



# Selling out Australia

Hannah Middleton and Denis Doherty

**In recent years, former US Navy officials have played critical but secretive roles as paid advisers to Australian governments. Since 2015, six retired US admirals have worked for the Australian government and a former US Secretary of the Navy has been a paid adviser to three Australian prime ministers. Australia has also hired three former civilian US Navy leaders and three US shipbuilding executives.**

Australian governments have kept details of this secret but the Pentagon recently revealed that “dozens of retired US military figures have been granted approval to work for Australia since 2012.”

These overpaid mercenaries promote the interests of the US empire and grow rich in the process.

Since 2015, these US officers have received contracts

worth around \$7500 per person, per day, about \$15 million combined.

“We were paying a lot of money and it wasn’t obvious to me that we were getting value for money,” Rex Patrick, former independent Federal Senator and retired submariner, commented.

*The Washington Post* last year revealed that a former US Navy admiral named Stephen Johnson had actually served as Australia’s Deputy Navy Secretary.

Among the US military consultants is William Hilarides. Canberra has already paid Hilarides almost \$2.5 million since 2016 for his consulting work.

James Clapper, former US Director of National Intelligence, has also worked for the Australian government. Clapper has a track record of lying in US interests. In 2013 he lied to the US Senate, stating that the NSA does not collect data on millions of Americans. His lie was exposed by the Edward Snowden leaks a few months later.

A *Washington Post* investigation found that some of the retired admirals have worked for the Australian government while simultaneously consulting for US shipbuilders and the US Navy, including on classified programs.

One of the six retired US admirals had to resign as a part-time submarine consultant to the Australian government because of a potential conflict of interest over his full-time job as board chairman of a US company that builds nuclear-powered subs.

Caitlin Johnson writes: “Australians are going to have to wake up to what’s being done to us ... We’re being groomed for a military confrontation of unimaginable horror, one which absolutely does not need to take place, all in the name of something as trivial as securing US planetary hegemony. We’ve got to start saying no to this, and we’ve got to start right now.”

# Military uses for Arnhem Space Centre

Hannah Middleton and Denis Doherty

**Last year the *Guardian* reported on the development of the Arnhem Space Centre (ASC) in north-east Arnhem Land in the remote Northern Territory. We warned then that the centre would eventually be used for space warfare purposes.**

And now, only a few months later, our warning is already coming true.

Equatorial Launch Australia (ELA), which runs the ASC, has signed an agreement with US rocket company Phantom Space Corporation to collaborate on missions.

The ABC has reported that Phantom, which has links to the US Department of Defense, has stated it plans to fire orbital rockets from the space centre by 2025.

The two companies said they are working towards a “space mission of national significance for Australia and the Asia Pacific region.” ELA chief executive Michael Jones said the mission plan was “classified and confidential.”

“The facilities, technologies and capabilities of ELA and the ASC are also able to allow it to be used as a state-of-the-art test and development range for both commercial and defence missiles and rockets,” Jones said.

Mark Lester, Phantom’s chief operating officer, said that “since the US and Australia remain close allies, it is possible we will conduct defence missions” at the Arnhem Space Centre in the future.

He added that the space centre could one day be used as a missile-testing and development range.

Local indigenous communities, who initially welcomed the space centre’s potential for employment and development, are now expressing concerns about the Space Centre being used by the military.

“It is very concerning that these things are being talked about by ELA and others without the Yolngu clans connected to the Gove Peninsula being at the forefront of that conversation,” indigenous leader Yingiya Guyula said.

In December 2022 US Space Force Lieutenant-General Nina Armagno described Australia’s “prime geography” as essential for future space operations.

Meanwhile Lockheed Martin is building Australia’s first sovereign defence satellite communication system known as Joint Project 9102.

Expected to cost \$4 billion, the new system will include new communications satellites, multiple ground stations across Australia, a communications management system and two new operations centres.

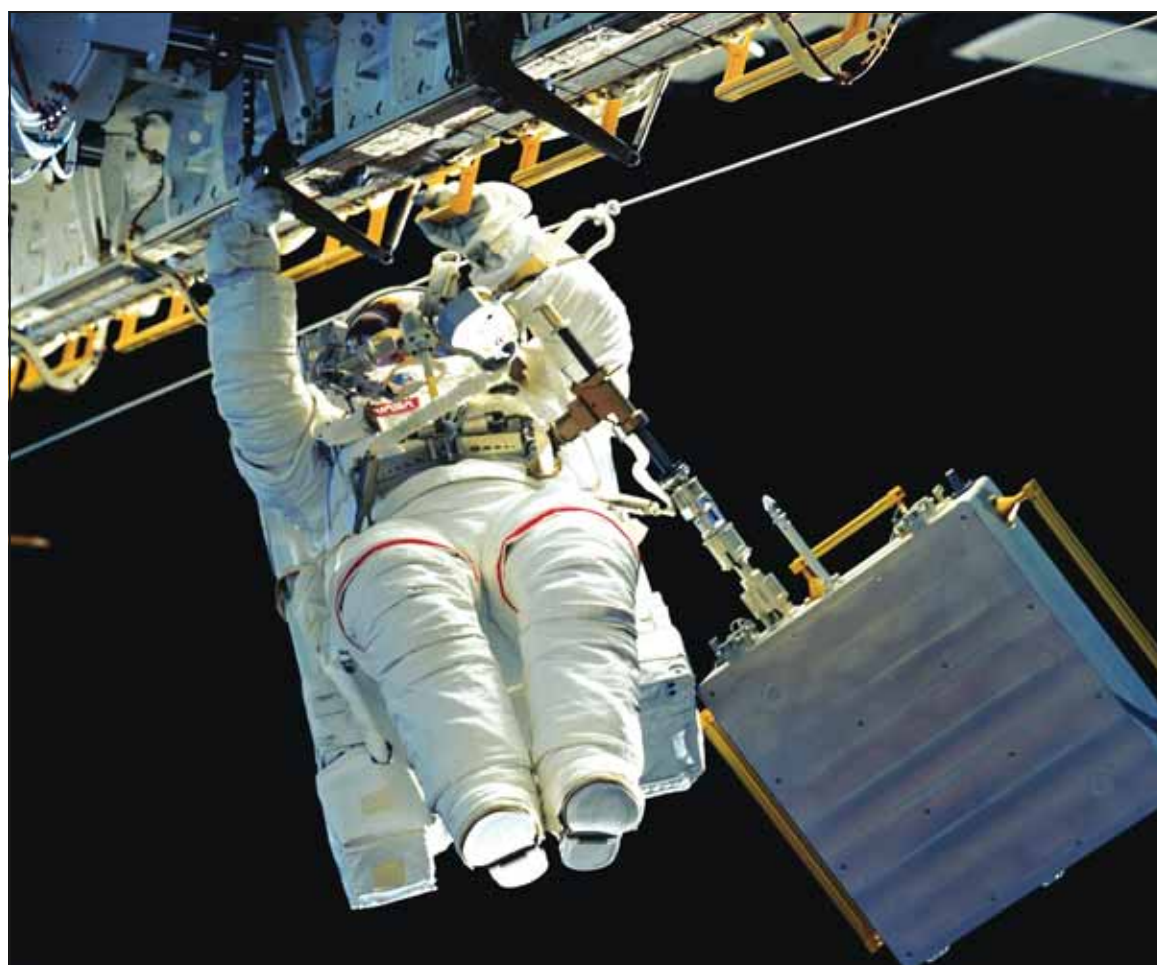


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# Guardian

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## Skilled Immigration: Must do better

