of the tax cut goes to the top 10 per cent of taxpayers. Men get twice the benefit from the tax cut when compared to women,” The Australia Institute reports.

That’s \$254 billion over ten years in tax cuts for the rich. A tax increase for those on low and middle incomes and NOTHING for workers on less than \$37,000!

## SOME VALUES!

Labor has lost any pretence of serving the interests of the working class. No government that puts people first at a time of such a cost-of-living crisis, declining wages, rising poverty and homelessness would turn its back on the vulnerable and victims of the current crisis while finding more than half a trillion dollars for death and destruction and tax cuts for the rich.

Any relief will depend on the pressure mounted on the government. That will take united action by trade unions, left political parties, community groups, and individuals. Write now to your MP and Senators demanding the war preparations cease and tax cuts for the rich be abandoned.

Give Peace a Budget!

Give the People a Budget! ✪

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Indentured Labour in the Colony of Queensland

The Guardian now has a podcast

Search for “Communist Guardian Podcast” or use the QR code



# Guardian

Issue 2050

1st May, 2023

## May Day 2023: What do we march for?

1889 is a long way behind us, and the first May Day commemoration honouring the workers killed and wounded in the Haymarket confrontation in Chicago is something most people would have to look up. But there is no need to delve into the past to look for reasons to gather and to march on May Day 2023. Last week's statement from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Australia put it like this:

**On May Day we pay tribute to all those workers who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the struggle for workers' rights.**

**That struggle continues. Since the first march to commemorate May Day, workers have marched to remember the fallen and to continue the fight. The issues we are fighting for change over time, but the cause, solidarity with workers in Australia and around the world remains the same.**

**We march to remember the fallen, from those first demonstrators in Chicago, killed and injured while supporting the strike for an eight-hour work day.**

**Australia has played a proud part in that particular achievement, and Melbourne comrades will gather at the Eight Hour Day monument outside Trades Hall, both on May Day itself and at the official Trades Hall May Day event. As one historian put it, the eight-hour day movement showed Australian workers they could "successfully organise, mobilise, agitate, and exercise significant control over working conditions and quality of life."**

**Not only is it possible, it's vital that we organise, mobilise, and agitate, and not just "exercise significant control" over working conditions, but work towards taking control over working conditions and the means of production which determine them.**

**Capitalism is often divided into two kinds in most of the Australian media. There is the bad old kind of capitalism which involved dark satanic mills and inhumane working conditions. That's safely in the past. Then there's nice progressive modern capitalism which brings us all manner of convenience and consumer goods. The struggle against the old, bad capitalism is a victory that is firmly in the past, like a war that we won. Unions like to point out that they won the weekend.**

**Working people know that this is a false distinction. Capital is a moving target and the struggle against it is ongoing. When we celebrate May Day, we do it knowing that none of the victories achieved by workers are safe. All need to be fought for now.**

**Take the eight-hour day. It was stonemasons working at Melbourne University who downed tools and marched on Parliament in support of it. That same university today, along with other universities around the country, is facing serious claims of wage theft, something universities in Australia seem to have built into their business model along with obscene salaries for Vice Chancellors. Don't work at a university? Capital is coming for your conditions and your hours of leisure too. Australian employer organisations never ever stop calling for the abolition of penalty rates, which embody the weekends that unions are so proud of achieving.**

**The Communist Party of Australia understands full well that capital never stops moving. As the CPA executive statement pointed out last week, real wages in Australia are falling while corporations in Australia post record profits.**

**In 2023, we're meeting and marching for working conditions and for life conditions. The capitalist system in Australia is not only conducting an onslaught against working conditions and incomes. Through inadequate carbon emissions reduction schemes and through putting our money towards preparing for war, capital and its servants in Australia are endangering life itself. Anyone who thinks this is too dramatic is invited to cast their minds back to the 2019-20 bushfires, the worst in Australia's history. The air in four Australian cities was not safely breathable. Now look at today. We have a government that is spending chicken feed on looking like they want to do something on climate change, and more money than any Australian government has ever spent on anything on some submarines.**

**We meet on May Day to remember past victories for working people, and to work for the victories we need now, in 2023. Join us.**

# Coles bargaining 2023: Not down down

**RAFFWU, the Retail And Fast Food Workers Union is bargaining for members at Coles. Workers at Australia's second-biggest supermarket chain can sign up to have RAFFWU bargain on their behalf. Just joining gives the union side of the bargaining more strength.**

Originally endorsed in 2020, on 8th March 2023, Coles RAFFWU members unanimously endorsed their claims for bargaining at Coles.

RAFFWU's campaigns have forced Coles Supermarkets to the bargaining table, and any Coles workers who think their conditions could be better, or who would like to protect the conditions they have now, should join the union fighting for Coles workers.

RAFFWU have runs on the board here. In 2015, casual loading and junior rates were increased. In 2017, the union's campaigns returned penalty rates, overtime rates and other conditions worth over \$100 million per year. However, the 2017 agreement reduced other worker rights. RAFFWU was the only union running a Vote No campaign, feeling that workers deserved a better deal.

Ever since early 2020 RAFFWU has been campaigning to get Coles to the negotiating table.

The union represents members every day at Coles – including in bargaining, in disputes, in disciplinary matters, in tribunals, in courts. Representation, advocacy and campaigning is what RAFFWU does for members at Coles. The union participated in all 2017 bargaining meetings with Coles and represents members in bargaining. Right now Coles is refusing to negotiate and RAFFWU is the only union doing something about it.

One of the union's most important claims is for a Living Wage.

Right now, Coles workers are paid much less than

a Living Wage. RAFFWU believes all non-casual workers should be paid at least \$27 per hour. Penalty rates, casual loading and overtime should be on top of this minimum \$27 per hour. This is a Living Wage – 60 per cent of the median full time adult wage in Australia.

Coles doesn't want to pay living wages, give new rights or return the conditions they stripped in 2017. RAFFWU will fight for member rights.

RAFFWU members are active in store, with work-mates and throughout the negotiations.

## A LIVING WAGE FOR COLES WORKERS

Right now workers at Coles are paid a minimum wage. It is only a few cents more than the absolute minimum they are allowed to pay. The minimum wage Coles workers are paid is not a Living Wage. A Living Wage is a wage which allows you and your family to not only buy bread and other necessities of life, but also to actually live! Imagine not having to worry about the rent or mortgage, or the next bill, or school costs or all the other things which are part of living. A Living Wage is about more than surviving. It's about living!

In Australia, a Living Wage is more than \$27 per hour.

RAFFWU believes that every worker deserves a Living Wage. Every worker deserves more than \$27 per hour before any penalty rates or casual loading. Coles workers deserve a Living Wage.

You can support and/or join RAFFWU by contacting them on 1300 723 398 or via their website at [raffwu.org.au](http://raffwu.org.au).

Join your union! Fight for a Living wage! 🗳️

### NSW YOUTH FRACTION 2023 COMMUNIST YOUTH CAMP

BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL: [NSW@CPA.ORG.AU](mailto:NSW@CPA.ORG.AU)

DATES: 10 - 12 JUNE (LONG WEEKEND)

ELIGIBILITY: AGES 18 - 29,  
FULL/PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS

LOCATION: THE BLUE MOUNTAINS, NSW

COST: \$100  
INCLUDES ACCOMMODATION, SIX MEALS

ACTIVITIES INCLUDE EDUCATION,  
BUSHWALKING, BANNER PAINTING AND MORE



## Palm Sunday Guessing Competition Results

Many thanks to everyone who entered the competition.  
Your support is greatly appreciated.

1st prize Shane Cowl  
2nd prize Raul  
3rd prize Kistin McCandless  
4th prize Graham H  
Seller's prize Denis Doherty

## May Day Events

**Adelaide:** Monday 1st May, Drinks 3:30 pm Semaphore Workers Club, Dinner 6:30 pm Waterside Workers Hall

**Brisbane:** Monday 1st May, 9:30 am, corner Turbot/Wharf Streets, Spring Hill

**Melbourne:** Sunday 7th May, 1:30 pm, Vic Trades Hall, corner Lygon and Victoria Streets, Carlton

**Perth:** Monday 1st May, 6-8 pm, 43 Below, corner Hay and Barrack Street

**Port Kembla:** Saturday 6th May, 12 Noon, Wentworth Street, Port Kembla

**Sydney:** Monday 1st May, 11:00 am - 2:00 pm, Belmore Park (along Eddy Avenue, next to Central Station)

## Rally for Palestine – Sydney 75 years of Al-Nakba

On 15th May, Palestinians commemorate Al Nakba: the massacres, ethnic cleansing and seizure of Palestinian land by Zionist militants to create the state of Israel. Each year, rallies and other events are held globally to commemorate this tragic and reprehensible act.

Join the rally in Sydney to show your support for Palestinians' right to self-determination!

**Saturday, 13th May 2023, 1:00 pm Sydney Town Hall**

More details: [facebook.com/syd.bmbc](https://facebook.com/syd.bmbc)

# For-profit health in the trolley

Anna Pha

**In the language of privatisation, Sydney's public trains call the millions who use the system daily, not commuters, but "customers." Now, with Woolworths, the giant supermarket monopoly, expanding its tentacles into the health care sector, patients too, will be customers. And, as if it had altruistic motives, Woolworths claims to be helping to tackle Australia's health crisis. But its corporate plans are self-serving (as in profit-generating) and dangerous. It is also a reflection of the privatisation plans of the Albanese government.**

Woolworths had previously sought to locate pharmacies in its supermarkets but was unsuccessful when it came up against the powerful Pharmacy Guild representing the interests of pharmacies.