The idea of skilled migration is deceptively simple. A lot of people in other countries want to live in Australia. We have to sort them out somehow. Why not make sure that the people allowed to move here have skills the country needs?

The reality is complicated. Skilled migration ticks a number of boxes for Australian governments. It keeps business lobbies happy. Business groups donate heavily to both major parties, so keeping them on side is important for the ALP and the Coalition. Business likes skilled immigration. They need skilled workers. They like the competition amongst employees that keeps wages low and keeps employees compliant. Australian business likes the idea of the “reserve army of the unemployed” that Marx described.

Governments also like skilled migrations for political reasons. Under Howard, the skilled migration system allowed the PM to bring in the extra workers businesses demanded, while catering to his party’s prejudice towards the upper middle class. Howard saw business and skilled migrants as so many pro-business Liberal voters, hopefully bringing in the petty-bourgeois values he prized. He could cater to racism by lying about the moral character of refugees, but keep business happy with hungry legal migrants.

Of course there were casualties. All migrants, refugee, skilled, and business migrant alike, suffered from the racism that Howard worked so hard to foster. His party is still at it, with recent lies about Black Australians.

Another casualty was the skilled migrants themselves. Under Howard and the governments that followed him, skilled migration was handled in a slapdash fashion, with thousands of unhappy migrants forced into categories to fit the “points system,” studying subjects that didn’t suit them, and repetitively sitting language tests they didn’t need. Waiting times for visas grew longer and longer, and a lot of our migrants now have stories of friends and relatives who gave up and tried other countries, or just went home poorer.

The other loser from the whole process has been the Australian education system. TAFEs have been starved of funds and forced to compete with a system of dodgy private colleges. More of our brightest Australians wasted time and money on these outfits while the TAFEs that could be the envy of the world withered.

Now we have a Labour government and there has been a review. The review has handed in its findings, and the ALP is going to make changes they hope will make business and unions happy.

For the employer groups, there’s the abolition of the labour-market testing requirement. Business has always hated having to prove that they’ve genuinely tried to find local candidates for positions. Instead, there will be “skills assessments,” hopefully proving that migrants have the skills the industry needs. For unions, there’s the prospect of higher pay thresholds, so that skilled migrant workers don’t undercut Australian workers the way bosses would like.

Albanese said of immigration that “the system that we inherited was broken.” This is true of a lot of things he inherited from the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison Coalition governments, but it does not get him off the hook. We need an education system that is fully funded to develop Australian workers to do the jobs that suit them best. We need an immigration system that treats migrants as human beings, not just as a way to save money on wages or education.

The Communist Party of Australia has always supported properly training, and paying Australians wherever they come from rather than turning workers against each other for the bosses benefit. As an internationalist party, we strongly oppose the policy of just leaching workers from other countries. Five thousand New Zealand nurses have registered to practice in Australia since last August.

This country can afford to properly educate young Australians and treat migrants decently. We should reverse the Coalition cuts to education, fund the TAFEs, and pay our aged care workers properly. We can do all that *and* treat migrants as human beings, not as disposable assets.

# Sexual harassment rife

**The United Workers Union (UWU) and Equal Opportunity SA have called for the government to implement a set of recommendations arising from a report which showed almost 50 per cent of hospitality workers had experienced sexual harassment at work.**

The *Hospo’s Harassment Problem* report, based on a survey of workers in various hospitality and entertainment venues, found that the vast majority of people who had either experienced harassment, or witnessed it, had not reported the incident because they feared repercussions, such as losing their job.

Disturbingly, 58 per cent of respondents who had claimed they had been sexually harassed said their perpetrator was a supervisor.

The report recommendations were mainly centred around tightening workplace health and safety legislation but also included a recommendation to overhaul the Responsible Service of Alcohol certification.

UWU coordinator Louise Dillon said the precarious nature of hospitality jobs, coupled with a lack of government oversight meant sexual harassment and other forms of exploitation were rife in the hospitality sector.

“The current system of self-regulation isn’t working and needs to be completely re-thought,” Dillon said.

“Our experience and our report show that when hospitality workers are subjected to sexual harassment they are less likely to report. This is often because they

don’t think they will be believed, and sexual harassers are often directly employed in positions of power in the workplace.

“Harassment is a risk to safety and wellbeing and the onus should be more explicitly on the boss to provide a safe workplace for all.”

Equal Opportunity Commissioner Jodeen Carney said:

“What has been reported to the UWU is consistent with anecdotal and other reports that have been coming to my office over the last 12 months.

“I’m particularly supportive of an advisory body to be established, with industry, to work towards identifying solutions so that those who work in the industry have the best experiences they can have.

“For many, working in hospo is their first job. All of us need to do what we can to ensure their first jobs aren’t their worst.

“I know many in the industry are working hard to develop policies and training for their staff, but too many aren’t. Now is the time for all us to put our shoulders to the wheel to effect change.

“In the meantime, I encourage businesses to join the WE’RE EQUAL initiative my office has developed. Participating businesses make a commitment to provide a safe environment, free from discrimination, bullying or harassment – for their staff, their customers, and their suppliers.” ✪

## Call for federal industrial manslaughter laws

**The Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union (AMWU) marked International Workers’ Memorial Day (IWMD) by calling for greater powers for union delegates and Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) as well as federal industrial manslaughter laws and more protections for workers exposed to dangerous fumes and chemicals.**

In a statement, AMWU National President Andrew Dettmer said:

“Today is International Workers’ Memorial Day – a day where all are called on to remember those workers who have failed to come home after leaving for work. A day we remember those who have been diagnosed and perished with cancers and other illnesses, sometimes decades later, because of their exposures whilst at work. A day where we remember the thousands of Australian workers who have been maimed in the pursuit of making a living, some bearing their scars and disabilities for the rest of their lives.

“This day presents an opportunity to pause in our otherwise busy lives and think about what really matters: our workmates, our families, our friends and those we love. An opportunity to evaluate what is important and reaffirm the value we as Australians place on life. The 169 workers who were traumatically killed at work in 2021, the last complete reporting period, were all victims of needless and preventable incidents.

“The best possible way to prevent tragedies occurring at work is by empowering union delegates and Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) to do their jobs as effectively as possible. No government regulator can replace the thousands of delegates and HSRs who keep their workmates safe every day. Outdated industrial relations laws are making that vital work much harder and endangering people on the job.

“We need the government to go that extra step to protect Australian workers. We need to introduce industrial manslaughter laws into

the Commonwealth Work Health & Safety Act, we need to stop Australian workers from being exposed to dangerous chemicals and ensure that exposure standards are health-based, not simply an artificial upper limit.

“In the case of welding fumes, under the current Workplace Exposure Standards welders are notionally ‘allowed’ to breathe up to 11 grams of a known carcinogen every year. Our policy bodies have failed to do what they are entrusted to do. We have a responsibility to right this wrong.

“The AMWU calls on all who mark this day to recommit to making workplace health and safety our highest priority. That means doing what our gut tells us is right, despite it not always being what’s popular or comfortable. If you see or sense something’s not right or not safe, or you’re just not sure, speak up. Let’s not watch any more workers needlessly die at work. Let’s watch out for our mates and if something feels unsafe, let’s stop.” ✪

### 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)

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

# Cut-and-paste US world domination

Anna Pha

**“So today I want to talk to you about how we avert war and maintain peace – and more than that, how we shape a region that reflects our national interests and our shared regional interests,” Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong told the National Press Club in her address on 17th April.**

In the same breath, Wong talks about Australia “shaping a region that reflects our national interests,” and about not “encroaching on the ability of countries to exercise their agency ... and decide their own destinies.”

Australia’s shaping the region sometimes appears to be single handed or sometimes with our “partners.”

References later in the address leave no doubt that “our shared regional interests” are those shared with the US and its allies.

## RISING TENSIONS

“Tensions have risen between states with overlapping claims in the South China Sea ... China continues to modernise its military at a pace and scale not seen in the world for nearly a century with little transparency or assurance about its strategic intent.”

“On top of that, North Korea continues to destabilise, with its ongoing nuclear weapons program and ballistic missile launches, threatening our friends in Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the broader region.

“Altogether, this combination of factors and the risk of miscalculation comprise the most confronting circumstances in decades.”

“So I will say it now to the National Press Club – to avoid any possible misunderstanding: our job is to lower the heat on any potential conflict, while increasing pressure on others to do the same. The Albanese government does that here at home, and we do that in our diplomacy.”

How will “we” really do that? The rest of the speech does not sound like “diplomacy.” It sounds more like through AUKUS, an arms race for military superiority and war preparations.

## AUKUS

“... AUKUS represents an evolution of our relationships with the US and the UK, helping make Australia itself a stronger partner for the region.”

“In an age of military modernisation, as other militaries can operate from increased range, with faster speed, and greater precision and lethality, taking responsibility for our security means being able to hold potential adversaries’ forces and infrastructure at risk from a greater distance.”

According to the Foreign Minister, AUKUS represents “a transformational moment for our nation, our Defence Force and our economy.” The last point is correct but not in the way she would have us believe. It will divert upwards of half a trillion dollars from the budget into the pockets of US arms manufacturers at the expense of the wellbeing and security of the Australian people.

Under AUKUS, Australia is purchasing nuclear-powered submarines, missiles, and building and expanding bases for the US. These will not be under Australian command and may include nuclear weapons. AUKUS ties Australia into preparations for a war

against China and sacrifices our sovereignty, despite Wong’s claims to the contrary.

“Our focus needs to be on how we ensure our fate is not determined by others, how we ensure our decisions are our own,” Wong says, in total denial of the implications of AUKUS.

“Our focus must be on what we need to do so we can live according to our own laws and values, determined by our own citizens, pursuing our own prosperity, making our own choices, respecting but not deferring to others.”

“We need to harness all elements of our national power to advance our interests, when the implications of unchecked strategic competition in our region are grave,” Wong says, as if AUKUS is not fuelling the arms race and China is not allowed to protect itself.

## DEFERRING TO THE US

“The United States is our closest ally and principal strategic partner.

“The Indo-Pacific would not have enjoyed its long, uninterrupted period of stability and prosperity without the US and its security guarantee to the region.” Never mind the US wars in Korea and Vietnam, or the invasion of East Timor by Indonesia.

“The whole region benefits from US engagement, from their contribution to the region’s strategic balance.”

“As we seek a strategic equilibrium, with all countries exercising their agency to achieve peace and prosperity, America is central to balancing a multipolar region.” Multipolar with the US at the helm!

“And this balance must be underwritten by military capability,” meaning US military might and hegemony.

## WESTERN RULES

Australia’s interests “lie in a region that operates by rules, standards and norms – where a larger country does not determine the fate of a smaller country; where each country can pursue its own aspirations, its own prosperity.”

This is a reference to Western interests, rules and system, a system in deep crisis – not those of socialist China.

“All countries of the region must exercise their agency through diplomatic, economic and other engagement to maintain the region’s balance – and to uphold the norms and rules that have underpinned decades of peace and prosperity.”

## SHUTTING OUT CHINA

Wong repeats the concept of shaping the region: “... I want to talk about how we contribute to the regional balance of power that keeps the peace by shaping the region we want.” This “regional balance of power” is yet another reference to US domination. It goes to the essence of her intent to ensure US hegemony over the region.

Australia is working “closely with our regional counterparts to help the Pacific family stay united ...” “Our view and the view of the Pacific Islands Forum is that the Pacific family is responsible for Pacific security.” Yet Australia is “shaping the region we want!” Why then is the US playing a strategic role in the region?

Apart from its military role in AUKUS, Australia is expected to strengthen ties with Pacific Island nations through such means



Samantha Power, Administrator of the US Agency for International Development meets with Penny Wong, Australian’s Foreign Minister. Photo: USAID – flickr.com (CC BY-NC 2.0)

as increased aid in an attempt to keep China out of the region.

The government is encouraging “greater economic engagement in Southeast Asia by the United States and other partners from the Indo-Pacific and beyond, including through IPEF.”

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework is a regional arrangement to build cooperation and economic integration in the Indo-Pacific launched in September 2022. Its 14 member-states include the US, South Korea, Japan, and Indonesia as well as Australia. China is not a member.

## WAR

“I want to conclude with a point I make with many audiences around the world, because it really gets to the heart of it.