Now Woolies is planning to capitalise on the health crisis and the increase in the number of people using telehealth services for GP and other medical appointments. These, it says, will be quickly accessible and cheap.

The grocery's subsidiary, HealthyLife already sells a range of vitamins, supplements, dietary products, rapid antigen tests, protein and other products.

The pharmaceutical company, SuperPharmacy, has been a partner of Woolworths Group since 2021 via the Everyday Rewards program and as a third-party merchant. This relationship is being extended through HealthyLife.

SuperPharmacy has been providing Australians with prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines and "wellbeing needs" since 2000. It has six physical SuperPharmacy pharmacies located in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, and West Australia.

Under the new arrangements the physical outlets will continue to be owned and operated independently under the HealthyLife Pharmacy banner.

HealthyLife is acquiring key technology and warehouse assets from SuperPharmacy, and in turn will provide e-commerce, related technology, branding, platform, and

warehouse wholesale services to SuperPharmacy, under the banner name "HealthyLife Pharmacy."

According to a statement by Woolworths, SuperPharmacy will provide customers with more convenient access to prescriptions, non-scheduled health products, and complementary health programs.

HealthyLife Managing Director Ananth Sarathy, said: "The pandemic has led to an increase in customers turning to the digital environment for their health needs. SuperPharmacy is complementary to HealthyLife's existing health and wellness business. The arrangements with SuperPharmacy will enable customers to access their health needs in an efficient way online via the HealthyLife platform and in store at a HealthyLife Pharmacy."

Under the rebranding, HealthyLife Pharmacy will offer consumers pharmaceuticals, and prescription medicines, fulfilled via e-script and led by resident pharmacist Warren Turner, as well as access to health advice from health professionals, and services such as telehealth consultations and a range of complementary health programs.

HealthyLife has launched telehealth consultations, providing virtual access to healthcare practitioners via a network of GPs, dietitians, nutritionists, and in-house naturopaths.

It offers same-day appointments "with Australian-based practitioners for a range of services including health consultations, medical certificates, e-scripts and referrals, for a one-off fee starting at \$25."

"In addition to providing fast access to trusted health advice, telehealth patients can request an e-script from the GP, have the script fulfilled and delivered to their door through our partner SuperPharmacy, via the HealthyLife platform – all from the comfort of their own home."

A 15-minute GP consultation is \$45 and a 15-minute virtual consultation with a naturopath is free of charge. The fee for a 30-minute consultation with an accredited dietitian or nutritionist is \$115.

Woolworths is creating a vertically integrated arrangement from doctors' consultations through to the sale of prescribed

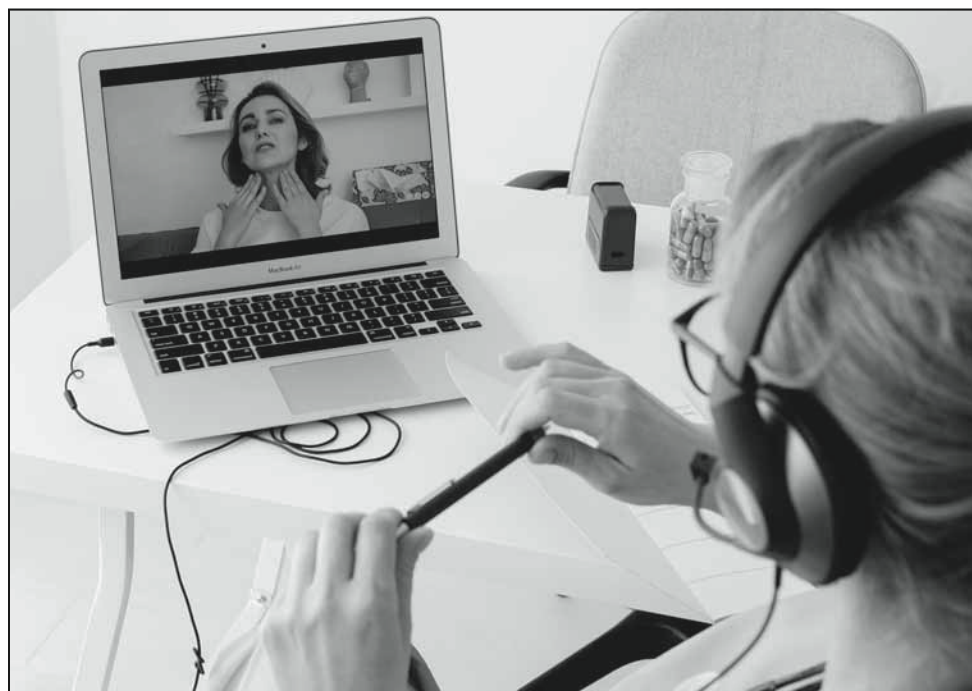


Photo: hillside7 – pixabay.com

medications and over-the-counter medicines, dietary products and supplements.

This whole process raises serious questions including potential conflict of interest, and a parallel system of "health care" for poorer socio-economic groups.

For example, will there be an incentive for doctors to prescribe medications, or for nutritionists to recommend dietary products? Naturopaths are employed by Woolworths, with no charge for a 15-minute consultation. Will they have an incentive to recommend supplements and other products sold by SuperPharmacy?

GPs, dietitians and nutritionists will be engaged through partner networks rather than as direct employees. There is a suggestion that GPs can go online when they have a gap in appointments and be allocated a patient. Will this become a gig version of medicine?

Down the track, will Woolworths link the medical appointments and scripts to its Everyday Rewards program as an additional

incentive to use the HealthyLife platform?

Online appointments can be useful for certain types of consultations especially with a regular GP who has your medical history and knows you. But ad hoc allocation to a GP for medical conditions, especially for serious conditions, raises questions about the quality of care on offer.

Where are the accountability and safeguard measures to ensure that over-prescription and over-servicing do not occur? And where is the accountability for the private information on all of these patients that will be in Woolworths' hands?

Woolworths is a monopoly corporation. Its entry into the medical field raises many concerns and could prove dangerous.

Healthcare is not a product on a supermarket shelf to be bought and sold for profit.

Health care is a human right. Governments have a responsibility to provide a system of universal public health care, including dental, from central revenue free at point of delivery for all Australians. ✪

## Public Housing in Glebe saved!

Denis Doherty

**Pro-public housing group Hands off Glebe has been campaigning to stop the sell-off of public housing in Sydney's Glebe area for years. Now they have had a small victory!**

An email from the Department of Planning and Environment states: "As of 13th April 2023, nil dwellings owned by the NSW Land and Housing Corporation (LAHC) are for sale in the City of Sydney LGA."

While the group still has a battle on its hands to save some larger public housing estates from evictions and demolitions, sales of a series of public housing homes in Glebe have been stopped.

Campaigners hope these properties will be renovated and made livable for low-income families.

This is a great success for the community and local State politicians and City of Sydney councillors. Credit should go to Sydney's Deputy Lord Mayor Sylvie Ellsmore for her efforts.

The houses saved are in Wentworth Street, Mitchell Street, Darghan Street, and Campbell Street in the historic inner city suburb of Glebe.

Hands Off Glebe will keep fighting for public housing in the area.

Hands Off Glebe can be contacted at [glebegrapevine.org](mailto:glebegrapevine.org) ✪

**Politicians academics, business leaders, community advocates and other prominent Australians have joined in a rare display of unity to urge the Prime Minister to implement the first priority recommendation of the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee and deliver a substantial increase in JobSeeker and related payments in the May Budget.**

Labor MPs Alicia Payne, and Michelle Ananda-Rajah, Liberal MP Bridget Archer, the Greens, and a wide range of independents and crossbench politicians including Kate Chaney, Zoe Daniel, Helen Haines, Jacqui Lambie, David Pocock, Monique Ryan, Sophie Scamps, Lidia Thorpe, and Andrew Wilkie, have all signed an Open Letter urging Prime Minister Anthony Albanese to lift JobSeeker and related payments to help address "structural injustice" and "increased deprivation."

Sitting members of the Federal Parliament are joined by former senior politicians and bureaucrats, First Nations leaders, leading economists, and prominent Australians.

The Open Letter to the Prime Minister comes after the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee, which was established as part of a historic agreement between the

government and Senator Pocock, recommended the government lift JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, and related payments to 90 per cent of the pension rate, or \$68.40 per day, as "a first priority"

The Open Letter, co-ordinated by the Australian Council of Social Service, says: "We all want the security of knowing that we'll be supported during tough times."

"But right now, the rate of JobSeeker is so low that people are being forced to choose between paying their rent or buying enough food and medicine."

Currently for a single person JobSeeker is \$49.50 per day and Youth Allowance is \$40.20 per day.

ACOSS (Australian Council of Social Service) research last year found that six in ten people on income support were eating less or reporting difficulty getting medicine or care because their incomes are totally inadequate. This figure increased to seven in ten in March 2023.