“Today’s circumstances have prompted comparisons with 1914, the 1930s, and 1962. These being the First World War, the rise of fascism and the Second World War, and the Cuban Missile Crisis which brought US and socialist Soviet Union to the brink of nuclear war.”

These comparisons have legitimacy in that they raise the main contradiction in the world today, between socialism and imperialism, the highest and final stage of capitalism. This contradiction is embedded in the text of Wong’s speech, which itself reads like a

cut-and-paste position paper from the US State Department.

“We are investing in our national power, not just to guard against regional contest, but to shape and influence it to advance our national and shared interests.

“We are doing this by creating deterrence, with major military investments in future capability, including through the AUKUS partnership.”

And the arrogance of nationalism: “Our decision is to use all elements of our national power to shape the world in our interests, and to shape it for the better.”

In conclusion:

- Australia has surrendered its sovereignty to US imperialism;
- Australian taxpayers are funding US war preparations;
- Australia remains the deputy sheriff for the US in the Pacific region;
- Australia is wooing Pacific island nations with the aim of excluding China from the region;
- Despite the rhetoric about averting war, the Australian government is preparing for war;
- The Australian Parliament – and certainly not the Australian people – will not be consulted before Australia goes to war. ☘

**“Our decision is to use all elements of our national power to shape the world in our interests, and to shape it for the better.”**

# Banks laughing all the way

Marcus Browning

**When the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) handed down yet another interest rate rise last week, it was crippling for ordinary working people, small business, and small farmers, but not for the banks. With record profits ANZ, Commonwealth Bank, NAB and Westpac were laughing. Their profit outcomes are a direct result of unregulated monopoly price gouging and heightened exploitation of their workforces. Now they stand to make even larger profits.**

The banks continue to act with impunity, having nothing to fear from all the hot air in Canberra. Their PR consultants are constantly at work devising means of restoring their public image.

The Big Four consolidated their monopoly position during financial crises with the help of government deposits and other guarantee systems. The relatively smaller banks such as Members Equity (set up by industry superannuation funds), the building societies, and credit unions hardly pose a threat to them. The media almost talk as though they do not exist.

The Big Four deny lack of competition or collusion. They just happen to follow each other making identical decisions. If the Commonwealth Bank goes first, upping its mortgage rates by more than the RBA increase, the others will no doubt follow, but in the current political climate may take a little longer than usual.

The average Australian is paying thousands in bank fees every year. On every front bank customers face exorbitant fees, most of which involve a simple, automatic electronic recording or notification.

Trying to find cheaper deals is a minefield. Special lower interest rate offers for credit cards last six months. Card fees, late payment penalties and so on are buried in very small, grey print. Swapping mortgages is a nightmare – the delving yet again into your personal affairs, exit fees, hidden penalties for late payments, and different types of loans.

## BANK WORKERS ABUSED

Bank workers are on the receiving end of angry customers – long queues, long waiting times on the phone, difficulties in rectifying bank errors, whopping fees and penalties. Thousands of bank jobs have gone offshore. Bank staff are under pressure to sell debt with pay increases tied to how many new credit cards or other forms of debt they sell. Their health suffers under pressure to sell debt products even when people don't want or need them and may not be able to afford them.

The Finance Sector Union has a Better Banking Charter calling on the government to stop banks offshoring jobs and linking pay to sale of debt products. The Charter also calls for bank interest rates to reflect RBA rate changes, and for banks to demonstrate a direct link between fees and customer service.

The Banking Amendment (Delivering Essential Financial Services for the Community) Bill of 2010 included provisions for minimising or removing fees from basic services, capping the level of mortgage exit fees, and introducing a variable rate mortgage product ("Fair Price Mortgages") that would only permit genuine changes to the lender's cost of funds to be passed on to customers.



Image: Gino Crescoli – Pixabay.

The Communist Party of Australia, as a first step, is calling on the Australian government to establish a People's Bank, a government guaranteed public bank based on a strong and democratic social charter that operates in the interests of the people and the economy. This would immediately introduce real competition and put pressure on the Big Four to slash fees and improve service.

Re-regulation of the financial sector is long overdue. The government should regulate interest rates, fees, and capital flows, and confine banks to banking with the many highly speculative practices that are not central to banking outlawed. It is also time for a super profits tax on banks.

A government that caves in to the mining corporations on the environment and a super profits tax is not about to stand up to the banks. Nor is the Opposition which also does the bidding of the big end of town.

It requires a government of a new type closely linked the people's mass movements governing in the interests of the people. ✪

## Uni workforce "up for a fight"

**A wave of industrial activism and protest has rippled across every campus in the country as furious university workers push back against wage theft, casual employment, stagnant wages and chronic underfunding.**

The action began on Monday 1st May, and reached a crescendo on Wednesday, when thousands of workers from Monash, Melbourne, Deakin and other campuses walked off the job, and converged on the Victorian Trades Hall.

Approximately three in ten university jobs are permanent. But the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) is fighting back, winning "decasualisation" clauses at Western Sydney University, Australian Catholic University, and University of Technology Sydney in the last six months.

At the University of Sydney, a major decasualisation clause is about to be inked, converting 330 casual positions to permanent.

NTEU National President, Dr Alison Barnes said the national week of action was designed to insert decasualisation provisions

in the enterprise bargaining agreements of every Australian university.

"For too long, Australian universities have allowed casualisation and its toxic twin, wage theft, to flourish. We are determined to stamp it out," Dr Barnes said. "We have won decasualisation clauses at three universities, and the coming agreement to make 330 casuals permanent at Sydney University adds significant momentum.

"We are actively bargaining at 24 universities and intend to give thousands of workers the rights, security and stability that comes with permanent employment. Everyone who works regularly deserves to be able to plan for basic life events like illness, holidays, or buying a home."

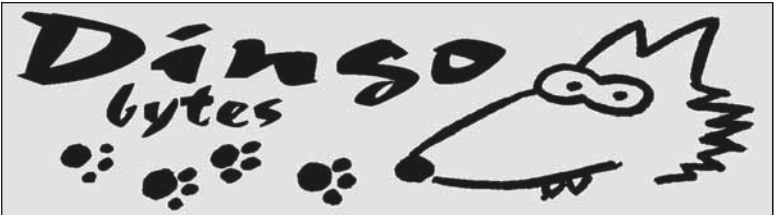
A wage theft report released by the NTEU in February showed universities across the nation have been required to pay back more than \$80 million in wages stolen overwhelmingly from casual workers. Melbourne University was easily the worst offender, paying back almost \$32 million.

Despite rampant wage theft,

many universities are still conspiring to suppress wages. A leaked strategy road map from employers' lobby group the Australian Higher Education Industrial Association (AHEIA) recently revealed a concerted plan to delay wage bargaining to avoid offering staff fair pay and appropriate conditions. In some cases, senior university management are offering cash bonuses to staff as a distraction from real pay cuts.

NTEU General Secretary, Dr Damien Cahill, said the workforce was at breaking point. "Thousands of university workers will walk off the job or take part in protests, not because they want to, but because they have to," Dr Cahill said. "Tertiary education is one of Australia's biggest export earners. Universities are critical to whether we can deal with big challenges such as climate change, the next pandemic or the skills of our workforce. Yet we are constantly devalued and treated as a budget line expenditure item.

"The university workforce is furious and up for a fight." ✪



This International Day of Mourning, the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA) remembers those who have lost their life at work and renews calls for more to be done to address mental health workplace risks to prevent further tragic losses. International Day of Mourning (28th April) is a day to remember and honour those who have lost their lives at work. NSWNMA General Secretary, Shaye Candish, expressed concern around the increasing psychosocial and mental health risks impacting nurses and midwives. "We'd like to see urgent investment focused on protecting the psychosocial wellbeing and mental health of nurses and midwives," Candish said "We've seen a significant amount of research in the past year highlighting the extent of the problem. A COVID-19 Frontline Healthcare Worker study found one in 10 healthcare workers surveyed reported thoughts of suicide or self-harm over a two-week period. Healthcare workers were also twice as likely as workers in other industries to experience psychological injury, according to a Design for Care survey on Psychological injury in the NSW Healthcare and social assistance industry." A report released earlier this year commissioned by the NSWNMA revealed 15 in every 100 nurses and midwives surveyed are suffering symptoms of post-traumatic stress at clinical levels, with overwork, exhaustion, and burnout identified as key contributors. "The data and research into mental health risks at workplaces is there, now we need action to address the issues," Candish said. Workplaces should be proactive and encourage reporting of workplace psychosocial hazards and risks, as ignoring them or accepting them as the norm is increasingly dangerous. "In addition to that, we need increased risk mitigation measures to address occupational violence, improved programs to reduce bullying, further training for staff and managers to support each other after traumatic events, and a review of the Employee Assistance Program," Candish continued. "The NSW government commitment to implement ratios in NSW public hospitals through their Safe Staffing policy will have a positive impact on nurses' and midwives' mental health, but more must be done."

**PARASITE OF THE WEEK:** Measures are being put in place to prevent employers from absconding with workers' super. The union movement has welcomed the federal government's announcement that superannuation is to be paid on the same day as wages. When super is paid quarterly rather than on the same day as wages, it is harder to track when it is not paid. Like wage theft, failure to pay superannuation is rife: millions of workers have up to \$5 billion a year in superannuation unpaid by employers, and this has serious implications for their retirement. Mandating for super to be paid with wages will not only make it easier to detect and recover unpaid super, it will also help prevent its non-payment – as quarterly payments will no longer obscure what's owed. This announcement comes as legislation is also before federal parliament to finally enshrine superannuation as a universal workplace right, ensuring every worker has the right to recover unpaid super.



Sydney Vigil

**STOP USA BLOCKADE ON CUBA**

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

**Also stop other blockades like Venezuela and Gaza.**

**4:15 pm Wednesday 17th May  
50 Miller Street North Sydney**

# Housing crisis pushes more into poverty

**The housing crisis is pushing more people into poverty, as new research shows that private renters and public housing tenants in NSW are increasingly falling below the poverty line. People experiencing poverty in NSW are most likely to live in the private rental market, where more than 413,000 tenants (20 per cent of all NSW renters) are now living below the poverty line, as inflation and cost of living pressures soar.**

With home ownership becoming more out of reach, the research notes that older people reaching retirement age but still in the private rental market are contributing to this increase. It's particularly an issue for older women with 53 per cent of older women in the private rental market now living below the poverty line, up from 34 per cent in 2016.

The research was commissioned by peak social services body NSW Council for Social Service (NCOSS), and conducted by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) at the University of Canberra. NATSEM analysed 2021 census data to reveal the dire state of poverty across NSW and how it has changed in the five years since the previous census.

The release of the full report is accompanied by interactive maps which show the poverty rates in each suburb and town across NSW in 2021 compared to 2016, broken down by demographic groups. NCOSS CEO Joanna Quilty said the report is a wake-up call for the state's leaders, urging the NSW government to respond quickly.

"These statistics are devastating, showing the grim reality of poverty reaching into every suburb and town in NSW – but with some communities really bearing the brunt," Quilty said. "What we are seeing is a housing crisis on multiple fronts – whether it's people renting in Sydney, paying off a mortgage in regional areas, living in public housing, having to move back in with family, or resorting to some other temporary arrangement to get by.

"And we know that the situation has only gotten worse since 2021, with relentless rate hikes and soaring cost of living pressures.

"People living in poverty are resourceful and do whatever they can to survive. But we know for some, this can mean forgoing medication, healthcare, or food to cover housing costs, or living in overcrowded or unsafe situations because there is no other option.

"And public housing is no longer the safety net for people in these dire circumstances. Even for the so-called 'lucky' few who secure public housing, it's not keeping them out of poverty."

Other concerning findings from the report include:

- Public housing tenants have the highest rate of poverty (60 per cent) of all demographic groups across NSW.
- There are pockets in Sydney – such as Zetland and Springwood – where 100 per cent of public housing tenants now live below the poverty line.
- And the issue is not confined to Sydney – 100 per cent of public housing tenants in Mullumbimby on the Far North Coast, and Lake Munmorah on the Central Coast are also living in poverty.

In regional NSW, there's also been a sharp increase in the number of people paying off a mortgage who are living below the poverty line – up by more than 80



Public Housing Towers, Waterloo, Sydney. Photo: J Bar – Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0)

per cent since 2016. This is a growing trend of people reliant on below-the-poverty-line income support payments (such as JobSeeker or Youth Allowance) or working part-time, moving into others' households (family, friends or other informal arrangements) because government support payments are inadequate.

"We are pleased the newly elected NSW government has recognised the urgent need to address the state's housing crisis," Quilty said. "To help, we have put forward a set of actionable and practical recommendations for the NSW government to consider, and we look forward to working with the government on these solutions."

NCOSS has called on the NSW Government to adopt a set of recommendations, including:

1. Bolster supply of social housing in NSW to 10 per cent of all housing stock, via a long-term plan with established targets and identified locations.
2. Make renting more affordable and secure, including increasing rental supply and capping rents, which build on commitments to remove 'no grounds' evictions and establish a Rental Commissioner.
3. NSW government should advocate to the federal government to lift the income support payments to above the poverty line, and increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 50 per cent to enable an acceptable standard of living for recipients.