Former politicians and bureaucrats to have signed include Brian Howe AO, Kathryn Greiner AO, Cathy McGowan AO, Robert Tickner AO, Doug Cameron, Jenny Macklin, John Hewson AM, Fred Chaney AO, Verity Firth AM, Renée Leon PSM, and Marie Coleman AO. Economists, philanthropists

and business and union leaders include Ken Henry AC, Jeff Borland, Danielle Wood, Chris Richardson, David Thodey AO, Emma Dawson, Nicki Hutley, Angela Jackson, Sally McManus, Michele O'Neill, Simon Holmes a Court, Richard Dennis, Melinda Cilento, Paul Zahra, Jill Reichstein AM, and Diane Smith-Gander AO.

First Nations leaders including Professor Megan Davis, Pat Turner, Antoinette Braybrook, Dr Hannah McGlade, Mick Gooda, June Oscar AO, and Thomas Mayor have signed, along with prominent Australians including Patrick McGorry AO, Fiona Stanley AO, Tim Costello AO, Tony Nicholson, Georgie Dent, and Craig Foster.

Academics including Professor Kay Cook, Professor Nareen Young, Professor Miranda Stewart, Professor Peter Whiteford, Professor Eileen Baldry AO, Assoc Professor Ben Phillips, Eva Cox AO, and Professor Julian Disney AO have also signed.

The letter concludes by saying: "We call on the Federal Government to substantially increase JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, and related income support payments in the 2023 budget so as to not leave people in need behind."

So far at least 335 people have signed the letter. ✪

*Have your say!*

*Write a letter  
to the Editor*

email: [editor@cpa.org.au](mailto:editor@cpa.org.au)



Burrup rock art. Photo: Neil McCabe – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0).

## “No empathy, no morals”

The following is a statement from Murujuga traditional custodians responding to the announcement today (25th April) that Perdaman will begin the immediate removal of sacred rock art sites to build a fertiliser plant. Despite claims from WA Premier Mark McGowan on the Burrup today, cultural heritage assessments and consultation with Murujuga traditional custodians remain incomplete.

Kuruma Marduthunera traditional custodian and Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act Section 10 Applicant Josie Alec said:

“I don’t know what to say. I am so angry and hurt right now. It is a sad, sad state of affairs. The free, prior and informed consent has still not been given to Perdaman to remove these rocks – not all traditional custodians have been consulted on this. We as traditional custodians are still in the process of

setting up a meeting with Perdaman which they have tried to arrange for next week.

“We still have an outstanding cultural heritage assessment of industry damage to Murujuga under Section 10 of the Heritage Protection Act. How can they go and remove rocks straight away when they are supposed to be consulting with us first, and they have actually invited us to a meeting? Shame on them.”

Raelene Cooper, Mardudhunera woman and the former chair of the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation, said:

“Premier Mark McGowan has always stood for industry and pushed for industry to go ahead, green-lighting everything because he is looked after very well by Woodside. With the corrupt way they’ve handled and mishandled the wishes of Western Australian people, especially for First Nations people McGowan has a lack of respect, a lack of empathy and no morals.

“In 2016 McGowan sat on Murujuga with a multitude of people beside him signing a document pertaining to the World

Heritage nomination because of the Burrup’s unique universal value which is globally noted. However, today, McGowan stands there quite proudly with a shovel to dig into the ngurra, the ground, giving the green light to go ahead and destroy the very rock art that holds the World Heritage values of our Country.

“How do these people sleep at night? McGowan and his team of very smart, intelligent people have done nothing but belittle and deceive and lie to the Australian public and to First Nations people. Yesterday we had ANZAC Day for all those Australians who fought for us, including our First Nations people who were never acknowledged, yet today in 2023 First Nations people are still fighting for our country. And yet we’re fighting our own government. It is Incredible, remarkable, and absolutely disgraceful – how do these people sleep at night?”

“This is not over, we are coming. There are consequences in our lore, there are consequences when they disrupt and disturb our Elders and our history.” ✪

## Maritime Union Australia goes hard for renewable energy

**The Commonwealth government is holding a consultation on declaring an “Offshore Renewable Energy Area” off the coast of Newcastle, running from Port Stephens south to Norah Head on the Central Coast.**

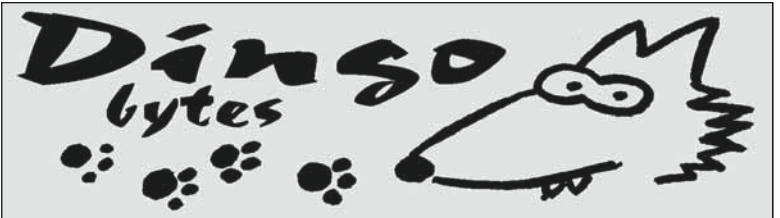
The Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) is responding vigorously, and urging members and supporters in Newcastle, the Hunter and the Central Coast area to do likewise.

Pointing out that the area has a skilled workforce, great electricity grid connections and port infrastructure, a location close to large electricity loads, and strong and consistent winds that blow at times that solar power isn’t available, the MUA is arguing strongly for development of renewable energy to be given priority over other uses of the Hunter and Central Coast offshore area, such as for defence exercises or gas exploration.

The MUA’s explainer on the topic points out that “building offshore wind projects will help reduce carbon emissions causing climate change, which is the greatest environmental threat we face.” They also argue for any renewable energy projects in the area to provide secure, quality unions jobs, benefits for First Nations people, and to maximise local manufacturing for offshore wind.

Since maximising renewable energy in preference to “defence” spending affects everybody in the country, you don’t have to live in the Hunter area to make a submission to the Hunter Offshore Renewable Energy Area Consultation.

To find the consultation form and see the MUA’s suggestions, go to [mua.org.au/news/hunter-offshore-renewable-energy-update](http://mua.org.au/news/hunter-offshore-renewable-energy-update) ✪



The governments of ten Latin American and Caribbean countries met to discuss the best ways to jointly counter the inflationary wave sweeping the world which has been a scourge to their populations. The meeting was convened by Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador and was attended by government representatives from Cuba, Brazil, Chile, Honduras, Argentina, Colombia, Bolivia, Belize, Saint Vincent, and the Grenadines representing, in addition, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the host, Mexico. Among the measures considered were the exchange of foodstuffs, and trade in foodstuffs and raw materials in order to tackle, in a united way, the problem of high prices that plunge people into serious difficulties. Dealing with hunger and shortages requires popular agrarian reform, a type of cooperative and solidarity economy that puts the needs of the population first, and rewards peasants and small farmers.

The International Day of Peasant Struggles was commemorated on 17th April. On this day, La Via Campesina called for a day of global mobilisation to highlight and denounce the continued criminalisation, oppression, and repression of peasants, farm workers, rural women, migrants, and Black and Indigenous communities around the world. In the face of the advance of capital over territories that until recently were considered “marginal,” peasants, Indigenous peoples, and other rural inhabitants represent the main frontier of resistance against the hydro-agro-extractivism of transnational mega-corporations, says the text of the appeal issued by the coalition, which brought together 182-member organisations in 81 countries. Hunger is violence. Food sovereignty is a necessity, an essential human right.

**PARASITE OF THE WEEK:** Tugboat operator Svitzer has been forced to agree to abandon its reckless and implausible legal action to cancel the EBA of almost 600 tugboat workers around Australia. Tugboat workers had been denied a pay rise for over four years, a process that has been deliberately strung out by Svitzer’s managers and lawyers, with the added threat of complete termination hanging over their heads. In March, to coincide with Svitzer parent AP Moller Mærsk’s Annual General Meeting, a delegation of representatives from the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) joined with comrades from global transport unions FNV Havens (the Netherlands) and 3F Transport (Denmark) and the ITF’s Maersk Network to bring the Svitzer campaign to the doorstep of the world’s largest shipping company in Copenhagen, Denmark, with a full-page, front page ad in *Jyllands-Posten* published by the MUA on the day of the AGM warning shareholders about the anti-worker actions of Svitzer’s Australian managers. “The citizens of Denmark must realise that although Mærsk is a national icon and are good corporate citizens in Denmark, they are not anywhere else in the world,” MUA Assistant National Secretary Jamie Newlyn told *Berlingske* newspaper. Newlyn demanded that Danish shareholders in the global shipping behemoth call Svitzer’s Australian managers into line. “Svitzer and Maersk’s behaviour is an attack on the principles of collective bargaining and is contrary to the social values of both the Australian and Danish people. These managers should be called to heel by their Danish parent company or shown the door,” Newlyn said.



Sydney Vigil

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# Raise the rate raises the roof

So many different sources are speaking out against the Albanese government's refusal to "raise the rate" – meaning increase Jobseeker, Commonwealth Rent Assistance, and related allowances – that it might be easier to say who doesn't want the rate raised.

St Vincent de Paul Society, aka Vinnies National President Mark Gaetani said "We have been calling for increases to JobSeeker and Commonwealth Rent Assistance for years. They are woefully inadequate, and nothing will change unless we prioritise these areas."

ACOSS, the Australian Council of Social Services started the campaign to raise the rate and is calling for a permanent and adequate increase to JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Austudy, Abstudy, Special Benefit, and Parenting Payment to at least \$76 a day.

The Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee, the welfare advisory panel set up by the Albanese government has said that Jobseeker payments are "seriously inadequate". Members of the Committee have spoken of hearing from "people who live on income support having to choose between paying for their medicine or electricity bills."

Bill Shorten, the Minister for Government Services has said "We can only do what is affordable". This is from a government that thinks it's affordable to give more than \$200 million in tax cuts, mainly to people earning more than \$200 thousand a year.

Independent senator David Pocock has pointed out that one in six Australian children grow up in poverty, while Greens leader Adam Bandt has described the ALP's attitude to Jobseeker as one that Scott Morrison would be proud of.

Some of the criticism is coming from within the tent. The Economic



Inclusion Advisory Committee includes Jenny Macklin, a former government minister in the Gillard government.

We often hear that poverty "is a choice" in Australia. This is very true of the low rate of Jobseeker. It is a choice driven by ideology and by fear. Neoliberal ideology insists that Jobseeker has to be low in order to give unemployed people an incentive to look for work. Never mind that it's now so low that it acts as a barrier to seeking work, as unemployed people are too preoccupied with survival to look for work effectively!

Fear? Well, the ALP is fearful of attacks from the Liberal side of politics, fearful of being criticised for being "soft" on the unemployed.

The Communist Party of Australia's political resolution states that the Party "will continue to campaign for a living income, above the poverty line, for all unemployed."

Write to your MP and demand Labor increase Jobseeker to a living wage.

More information can be found at [www.raisetherate.org.au](http://www.raisetherate.org.au) ✪

## Opinion: Wong's "reality check" ignores reality

**When Penny Wong took over as Foreign Minister from Marise Payne last year, she was surfing the wave of approval that brought the Albanese Labor government into power, replacing a disorganised and venal regime which seemed to think that everything could be solved with a three-word slogan. Progressives were thrilled. Instead of a PM who spent all his time in search of photo-ops, we would have a PM who actually did something about serious issues like climate change. We would have a government that lived in the real world, and did real things about real problems.**

All Labor had to do was be more real-world based than the Liberal-National Coalition. That's not setting the bar very high.

That was then. Now we find Penny Wong giving the Press Club a "reality check". Apparently, nations in the Indo-Pacific would not have had a "long, uninterrupted period of stability and prosperity" without the USA.

That's Penny Wong's reality. We don't know if Wong looked at history during her time at the University of Adelaide, but as far as the "long uninterrupted period of stability and prosperity" goes, conditions apply. Wong may have forgotten the Vietnam war. 521 Australians died, which wasn't very good for their prosperity. New Zealand, Thailand, and the Philippines had fatalities and casualties too.

Apart from that, the prosperity and stability was uninterrupted, unless you count the Korean War, in which Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, and the

Philippines also lost lives in one of the most destructive conflicts of the modern era.

Closer to home, between 500,000 to one million people, a conservative estimate, were killed in Indonesia in a massacre of communists and suspected communists in 1966. Spies from the US, the UK and Australia helped encourage the massacres with black propaganda campaigns. This wasn't very stability or prosperity-enhancing, but the massacres happened two years before Wong was born, maybe nobody told her.

We could also mention the Indonesian takeovers of West Papua and Timor L'este, both Gulf Wars and the lives lost in Afghanistan, and but we think you get the point. The US has provided Indo-Pacific nations with stability and prosperity except for the many times when it has provided the opposite. The stability and prosperity is the imperialist nation. Any that the rest of us get is a by-product.

In the same speech, Wong added that America is "indispensable," and that people who criticise the US "would find the world a lot less satisfactory if American ceased to play its role." There, she is appealing to a counterfactual; if America didn't pretty much run the world, it would be a worse world. Since the first part isn't real – the US *has* dominated the Indo-Pacific for a long time, we'll never know for sure, but the relatives of the dead might well ask "less satisfactory how?"

Unlike Penny Wong, we can call a spade a spade. Unlike her, we don't have to imagine what a world not dominated by the USA would be like. We're working to make it happen. ✪

## GREEN NOTES

Anna Pha

Australians spend more than \$570 and consume around 500 litres per person on bottled water per annum – second only to Singapore. The total expenditure in 2021 was \$15 billion. This is despite the availability of safe drinking water in most parts of the country. Imagine if that money were redirected to countries that do not have safe drinking water. UN University researchers estimate that close to 600 billion polyethylene terephthalate (PET) plastic bottles were discarded globally in 2021, resulting in over 25 million tonnes of PET waste – more than double the 12 million tonnes produced in 2000.

"Carbon dioxide is produced at every stage of the plastic value chain – including being burnt, buried, or recycled, not just extraction of oil and manufacturing," Carbon Tracker reports. Its analysis found that plastic releases roughly twice as much CO2 as producing a tonne of oil.

Plastics as they break down are an environmental and health hazard to animals and humans. "A growing plastic smog, now estimated to be over 170 trillion plastic particles [is] afloat in the world oceans mostly made up of microplastics." (*Fight Back CPA South Australia*)

Australia remains addicted to plastics with 3.5 million tonnes used in 2018-19. Plastic recycling rates remain low. Only 13 per cent of plastics are recycled and 84 per cent are sent to landfill. "Industry is selling plastic recycling to the world as the solution ... but they know full well this is greenwashing designed to maintain business as usual as they drip feed relatively small quantities of recycled plastic into the virgin feedstocks," said Jack Bemmer, the secretary of Zero Waste Australia and campaign director for the National Toxics Network told Michael West Media. The recycling of PET plastic, such as found in drink bottles, is 83 per cent to 93 per cent more expensive to recycle into a new bottle than to produce a new one from raw materials.

**By 2050 it is estimated that plastic in the oceans will outweigh the fish.** As the plastic breaks down into microplastics and nano-plastics it poses a significant threat to marine and terrestrial plant and animal life including humans. The plastics contain endocrine disrupting chemicals and other toxic compounds used in their production which find their way into the food chain. Toxic heavy metals added to plastic materials increase the danger to the health of humans and animals. Burning of plastic can lead to heart disease; aggravated respiratory ailments such as asthma and emphysema; rashes; nausea; headaches; or damage to the nervous system, kidney or liver. Dioxins settle on crops, waterways, and enter our food chain as do plastics ingested by fish.

"A world awash in plastic will soon see even more, as a host of new petrochemical plants – their ethane feedstock supplied by the fracking boom – come online. Major oil companies, facing the prospect of reduced demand for their fuels, are ramping up their plastics output." (e360.yale.edu) Companies such as ExxonMobil, Shell, and Saudi Aramco are increasing, not reducing, their output of plastic which is made from oil and gas, and their by-products. They are hedging against the possibility that an effective global response to climate change might reduce demand for their fuels. Plastics are expected to drive half of oil demand growth between now and 2050, according to the International Energy Agency, unless governments take decisive action to ensure they are rapidly phased out.

[www.cpa.org.au](http://www.cpa.org.au)



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# Gaza: Food or medicine

Ola Mousa

**Amal Bahar had to wait three months before she could see a doctor in the ear, nose and throat department at Gaza City's al-Shifa hospital.**

Throughout that time, she had tinnitus. "I have a constant tingling in my ear," she said. "At times, the pain gets severe and turns into a headache."

The pain, she noted, can be especially acute in the evenings.

As al-Shifa is a public institution, Amal was eventually able to see a doctor there free of charge. Yet because the hospital's resources are limited and much in demand, it took a long time before she could get an appointment.

She would have been able to receive treatment sooner if she was better-off. Yet with both Amal, 50, and her husband Wael, 55, unemployed, she cannot afford the bills.

The couple rely on disability benefits that Wael receives from the Palestinian Authority. It amounts to approximately \$110 per month.

Wael had an accident at a building site where he was working two years ago. His right leg has been badly damaged as a result.

Amal would have to pay about \$22 for

a consultation with a specialist in a private clinic. She also needs to buy medicine from pharmacies, which can set her back around \$40 a week.

Their dire economic circumstances have meant that Wael, Amal and their four sons go without many types of food. They have not eaten meat for the past 18 months.

"Poverty is destroying my family," Amal said. "And my illness and all the stress in my life are destroying my health." The full blockade of Gaza – imposed by Israel since 2007 – has caused major problems for the healthcare system.

Stocks of essential medicines have long been seriously depleted.

And those drugs which are available can be "expensive compared to neighbouring countries," noted Hussam al-Ladgha, a local pharmacist.

Muhammad Salem, 49, has chronic back pain. Over the past seven months, he has been waiting for an operation. He has been recommended a number of medicines to relieve his condition. The total bill for the medicines is more than \$20 per week.

Unemployed for the past seven years, Salem cannot afford that amount.

On occasions, he has arrived at the

hospital for appointments in the early morning but had to wait until the afternoon before a doctor could see him. "I am in bad pain every day," he said. "And I find it hard to sleep. I am anxious all the time."

Victims of Israel's brutality frequently have to make do with inadequate treatment.

Muhammad Diab, now aged 34, was shot in his left leg by an Israeli sniper in May 2018. He was participating in the Great March of Return – protests to demand that Palestinians be allowed to realise their basic human rights.

Diab has undergone a series of operations. He has encountered various complications, including an infection in his leg.

Requiring a knee replacement, he ought to be seeing doctors regularly. Yet because he cannot afford to pay medical fees, he is only able to have examinations once every two months.

The painkillers he receives do not provide sufficient relief, he said.

"I am unemployed and have three children," he said. "Before my injury [in 2018], I was a construction worker. Today, I am wounded and poor, relying on help from my brothers. I cannot pay for the treatment that I need."

According to the latest official data, approximately 44 per cent of people aged 15 years or older in Gaza are unemployed. About 80 per cent of Gaza's two million people depend on humanitarian aid.

Dr Shawqi al-Baba, an orthopaedic surgeon, noted that many people in Gaza are not having medical issues properly checked as they cannot pay fees. Health problems worsen as a result.

"For the poor in Gaza, going to a doctor is often the last resort," he said. "The main struggle here is for food." Zuhair Saad, 50, echoes that view. He has diabetes and high blood pressure yet seldom visits a doctor.

"I have been unemployed for 10 years and I have three unemployed sons," he said. "For the poor in Gaza, going to clinics and buying medicines are additional strains. We face a daily battle to find food."

*The Electronic Intifada* ✪

## Britain: Three million food parcels

Matt Kerr

**Almost three million food parcels were handed out last year in Britain – over one million of them to children – in the fifth-richest economy on Earth. The food charity, Trussell Trust, says that they distributed 37 per cent more food parcels in 2022-23 than they did in the previous year, taking the total to a staggering 2,986,203 – more than double what it was five years ago.**

The number of parcels for children has also more than doubled over the same period, from less than half a million in 2017-18, to 1,139,553 in the past year.

As fuel prices and inflation rocketed while wages and benefits remained stagnant over the past year, foodbanks are said to have been forced to open outside of working hours to accommodate those in work, as 760,000 more

people in total visited a foodbank for the first time.

The need for emergency food parcels has risen throughout Britain and Northern Ireland, with each region and nation seeing demand rise by at least 28 per cent, but some areas have fared worse than others.

Wales had the highest rise at national level, at 41 per cent, followed by England at 37 per cent, Scotland at 30 per cent and Northern Ireland at 29 per cent, but it is in the regions of England than some of the most dramatic shifts have occurred.

A 42 per cent rise was recorded in south-west England and a 45 per cent increase in east England.

It was the north-east that saw the largest jump in demand of all, distributing 54 per cent more parcels over the year, in what South Tyneside Foodbank's Brian Thomas called a "real pressure-cooker situation" as donations failed to keep pace with demand.

She said: "We see that there is some respite with the cost-of-living payments but that is short-lived and shows that one-off payments are unable to make lasting difference when people's regular income from social security and work is just too low for them to be able to afford the essentials."

The charity is calling on the government to commit long-term to peg benefit rates to the costs of essentials and that this backstop be "enshrined in law" alongside a long-term funding of crisis support.

Emma Revie, the trust's chief executive, said: "For too long people have been going without because social security payments do not reflect life's essential costs and people are being pushed deeper into hardship as a result."

"If we are to stop this continued growth and end the need for foodbanks then the UK government must ensure that the standard allowance of universal credit is

always enough to cover essential costs."

Unite, the Union whose Unite for a Workers' Economy campaign mobilises on food poverty – scoring a notable victory with its "Feed the weans" campaign to end school-meal debt in Glasgow last month – sees government indifference and corporate greed being at the heart of the problem.

Unite for a Workers' Economy's Clare Peden commented: "Food is not a luxury, it's a right, yet more and more people are experiencing

food poverty. All this is against a backdrop of excessive profiteering and corporate bosses enjoying massive payouts.

"We are tired of the politics of disappointment, so together we must organise in our communities and demand better."

"There has never been a more important time to fight for an economy that delivers a fair deal for workers and their families – a workers' economy."

*Morning Star* ✪

## Military spending record

**World military spending hit a new record high last year with the United States accounting for 39 per cent of the global total, according to a new report. Spending on the military soared for the eighth consecutive year in 2022 reached an astonishing new high of \$2,240 billion.**

By far the sharpest rise in spending, some 13 per cent, was in Europe and was largely accounted for by spending by both Russia and the Ukrainians.

Military spending by central and western European states totalled \$345bn.

In real terms, spending by these states for the first time surpassed that in 1989, as the Cold War was ending, and was 30 per cent higher than in 2013.

But by far the lion's share of military spending was by the US.

The Pentagon war machine spent some \$877 billion in 2022, which was 39 per cent of total global military spending.

The 0.7 per cent in real-terms increase in US spending would have been even higher had it not been for the highest levels of inflation since 1981.

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Sipri) senior researcher Dr Nan Tian said: "The increase in the US's military spending in 2022 was largely accounted for by the unprecedented level of financial military aid it provided to Ukraine."

"Given the scale of US spending, even a minor increase in percentage terms has a significant impact on the level of global military expenditure."

US financial military aid to Ukraine totalled \$19.9 billion in 2022.

Although this was the largest amount of military aid given by any country to a single beneficiary in any year since the Cold War, it represented only 2.3 per cent of total US military spending.

The level of military spending has been a bonanza for US arms manufacturers.

A Sipri report in December last year showed arms sales of the top 40 US arms manufacturers totalled \$299 billion in 2021.

During 2022, the US allocated \$295 billion to military operations and maintenance, \$264 billion to procurement and research and development and \$167 billion to military personnel.

According to the Pentagon's own figures, the US has about 750 bases across the world, with at least 313 in east Asia alone.

In contrast, China has a small number of bases in the South China Sea and just one other elsewhere, in Djibouti.

It spent an estimated \$292 billion last year on its military, about three times less than the amount spent by the US.

*Morning Star* ✪


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Dr Scott Burchill is Honorary Fellow in International Relations at Deakin University. He is the author of *The National Interest in International Relations Theory* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), *Misunderstanding International Relations* (Palgrave Macmillan 2020) and co-author and editor of *Theories of International Relations* (5th ed Palgrave Macmillan 2013).

He has also taught at Monash University, the University of Melbourne and the University of Tasmania, and is a regular commentator on ABC Radio and TV.

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Following his presentation, Scott will engage in conversation with Joseph Camilleri OAM, Professor Emeritus La Trobe University, Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia, and Convener of Conversation at the Crossroads. This will set the scene for an extended Q&A session.

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# US running Ukraine biolabs

Steve Sweeney

**Washington has been urged to come clean over its biolab program in Ukraine after the Department of Defense admitted its existence.**

The Pentagon said that it has operated 46 biolabs in Ukraine handling dangerous pathogens, after previously dismissing the charges as Russian propaganda.

China has joined calls for the United States to explain the role and capacity of the laboratories following the Pentagon's stunning reversal after months of denial.

In March leaked papers appeared to suggest that its operations in Ukraine were sensitive while Kiev was reportedly blocked from public disclosure about the program.

According to a document signed between the two nations, Ukraine is obliged to transfer the dangerous pathogens to the US Department of Defense for biological research.

Those who had raised concerns over the presence of the biolabs have been dismissed as conspiracy theorists and accused of regurgitating Russian disinformation.

But comments made by US Deputy Secretary of state Victoria Nuland in March prompted further suspicions when she appeared to confirm the biological program, saying she feared the labs would "fall into Russian hands."

China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said that the US must explain its activities and called on it to stop "single-handedly opposing the establishment of a verification mechanism for the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC).

"As I stressed time and again, the US conducts more bio-military activities than any other country in the world. Moreover, the US is the only country opposing the establishment of a verification mechanism for the BWC.

"The international community has long had concerns over this. Recently, Russia has further revealed the US's bio-military activities in Ukraine and raised clearly that the US has violated the BWC.



"According to the stipulations of the BWC, the US is under an obligation to provide clarifications on Russia's allegation so as to restore the international community's confidence in the US's compliance," he said.

Washington denies Russian claims that it has experimented on humans after it was alleged that testing of pathogens was carried out on psychiatric patients from Kharkiv.

The United States has been accused of engaging in biological warfare in the past.

Late Cuban leader Fidel Castro claimed that its operatives had introduced swine fever and dengue fever into the country, with a previously unknown strain of the latter created in a laboratory.

The aim was to create "the largest number of victims possible," he said.

Former *Daily Worker* international correspondent Alan Winnington and Australian journalist Wilfred Burchett were accused of treason and had their passports cancelled after exposing the US biological war in Korea in the 1950s.

Despite the denials, an International Scientific Commission headed by Cambridge University's Professor Joseph Needham concluded that China and North Korea had been subjected to bacteriological weapons.

*Morning Star* ✪

## 63 years

### A call to end the Cuban blockade

Graham Holton

**On 10th February 2023, local councillors in Washington DC put up resolution PR25-0113 calling for the Biden administration to remove Cuba from the State Sponsors of Terrorism List and to lift the 63-year-old US political and economic blockade (el bloqueo) of the Caribbean Island. Within the United States, at least 67 resolutions have been passed by state legislatures, county and city councils, and school boards. Lobbying groups such as Engage Cuba have also called for the end of the blockade of the Republic of Cuba.**

For decades there have been calls against the US economic blockade. The majority of the countries in the United Nations General Assembly have voted more than 30 times to end it, passing a resolution every year since 1992. The US and Israel are the only nations to consistently vote against these resolutions. Political pressure from the anti-Castro lobbying groups in Florida and the anti-Communist right-wing in the USA ensure the embargo remains.