"I'd like to thank NATSEM for its thorough work on this report, and I look forward to working with the NSW government on addressing these issues," Quilty said.

The report was based on 2021 census figures. That was before the ten successive interest rate rises which drove up mortgage repayments and rent to new heights.

The housing crisis is now significantly worse and so far the Albanese government has refused to act. Albanese keeps reminding us that he grew up in public housing, but has no plans to restore, let alone increase the stock of public housing which has sadly and tragically been depleted over past decades of neoliberalism.

His government's Housing Australia Future Fund will only scratch the surface with a plan for 30,000 social and affordable homes over five years, to address a shortage of 640,000. It is focused on social and affordable housing. These are not the same as public housing.

Social housing is government-subsidised short and long-term rental housing built by the private sector and owned by the private sector. Affordable housing is where rental is 20 per cent below the market rate. Today that is not affordable for social security recipients. ✪

## PEACE NOTES

Hannah Middleton

Brigadier General Anthony Mastalir, the head of US Space Forces Indo-Pacific, says it is critical to get the Deep-Space Advanced Radar Capability (DARC) system set up in Australia as soon as possible.

Speaking at the recent Sydney Dialogue organised by the notorious Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) Mastalir also claimed that Australia's Defence Space Command is "moving aggressively" to bring DARC here "on the continent."

DARC is designed to provide global monitoring of geosynchronous orbits in all kinds of weather and during daylight. The program calls for three transmit/receive sites, spaced at mid-latitudes around the world, to detect and track satellites.

Northrop Grumman won a \$341 million contract to begin building DARC, with the first location in Australia planned for 2025.

A Northrop Grumman spokesman said: "While current ground-based systems operate at night and can be impacted by weather conditions, DARC will provide an all-weather, 24/7 capability to monitor the highly dynamic and rapidly evolving geosynchronous orbital environment critical to national and global security."

Negotiations began in mid-2021 about where to locate the system in Australia and to finalise the required Technology Safeguards Agreement.

Back in December 2022 US Space Force Lieutenant-General Nina Armagno, while speaking at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, described this continent's "prime" geography as essential for future space operations and added that Australia already has the natural advantage of its southern-hemisphere geography and potential launch sites close to the equator.

Meanwhile Lockheed Martin won Australia's biggest space tender to build the country's first sovereign military satellites to combat threats in space – a new Australian defence satellite communication system known as Joint Project 9102.

Expected to cost \$4 billion, the new system will include new communications satellites, multiple ground stations across Australia, a communications management system and two new operations centres.

Dr Cassandra Steer, space law lecturer at the Australian National University's Institute of Space, pointed out that there are about 3,800 operational satellites in orbit, and an estimated 128 million pieces of debris [smaller than 1 centimetre].

Since its inception in January 2022, Australia's Defence Space Command has formed the ADF's first No.1 Space Surveillance Unit, which is based at RAAF Edinburgh, South Australia.

Defence Space Command was created to deliver the transformational change needed for an increasingly congested, contested and competitive space domain.

"Our mission is to prepare space power to secure Australia's interests in peace and war," Defence Space Commander Air Vice-Marshal Cath Roberts said.

"The space surveillance telescope in Exmouth was declared operational in September 2022," she said. "We also achieved Initial Operational Capability for the space segment and ground infrastructure for a protected military SATCOM capability."

With an increasingly congested, contested and competitive space domain and the increasing exploitation of civilian satellites for military purposes, we must remember that the 1967 Outer Space Treaty declared that the heavens are the province of all humanity, that there should be no private ownership and no military bases.

However, by 1990 the US had declared its aim of becoming "master of space".

In 2016 then President Obama allowed corporations to claim private ownership of asteroids. The US began planning nuclear bases on the moon and has been creating satellite launch sites all round the world to achieve a first strike capability targeted against China and Russia.

The 1967 treaty banned weapons of mass destruction while US weapons systems deployed into or planned for space are weapons of selective destruction.

A Prevention of an Arms Race in Space (PAROS) treaty would complement and reaffirm the importance of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, which aims to preserve space for peaceful uses by prohibiting the use of space weapons, the development of space-weapon technology, and technology related to missile defence. The treaty would prevent any nation from gaining a military advantage in outer space.

Under the draft treaty submitted by Russia in 2008, states would commit to refraining from placing objects carrying any type of weapon into orbit, installing weapons on celestial bodies, and threatening to use force against objects in outer space. State Parties would also agree to practice agreed confidence-building measures.

However, PAROS has regularly been blocked by the US and Israel.

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# Paying \$787.7 million won't stop Fox

Mark Gruenberg and John Wojcik

**Fox News's huge payment to Dominion Voting Systems to settle Dominion's libel suit over Fox's deliberate lies about the firm's voting machines in the 2020 election is an admission of guilt by Fox and "a ringing endorsement for truth and democracy," attorneys for Dominion say.**

The reality, however, is that the amount Fox has to shell out is far less than half the money it takes in during just one quarter of its yearly operations. To most corporate giants that percentage of earnings is nothing more than what they expect to shell out simply as the regular cost of doing business.

As a result of the settlement, the viewers of the giant "news" network will never get to see the admission by Fox that it was guilty of pushing on the public the Big Lie that the 2020 election was stolen from the Dear Leader, Donald Trump. Fox aired, on Tuesday afternoon, when most of its viewers were at their jobs or shopping for what they need at home, a several second statement that "some of the statements about Dominion voting machines were not accurate but that Fox remains committed to providing the highest standards" of journalism.

That was the extent of their admission agreed to in court. The many millions who get their news from Fox will never see anything else about the case. The settlement also guaranteed that people like Rupert Murdoch, the leader of Fox and that people like Tucker Carlson and other Fox hosts will never be seen admitting to millions that they lied to their admiring public.

All in all, Fox got off pretty easy and what has become the nation's national fascist broadcasting network will continue spewing what it calls "news," building support for the Republicans, a party determined to destroy democracy in America. Even if the network continues to pull away from Trump and toward possible alternatives like Florida's Republican Governor DeSantis, the Fox commitment to fascism will continue, if not actually grow.

## LARGEST AMOUNT EVER

The decision by Fox to settle for what is the largest amount ever in a libel suit in American history is, however, a victory for those who wanted proof that Fox lied about the election. "Lies have consequences. The truth does not know red or blue," Dominion lead attorney Justin Nelson said after the news broke before the libel trial began on 18th April.

Dominion had uncovered conclusive evidence Fox "knowingly and recklessly lied" about the election, analysts said even before the settlement. That's the legal standard private people or companies who sue must meet to prove libel.

But if Dominion's settlement is a win for truth, it is only temporary.