In 1959, with the collapse of the Batista regime in Cuba, the rebel forces under Fidel Castro took power. The government ended the Mafia control of night clubs and stopped the massive corruption of the previous regime. The Socialist

government stopped the US corporations' hold over the Cuban economy, nationalising large land holdings to be given to the peasant farmers. These achievements did not go down well with the US government.

In 1960 US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Lestor Mallory, called for a blockade, an "embargo" of Cuba, which the Eisenhower administration implemented. On 7th February 1962, under the Kennedy administration, the blockade was extended to include almost all Cuban exports. During the Missile Crisis in October 1962, the blockade of the island almost led to World War III.

The Johnson administration adopted the policy of "economic denial," using the member countries of the OAS (Organisation of American States) and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) to apply political pressure on Cuba for the Socialist government to step down. Only Spain and Mexico refused to cooperate with US imperialist demands.

Following the end of the USSR and the socialist bloc of countries in 1991, Cuba had few trading partners and no financial, military, or political aid. The US government reinforced its blockade with new restrictive measures when Cuba was at the peak of its worst economic crisis since 1959. The Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (Libertad) Act of 1996 (Helms-Burton

Act) restricted US citizens from doing commerce in or with Cuba and mandated restrictions on giving public or private assistance to any successor government in Havana until US claims were met.

In 1999, President Bill Clinton expanded the trade blockade by stopping foreign subsidiaries of US companies trading with Cuba. The following year Clinton authorised the sale of food and humanitarian products to Cuba.

The relaxation of sanctions under Obama, was stopped by the Trump administration, which thrust new sanctions upon the Cuban people. On 17th May 2022, the Biden Administration reinstated "the Cuba Family Reunification Parole program and increasing consular services, lifting a \$1000 cap on family remittances, increasing support for Cuban entrepreneurs and expanding authorised travel." The "Cuban government- and military-aligned companies" were not removed from the Cuba Restricted List.

In January 2012, an Angus Reid Public Opinion poll showed that 57 per cent of Americans called for an end to the travel ban that prevented US citizens from visiting Cuba. In 2015 *Al Jazeera* reported that since its inception in 1960, the blockade had cost the Cuban economy US\$1.1 trillion. On 1st June 2022, the US Transportation Department lifted restrictions on flights to Cuba. ✪



## Global Briefs

**CUBA:** The deputies of the newly constituted National Assembly of People's Power (ANPP) re-elected Miguel Diaz Canel as President of the Republic of Cuba with 97.66 per cent voting for his re-election. This is Diaz Canel's second term as president for another five years. Diaz Canel, an electronic engineer and Master in Business Administration, held the positions of Minister for Higher Education, Vice President of the Council of Ministers and First Vice President of the Council of State before being elected President in 2018. He has also been a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Cuba since 2003. According to the Cuban constitution of 2019, the President can only hold the office for up to two consecutive terms.

**UK:** Anti-monarchy group Republic is planning to stage the largest protest action on the King's coronation day, 6th May. The group's chief executive Graham Smith, said the activists will chant "Not my King," wear yellow T-shirts and carry yellow placards along the procession route as well as gathering for a major event in Trafalgar Square. Smith called the crowning of Charles Windsor and the Queen Consort a "pointless piece of theatre" which will cost tens of millions of pounds and be a "slap in the face" for people struggling with the cost-of-living crisis. "Anti-monarchy protests will carry one message: 'Do you want Charles or do you want a choice?'" Smith said.

**IRAN:** Iranian navy commander Shahram Irani went on state television to report a recent confrontation between Iranian and US navies in the Gulf. "The US submarine was approaching while submerged, but the Iranian submarine Fateh detected it and carried out ... manoeuvres to force it to surface as it went through the Strait (of Hormuz). It had also entered into our territorial waters but ... it corrected its course after being warned," Irani said. "This submarine was doing its best, using all its capacities, to pass in total silence and without being detected," Irani said. The commander added that the incident will be referred to international bodies because of the border violation.

**JAPAN:** Japan's plan to dump radioactive wastewater into the sea has caused great concern internationally. Long-term impact on marine life and human life was the main fear. At the recent G7 ministerial meeting Japan was hoping for a unanimous approval of its plan. But Germany's Minister for Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection Steffi Lemke said that she could not "welcome the release of the treated water. The Japanese government is desperate for international endorsement for its Pacific Ocean radioactive water dumping plans." It has failed to protect its own citizens as well as nations across the wider Asia-Pacific region, said Shaun Burnie, senior nuclear specialist at Greenpeace East Asia. "Its plans are a violation of the UN Convention Law of the Sea," he added.

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# Hands off Africa

Elizabeth Schmidt

**Like many other African countries, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has long been a battleground for foreign forces seeking control over its political future and resource wealth.**

Pope Francis's recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo has focused world attention on a "forgotten genocide" in a region long exploited by outsiders and devastated by the consequences of endless wars. For more than a century, Congolese rubber, ivory and minerals have enriched the coffers of colonial and Cold War powers. The people and their labour have been ruthlessly exploited, their bodies brutalised, their villages plundered, their women raped, and civilians murdered.

"Hands off the Democratic Republic of the Congo! Hands off Africa!" Francis told the cheering crowd. "We cannot grow accustomed to the bloodshed that has marked this country for decades, causing millions of deaths that remain mostly unknown elsewhere. What is happening here needs to be known."

What needs to be known is the role that outsiders have played in instigating and exacerbating Congo's endless wars. Dominating the public relations campaign, perpetrators have successfully blamed victims for their own plight. While local actors certainly deserve a share of the blame, their impact has been intensified by external support.

Congo's exploitation by outsiders began in the 16th century, when the territory became a major source of slaves for Brazil. Following the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the 19th century, Congo was pillaged for rubber and ivory.

King Leopold II of Belgium claimed Congo as his personal fiefdom and imposed a slave labour regime that consumed five to eight million lives between 1890 and 1910 and left countless others maimed and disabled. When the atrocities were exposed, international outcry, both by humanitarians and by fellow imperialists who hoped to gain Congo for themselves, forced Leopold to relinquish the territory to Belgium in 1908. Exploitation continued, although severed hands and mass murder were no longer a prominent feature.

As the "wind of change" blew over the African continent in the 1950s and '60s and national liberation struggles forced imperial powers to grant political independence, the Cold War superpowers vied with one another for influence. Congo, rich in strategic minerals and bordered by nine other territories in Central, Southern and East Africa, was a coveted prize.

Following Congo's independence in June 1960, it became a key Cold War battleground in Africa. The West, including Belgium and the US, along with white settler states and foreign mineral companies, targeted then Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, whose economic nationalism and political non-alignment threatened their interests.

Labelling Lumumba a Soviet stooge, Washington helped orchestrate a coup d'état



A woman of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photo: UN Photo/Marie Frechon – www.unmultimedia.org flickr.com (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0).

and joined forces with Brussels and local opposition forces to assassinate the elected leader. Belgium, together with other colonial powers and the white settler regimes, supported separatist movements that would ensure that Congolese mineral wealth would remain in Western hands.

In the decade that followed, the CIA helped install compliant political leaders and trained a mercenary army that quelled a Lumumbist insurgency in the east. Mercenary pilots bombed railroads, bridges and populated areas, while mercenary and Congolese soldiers raped, robbed and killed civilian populations.

In 1965, following a coup d'état by CIA protégé General Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, the US threw its support behind the military dictator, helping him establish a sophisticated, well-equipped army that transformed Congo into a regional powerhouse.

For the next three decades, his corrupt and brutal dictatorship wreaked havoc on Congo while enriching Mobutu, his family and associates. Valuing Mobutu as its regional policeman, the US turned a blind eye to his atrocities until the Cold War ended and Washington severed its ties.

The withdrawal of US military support rendered Mobutu vulnerable to a pro-democracy movement and to rebel forces that had challenged his rule since the 1960s. After the 1994 genocide in neighbouring Rwanda, genocide perpetrators, aided by France, fled to Congo from where they launched attacks and plotted a return to power. Rwanda and Uganda, in turn, backed rebel forces that drove Mobutu from power in 1997 and seized control of the embattled state.

The most recent spate of Congo wars, launched in 1996, continue to plague the country. The conflicts have attracted foreign armies and their local proxies, who have fought over the nation's political future and mineral wealth. Civilian populations, whose death toll has surpassed 5.5 million, have been the biggest losers.

Displacement and economic collapse have led to hunger, disease, and malnutrition. Women and children have been especially affected. More than 200,000 women and girls have been raped and brutalised, while tens of thousands of children have been abducted and forced to work as fighters, miners, cooks, porters, and sex slaves.

Externally imposed peace accords, designed by political and economic elites, have led to new regimes that have perpetuated many of these abusive practices and failed to address deep structural inequalities.

Unresolved are the distribution of land and resources, the impunity of armed groups and their external backers, the absence of responsive government, rule of law, and a security sector that can protect the civilian population.

Pro-democracy activists, members of the internal political opposition, and civil society more generally, were not party to the discussions or included in the new governments, which were often installed after elections plagued by corruption and violence.