In that statement, Fox didn't apologise for its deliberate libels. It didn't produce an outright *mea culpa* about its wilful repetition and enhancement of former Oval Office occupant Trump's lies about "stop the steal" and "a stolen election." Fox certainly didn't admit the overwhelming weight of evidence that Trump lost. That's even though the Trumpite Fox sycophants, behind closed doors, agreed he did.

In short, Fox paid the cash as the cost of doing its business, and can go on lying.

The ultimate fate of both Fox and democracy will be up to the masses of voters who must band together in a grand coalition to



The FOX 24 News set. Photo: RenaudTR – commons.wikimedia.org (CC BY-SA 4.0).

bury Fox, Trump, his acolytes, "stop the steal," conspiracy theories, vote fraud claims and the flood of assorted and often dangerous right-wing rubbish once and for all.

That coalition will have to band together long before next year's election, and preferably now. While running again for the White House, Trump still lies about 2020 and he remains a threat to democracy. By all accounts, Fox is still parroting his trash, racism, xenophobia, and lies.

Notorious Fox hosts, led by Tucker Carlson, perpetrated Trump's big lies. All knew the truth – and in emails and memos produced before the trial, admitted it. So did Fox founder, chairman emeritus and ruling force, capitalist tycoon Rupert Murdoch.

They may not escape the consequences. Another Dominion attorney, Stephen Shackelford, said the firm will pursue other repeaters and embellishers of Trump's lies besides Fox. He did not say who. "We are not done yet," he told MSNBC.

But Shackelford, who had been preparing his opening statement for the trial, said "an apology is about accountability" and maintained the money was an apology.

Fox didn't view it that way. Its weaselly written statement from its Manhattan headquarters read in part:

"We acknowledge the court's rulings finding certain claims about Dominion to be false .... This settlement reflects Fox's continued commitment to the highest journalistic standards."

The rest of the media doubt that commitment, and reading it on the air caused CNN news host Jake Tapper to crack up laughing. Fox piously proclaimed its hope the settlement "allows the country to move forward from these issues," not acknowledging what the issues are, or the damage its lies did.

That wasn't the end of Fox's denial of the truth. Websites of two key Fox outlets, Fox News itself and of the *New York Post*, didn't post anything. While Dominion attorneys patiently answered questions about the settlement and called it a vindication and truth, Fox's attorneys scuttled away, refusing to talk to the reporters who pursued them.

## ALLOWS FOX TO GO ON LYING

The whole scenario lets Fox go right on lying, even if it loses yet another libel case to another voting machine manufacturer, Smartmatic, whose machines Fox also charged were rigged in 2020. Dominion sued Fox for \$1.6 billion; Smartmatic is asking for \$2.7 billion. In its most recent quarterly report, Fox reported it had \$4 billion in cash on hand, not counting its billions in assets.

One analyst, Angelo Carusone of Media Matters America, the watchdog group that calls out right-wing lies, says only two forces could stop Fox from continuing to lie, as it did even while pre-trial discovery uncovered its libels and their motives: Viewership and corporate greed.

One force is if shareholders outside the ruling Murdoch family rebel, saying "You're taking money out of our pockets" by losing libel cases over the election. The other is if cable viewers rebel against local systems including Fox in their packages – and the local systems in turn refuse to pay Fox's high fees.

"The stain this leaves on Fox can't be wiped out with money," Carusone said. "The network has been completely exposed as a partisan propaganda outlet willing to do anything for profit and power. Fox News lied about the 2020 election. They all knew it was a lie, right up to the Murdochs themselves," Carusone said of Fox's ruling family.

"What the Dominion trial offered was a keyhole view into the day-to-day industrial-scale deceit that takes place at Fox. It helped illustrate why the company is such a uniquely destructive force" aimed at democracy.

But in an indication of Fox's continuing clout and of its devotees' continued worship, Carusone in an interview with MSNBC admitted Fox's cable clicks rose after the settlement. Its hard-right Trumpite devotees flocked to Fox after it put its own spin on the deal. That increase will let Fox raise rates it charges to cable carriers to carry its "news" and incendiary and lying pundits.

The actual trial was set to start at 1:30

pm in state court in Wilmington, Delaware. Just after entering the courtroom, Fox's attorneys, Judge Eric Davis and Dominion's attorneys huddled behind closed doors before Judge Davis emerged at 4pm to pre-empt opening arguments in the case by announcing the deal.

Had the trial commenced, testimony and evidence would have been laid before the entire country – including the Fox audience – about how Fox deliberately lied in pushing Trump's lies of vote fraud, "stop the steal," and rigged Dominion voting machines.

In reality, the evidence shows Trump was trying to steal electoral votes and the presidency. The House Select Committee investigating the 6th January 2021, Trumpite invasion, insurrection, and attempted coup d'état at the US Capitol proved that, through witnesses and video.

That attempted Trump steal was particularly obvious in Georgia, but he also tried in Arizona, Wisconsin, Nevada and Pennsylvania, all swing states. Not only did Trump's aides and most of his staffers know it, so did Carlson and the other Fox TV personalities masquerading as "fair and balanced" news people.

On election night and afterwards, Fox reporters who told the truth on the air were sidelined. The Fox elections analyst who called Arizona for Democratic nominee Joe Biden on Election Night was fired. Fox's Arizona call for Biden, which was correct, enraged Trump. It was the first indication to him and his inside-the-campaign troops that he could lose the Oval Office. Fox ratings dropped.

Pre-trial news reports indicated Fox's attorneys in the Delaware court intended to tie the firm up in a First Amendment freedom-of-the-press anti-libel defence, claiming they were just reporting the news made by a newsmaker – Trump – even if that newsmaker lied. Had they succeeded, Dominion would have failed. But in pre-trial rulings, Judge Davis restricted, if not denied, that defence.

People's World ✪

# The stain this leaves on Fox can't be wiped out with money.

# 150 young US organisers travel to Cuba, defy the blockade

Zoe Alexandra

**Over 150 young leaders from the US are in Cuba to participate in a solidarity brigade organised by the International Peoples' Assembly. They are meeting with different sectors of Cuban society to learn about the impact of the US blockade and experiences in building socialism.**

The 10-day brigade is organised by the International Peoples' Assembly. During the brigade, the young leaders will also share experiences and challenges that they face as organisers against capitalism, racism, and oppression in the US.

The brigade participants hail from organisations such as Black Lives Matter Grassroots, Black Men Build, Black Youth Project 100, the Palestinian Youth Movement, CODEPINK, Unión de Vecinos, the Party for Socialism and Liberation, the People's Forum, and others.

Manolo De Los Santos, co-executive director of The People's Forum and an organiser of the delegation, stated during the opening activities, "We have comrades here from all over the world who in many ways are prisoners of the US empire and are subject to the violence of the US Empire."