Outsiders have initiated or worsened the situation. Most of the Great Lakes countries and others from East, Central and Southern Africa have been involved, supporting various factions and pillaging the country's mineral wealth. Rwanda, especially, has

backed numerous rebel forces and used Congo's resources to rebuild its post-genocide economy. UN peacekeepers have failed to protect civilian populations and have often participated in the abuses and plunder.

There is no doubt that instability in Congo is the product of both internal and external factors. Longstanding political, economic, and social inequalities, the legacies of colonial and Cold War practices, and the determination of political and economic elites to protect their power and wealth have led to numerous domestic conflicts that foreign interests have exploited.

Although the presence of Rwandan genocide perpetrators served as the immediate justification for intervention in the 1990s, this rationale masked many others. Congo's mineral riches attracted the attention of outsiders, who looted the country's wealth to build their own.

Although the UN, the African Union and African sub-regional bodies sponsored several plans to establish stability and a framework for a new political order, their efforts were hindered by the competing interests of their members and the failure to address the underlying causes of local conflicts.

It should not require a celebrity visit to focus world attention on African conflicts that have taken millions of lives, especially when outsiders have provoked and intensified these endless wars. It is high time that the devastating impact of foreign intervention in Africa be taken as seriously as those in Europe.

*Third World Resurgence* ✪

## No weapons in space

Marcus Browning

**As the US war preparations escalate, its plans for domination here on earth also extend to the weaponising of space.**

At the UN Conference on Disarmament in 2005, China raised the critical significance of space in modern military strategy. Because of "its unique commanding position of height, outer space has been attached with an ever more important military and strategic value," said China's representative. "The rapid development of science and technology has provided material conditions for outer space to become platforms for warfare."

The speech noted that "currently

the relevant warfare theories and concepts such as 'control of outer space' and 'space forces projection' are being codified. There is added urgency to the issue of prevention of an arms race in outer space."

At the 2005 meeting the representative of the Russian Federation proposed that one way to avoid the weaponisation of space, was to close the loopholes in current international space law by evolving a new and comprehensive international legal agreement to block opportunities to deploy any type of weapon in space or use force or the threat of force with respect to spacecraft.

In 2002, China, the Russian Federation, Vietnam, Indonesia, Belarus, Zimbabwe, and Syria

jointly drafted and circulated a Working Paper at the UN titled "Possible Elements for a Future International Legal Agreement on the Prevention and Deployment of Weapons in Outer Space." It set out the case for a treaty based on the prohibition of weapons in outer space. All attempts to develop a treaty have been opposed by the US.

The preamble to the draft said:

"Outer space is the common heritage of humankind and plays an ever-increasing role in its future development. There exists a potential danger or an armed confrontation with combatant activities being extended to outer

space. The prevention of the deployment of weapons and an arms race in outer space become a pressing task facing the international community."

Under the space policy authorised by the administration of George W Bush, the United States asserted a completely bogus right to "freedom of action in space," stating it will "deter others from either impeding those rights or developing capabilities intended to do so."

The US spy satellites looking into other countries, and their communication satellites that eavesdrop on phone and other communications are part of the "freedom of action in space."

The US military is increasingly dependent on sophisticated satellites for communication, gathering intelligence and guiding missiles. The possibility that these space-based systems could come under attack has clearly created great consternation to US strategic planners as their space monopoly is being broken, particularly by China's technological advancement.

The US claims monopoly and unilateral "rights" to militarise and exploit outer space, while it refuses to consider an international outer space peace treaty. The US is the only nation to oppose discussion of a space treaty which aims to prevent the stationing of weapons in space by any nation. ✪

# The child in time

## Four dramatic new films

Michael Berkowitz

**Until recently, films with children as the subject were generally considered a risky proposition. Child-centred cinema consisted largely of animation, action, or family stories. Children were thought too immature, unable to hold the screen, unreliable actors, either over-broad or lacking nuance. They disappeared, acted inappropriately, or were swallowed up under the camera's focus. Most often these movies reduced plot lines to didactic tropes. Children's experiences were relegated to adults' second-hand moralistic storytelling or even buffering kids' on-camera appearances.**

In this context the past year's offerings are exceptional. Four strong dramatic tales of childhood, featuring child actors, have stormed Best Films of the Year lists and film festival awards. Four of these in particular have helped reshape the calculus of youth-centred cinema, presenting the issues of childhood in social realist form, examining problems for potential solutions, or using their subjects to shine a light on larger social problems.

In *Aftersun*, a loving father of limited means and problematic mental health brings his 11-year-old daughter to vacation at a Turkish spa. Calum (Paul Mescal) and his wife have split. But he is steadfast in his responsibility to his precocious daughter Sophie (Frankie Corio). The story is told in flashback many years later by Sophie struggling to understand her father.

Director Charlotte Wells is gifted with extraordinary

performances by first-time actor Corio and young veteran Mescal (*Normal People*), whose heart-breaking turn as Calum was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actor. Wells's light-handed, fluid direction has produced a film that expresses the conflicts of parental obligation in the face of personal trauma.

As Corio's Sophie moves eagerly into a stage of exciting growth, Mescal's Calum fights for his personal survival. Wells, Mescal, and Corio all have been honoured by a number of festivals and film societies for this outstanding work which lodges permanently in the viewer's sensibilities.

*The Quiet Girl* is the more sedate story of Cait (Catherine Clinch). She spends the summer with her older relatives, Eibhlin (Carrie Crowley) and Sean (Andrew Bennett), who quickly emerge as substitute parents.

We meet Cait among her loud, rude, demanding birth family. Her mother has little time for her as she is dragooned into the care and conflict of their constantly expanding, demanding, impoverished family crowded into their tiny, shabby home. At both home and school, neglect and humiliation crush the young girl's spirit.

Sent out to her country relatives, Cait slowly blossoms as she experiences healthy relationships and takes on farming duties. It's an uneven progress. She encounters gossipy neighbours and has to navigate Sean's slow acceptance. She even learns Eibhlin and Sean's unspoken "secret" tragedy. By the time she is supposed to return to her family, Cait's bonding with her middle-aged cousins has nurtured

her growth as an independent person.

Writer-director Colm Bairread has fashioned a linear, direct narrative, rich in detail and character development. Family situations are rolled out with the rich, loving sensitivity characteristic of masterworks by Ozu and Koreeda.

*The Quiet Girl* was nominated for the Academy Award for Best International Feature Film and won the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Best International Film award, among other honours.

### CHILDREN WITH SUPER POWERS

In contrast, science fiction thriller *The Innocents* is a cautionary tale about dangerous interactions among children with some degree of super powers. A metaphor for the harmful social relations of their parents, the film captures children learning of their powers and experimenting with their use. Unfortunately, wisdom has not accrued with their ability to do harm.

The film is carried almost entirely by its young cast. Ida (Rakel Flottum) and her autistic sister Anna (Alva Ramstad) move into a new apartment house and befriend Ben (Sam Ashraf) and Aisha (Mina Asheim). As the children play, they discover that their abilities do not match their compassion or understanding of their playmates. The results are deadly.

Eskil Vogt, who both wrote and directed *The Innocents*, balances dramatic tension with the precocious humanity of his central characters.

Perhaps the most disturbingly intense of these four films is the award-winning Belgian film *Playground*. It's a stark, unrelenting story of the cycle of bullying.

Seven-year-old Nora witnesses her slightly older brother Abel taunted, badgered and then physically assaulted by a playground gang. He makes Nora swear to secrecy. But out of concern, and under emotional pressure, she tells her father. Soon the entire family is humiliated as events turn toxic with the unrelenting

threats of physical violence and mental cruelty.

Writer-director Laura Wandel has coaxed such stellar performances from her young cast that the playground plays more as a minefield of horrors than an area of physical respite from the stress of school.

*Playground* was selected as the Belgian entry for the Best International Feature Film at the 94th Academy Awards as well as honoured at the Cannes Film Festival. *People's World* 🌟



Many people are struggling to put a roof over their head for an affordable price. Current legislation at both state and federal level allows for and encourages the commodification of housing and incentivises dishonesty. Many landlords take advantage of high competition in the private rental market, and renters struggle to keep up. Among renters most adversely affected are women and in particular, older women.

The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) released a brief in March on International Women's Day, outlining the impacts of the housing crisis for women. Women are less likely to be able to save for a deposit on a home and if they are able to, will most likely take longer than men. This means they are less likely to own a home which is a key support during retirement. Due to women paying off their mortgage at a later age, this increases stress in older women and leads to negative health outcomes.

If older women are unable to buy a house or cannot keep up with increasing rent prices, they become increasingly at risk of homelessness. Women of all ages fleeing violence are most vulnerable to homelessness. With lack of government funding towards support for those facing these circumstances, older women are the fastest growing group of homeless.

Women are also more likely to be raising a child alone. There has been a 12 per cent increase in single parent families since 2021, and mothers make up 80 per cent of this group.

If women do have a roof over their head, conditions are often poor and can even pose threats to health. Many parents worry about mould in rentals, or live under the constant fear of rent increases. Where state governments are behind on renters' rights in legislation, many don't feel able to ask for properties to be cleaned or repaired for fear of eviction.

In NSW, the Minns government committed to ending "no-grounds" evictions but has not moved to legislate it at the time of writing. The NSW Tribunal also puts the onus on renters to show a rent increase is unreasonable, making it hard to fight against them. In some cases, a renter may even win a challenge but may still be evicted under "no-grounds" evictions legislation in retaliation. Landlords are also evicting tenants for no reason than to simply put a property back on the market at a higher rate because of current high demand and low supply of housing. There are long wait lists for public housing, and few are being maintained to proper standards.

Suffice it to say, it's understandable single mothers struggle to stand up to landlords under the current system. Socialism provides the opportunity to solve these problems by ending the need for landlords through the provision of universal public housing for all workers. In addition, universal and properly funded early childhood education and care, healthcare, schooling, and social services would support families and give a broad and comprehensive safety net to women and single mothers.

## "We are here"

**FRANCE: Hundreds of people opposed to a new law raising the retirement age by two years demonstrated directly against President Emmanuel Macron as he visited their town last week.**

Macron's trip to Ganges in the south of the country comes amid a concerted new effort by him and his government to move on from the furore caused by his government's pension reform.

Demonstrators sang what has become the anthem of the retirement protests: "We are here, we are here, even if Macron doesn't want (us to be here), we are here."

The French president was visiting a middle school,

but the site was hit by a power cut protest by the local affiliate of the left-wing CGT union federation.

Police briefly used tear gas to disperse protesters who tried to storm barriers set up at the school.

Raising the retirement age has sparked months of protest. Opponents were further infuriated after Macron's government in March chose to use a special constitutional power to pass the reform without a vote in the National Assembly.

French unions say wealthy taxpayers or employers should pay for any pension reforms and have called for massive demonstrations across France against the new law on International Workers' Day, 1st May.

*Morning Star* 🌟

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# Sugar and blackbirding

## Indentured labour in the Colony of Queensland

Graham Holton

**The Queensland sugar industry annually generates \$2 billion, and this industry began with indentured labour. In July 2021 the mayor of Bundaberg, Jack Dempsey, made a historic apology for the town's Pacific Islander labour trade, called "blackbirding," in the 19th century.**

He was the first elected leader to formally say sorry, following Prime Minister Scott Morrison's insensitive remarks, made on radio in June 2020, that slavery never existed in Australia. At the time there were marches around the world supporting Black Lives Matter. This use of cheap imported labour has a long history in Queensland.

The two important sugar towns of Townsville and Mackay derived their names from wealthy "Blackbirders," Robert Towns and John Mackay. Their wealth and political influence had been derived from the trade.

Queensland separated from the Colony of New South Wales in 1859. Four years later, the first group of 67 South Sea Islanders arrived in the colony of Queensland on the ship *Don Juan* to work in the sugar, cotton, and tobacco industries.

The following year Queensland's first industrial-scale sugar plantation commenced in Moreton Bay. While the practice of blackbirding was eventually banned in the Colony of NSW, the colonial government of Queensland allowed its citizens to benefit from the practice until the "White Australia" policy forced the return of the islanders to their home islands in 1904.

Blackbirding replaced the slave trade after slavery was abolished in the British Empire, when the House of Commons passed the Abolition Act in July 1833. The US Civil War, 1861 to 1865, created a strong demand for cotton and sugar in Europe, as the war had stopped exports from the Confederate States.

Convict labour was slave labour in the Australian colonies until transportation ended in 1868. "Blackbirding," the kidnapping of islanders as labour, replaced convict labour. To circumvent the accusation of slavery South Sea Islanders, called "Kanakas," were paid a minimal wage of £5 per annum.

Blackbirding saw 62,500 South Sea Islanders sent to Queensland and northern New South Wales to work in sugar cane fields, and the pastoral, and maritime industries. They came from Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Fiji and German New Guinea (now Papua New Guinea). Legally they were known as "indentured" labourers as they had signed contracts of employment. It did not matter that the islanders could neither speak English nor read.

They were paid a small fraction of the market wages of the time and worked in slave-like conditions. The abuse of islanders included corporal punishment administered by overseers for failure to meet targets, being deprived of food and leisure time, medical neglect, married couples could be separated. They were segregated from the rest of society, provided with a weekly food ration and worked unlimited hours.

The mortality rate of 30 per cent was similar to the 33 per cent death rate of African slaves, who died within the first three years of being transported to the USA. An



Sugar cane plantation, c 1923. Photo: Queensland State Archives (CC BY-NC 2.0)

estimated 15,000 islanders died within the first year of their arrival in Queensland due to European diseases, mistreatment, malnutrition, and suicide.

These workers were banned from organising as a group and were forbidden by law from striking. Workers who left a plantation without permission, "absconding," faced three months imprisonment. The deceased were buried together in unmarked mass graves, which continue to be uncovered up to this day.

In 1867, the slave ships *King Oscar*, *Spunkie*, *Fanny Nicholson*, and *Prima Donna*, holding over 1,000 Kanakas, were offloaded in the ports of Brisbane, Bowen, and Mackay. The labourers were sold for £2 each, raising fears of a burgeoning new slave trade. The following year Captain McEachern of the *Syren* anchored in Brisbane with 24 dead islanders. The remaining 90 on board had been taken by force and deception.

No legal action was taken against McEachern. This trade soon became an established industry, with labour vessels from eastern Australia obtaining workers for the Queensland and Fiji colonial markets. Captains of labour ships were paid five shillings per worker, "head money," and each worker was sold for between £4 to £20 each. [1 shilling became 20 cents, £1 (20 shillings) became \$2 at time of conversion to decimal currency in 1966.]

Those on board the *Bobtail Nag* had metal discs imprinted with a letter of the alphabet hung around their neck making for the ease of identification of each worker. The tag had replaced the branding iron used in the slave trade.

Maryborough and Brisbane became important centres for the trade with vessels such as *Spunkie*, *Jason*, and *Lyttona* making frequent "recruiting" journeys. Captain Winship of the *Lyttona* was accused of kidnapping and importing Kanaka boys under 15 years of age for the plantations of George Raff at Caboolture in Moreton Bay.

Queensland Governor George Augustus Constantine Phipps, the Marquess of Normanby, made enquiries into the trade and

found that the islanders were "engaged without any pressure and were perfectly happy and contented."

To stop the kidnapping of labourers, the British government passed the Pacific Islanders Protection Act in 1872. Queensland then enacted complementary legislation. Islanders put up with the harsh conditions because they could return home with high status objects, such as metal axes, knives, guns, saucepans, and European clothing.

Today CSR is synonymous with sugar. The purchaser at the supermarket is unaware how the company's fortune began from islander labour. The CSR (Colonial Sugar Refining Company) was founded in 1855, Sydney, then set up refineries in other British colonies in Australia and in Fiji.

Sugar plantations were set up in the 1860s in Brisbane at Cleveland, Beenleigh, and Caboolture. CSR soon dominated the processing of sugar cane in Queensland, with small sugar refineries in Maryborough, Bundaberg and Mackay districts.

In 1874 Qld began exporting sugar to other colonies. By the 1880s the Burdekin River, Herbert River, and Cairns had sugar plantations, with the industry dominated by large companies and wealthy landowners.

The Commonwealth of Australia decided to deport most Pacific Islanders, as part of the implementation of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, known as the White Australia policy. The Pacific Island Labourers Act was the first law passed by Australia's first federal government, under Prime Minister Edward Barton, a Protectionist. It prohibited any South Sea Islanders from entering Australia after 1904.

The deportation of Islanders residing in Australia began in 1906 and continued until 1908. More than 7,500 South Sea Islanders returned to their home islands, even though some had arrived in Australia as children and had no memory of their homeland.

Three opposing views faced the Islander labour trade and the White Australia policy. The famous British anthropologist, WHR Rivers, in his *Essays on the Depopulation of Melanesia* (1922) writes that the Queensland

labour trade was "one of the blackest of civilisation's crimes." It had created numerous problems and deservedly ended.

In contrast, was the view that the trade attracted the worst type of workers. WG Ivens in his *Dictionary and Grammar of the language of Sa'a and Ulawa, Solomon Islands* (1930) writes that it attracted islanders who wanted "to be freed from the likelihood of punishment." These undesirables were understandably repatriated.

The third argument was that the islanders living in Australia wanted to stay. They challenged their expulsion, with 3,000 signing a petition to King Edward VII, resulting in the federal government expanding the categories of exemption.

In 1994, the findings of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission led to the federal government recognising the community as a disadvantaged ethnic group. The state governments of Queensland and New South Wales have since followed suit. Today, the Australian South Sea Islander community numbers 300,000.

For those who returned home, blackbirding had a major socio-economic impact. For those who returned to Vanuatu (formerly the New Hebrides), their experience impacted their national identity. Although there were no formal written records, their stories survived through the oral traditions. It even impacted the national language, Bislama, which "was developed in the cane fields of Queensland."

This marginalised group, like the other modern island nations, suffer from the intergenerational trauma produced by the legacy of kidnapping, slave-like labouring conditions, segregation and forced deportation. The impact of being incorporated into the capitalist system under 19th century British colonialism can be felt to this day: widespread poverty and social dislocation that tears apart communities.

Further Reading:  
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