De Los Santos added, "This system of violence puts itself in all its force, with all its resources, with all its strength, against anyone who says otherwise. Any people who dare to organize their societies on their own terms, in defence of their own resources, in defence of the planet, in defence of life [face] the wrath of the US Empire. That is why we are here today."

During the first session of the day, brigade participants heard from the president of

Casa de las Américas and former Minister of Culture Abel Prieto, and Zuleica Romay, the director of the department of Afro-American studies at Casa de las Américas. Prieto and Romay reflected on how the Cuban revolution has grappled with cultural transformation in the eradication of oppression as well as the current conditions in Cuba today with the intensified blockade. They also answered questions about Cuba's democratic process, the experience of Black people in the country, and pressing challenges facing Cuba today.

## CULTURE IN TRANSFORMATION

Prieto, one of the country's key intellectuals, explained that one of the strongest tools of the US empire used in their psychological warfare today is the weaponisation of history. He said that there is a significant attempt to idealise and praise pre-revolutionary Cuba. "The idea is that people say ok, then why did we have a revolution, if that all was so great?" he explained. "But of course, in this image of the idealised Havana, you couldn't see the children without schools, hospitals, homeless, and living in shantytowns."

This is why, Prieto told the brigade participants, "it is necessary to engage in permanent education about the history of the revolutionary process. It is important that our youth understand where we came from, what we did, everything that it cost us in terms of sacrifice, blood, and lives."

Romay emphasized the need for this education to also address existing oppressive hierarchies. She explained that following the initial triumph of the revolution in 1959, "it was thought, naively, that if we were able to break the infrastructure that

sustained capitalism, the rest of the things would change over time." However, she added, "prejudices are extremely resistant, even to structural changes ... it looks for a way to maintain inequality and so that the person who is considered inferior stays in their place."

This became apparent, she highlighted, during the economic crisis of the 1990s because it is when social inequality becomes normal, "and the people and groups of people that are more relegated socially are in that situation because they deserve it and they haven't put in effort. And by the end of the 90s there were people who dared to say this publicly." What did Cuba do in this moment? It intensified its struggle against social prejudices: "the prejudices motivated by skin colour, territorial origin, sexual orientation, etc." She explained that this is key because "it is society that trains us, it is the society that represses us, and it is society that is violent towards us. And the society must get ready in many ways to struggle against this. We are in this struggle and we are motivated. We are not the least bit tired. A revolution is looking around you and ... we have to start again with more enthusiasm."

## HUMAN RIGHTS

During the afternoon session, the brigade met María Ofelia Rodríguez, coordinator of the Network of Lesbian and Bisexual Women, Maritza López, a popular educator of the Black Neighborhood Network, and Yamila Gómez Ferrer, a lawyer who helped draft and build the historic Family Code. The women talked about how they have organized to defend the dignity and human rights of all Cubans.

Rodríguez saluted the historic victory of



Photo: Alberto Lama Photography – flickr.com (CC BY-ND 2.0)

the Family Code and added that "the struggle is not over, because it is not just about a law or legislation but it is in the hearts and minds of the people."

López of the Black Neighborhood Network underscored the importance of popular education in the struggle against racism, "it has given us not only a methodology but a conception of life ... and has helped us make people understand and change their perspectives."

Ferrer reflected on the profoundly democratic process of building the Family Code, which involved tens of thousands of meetings and consultations with communities and institutions. She added, "The minds of people don't change one day to the next but we have a code that gives us a legal framework to guarantee people's rights."

Monthly Review April 26, 2023

## Israeli Police Forces raids Communist Party's headquarters in Nazareth

Communist Party of Israel (CPI): This was an outrageous provocation and intimidation.

**A large force of Israeli Police and its gendarmerie, the "Israel Border Police," attacked the headquarters of the Communist Party, demanding to take down the Palestinian flag.**

Comrades of Nazareth confronted the police forces and refused them access to the building. The Police did not possess any warrant, and called for backup, climbed walls, removed the Palestinian flag and the red flags, and confiscated them, all while arresting the secretary of the party in Nazareth.

After the intervention of

the Party leadership, the Police returned all flags to the headquarters, where they were flown again over the CPI headquarters in Nazareth.

The Communist Party reiterates that this is a provocative authoritarian assault, the aim of which is to further suppress the political freedoms and to attack the solid

political opposition to this government's crimes and policies.

CPI cadres, who participated yesterday in the March of Return, say that this assault will not go unnoticed, and the response will be in mass mobilisation towards the 1st of May march in Nazareth on Saturday.

Rise against the Occupation,

against Fascism, against class oppression, against exploitation!

We fight united for Peace and Socialism!

In solidarity,

**International Relations Committee. Communist Party of Israel 27th April 2023**

## US and NATO accounted for over half of global military expenditure in 2022

**The world's total military expenditure surpassed \$2.24 trillion in 2022, with Europe recording its steepest rise in the last three decades, according to the annual military expenditure report of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). The report was published on 24th April.**

The annual report notes that global military expenditure rose by 3.7 per cent last year. 2022 was the eighth consecutive year of increasing global defence spending.

The US remains by far the largest global spender with a military expenditure of over \$877 billion in 2022 – three times more than the second largest spender, China,

which spent \$292 billion. \$19.9 billion of the US military expenditure was military aid to Ukraine.

The US and its NATO allies have been the primary reason for the rising military expenditure and weaponisation in the world.

The US alone accounts for 39 per cent of the world's total military expenditure. This is more than the total military expenditure of the rest of the top 10 military spenders, including China, Russia, and India. According to SIPRI, the 31 NATO members together spent over \$1.23 trillion – more than half of the world's total military expenditure in 2022.

## App delivery workers in India strike against increasing exploitation

**A new pay scheme introduced by Blinkit, a quick-delivery grocery unit under one of India's largest food delivery platforms, Zomato, has sparked protests by delivery workers across several cities in the country.**

Discussions with the labor department failed to address the key issue of pay revision.

Protests by Blinkit "delivery partners" were reported in Kolkata, Hyderabad, Pune, and the national capital New Delhi. In videos shared via social media, protestors were seen burning effigies of the quick-commerce platform and holding placards against it. They are demanding that the new pay structure, which will reportedly reduce their current incomes upon implementation, be immediately rescinded.

Zomato bought Blinkit in 2022 for \$568 million.

The new payout introduced on 10th April has dropped per delivery rate from Rs 25 (\$0.30) to Rs 15 (\$0.18). The previous structure had a defined base payment with incentives according to the distance traveled by the partner to deliver the order. In the new payout system, however, there is no base payment. The partner will only be paid per kilometre of travel to deliver the orders, for which the rate ranges between Rs 9 (\$0.11) and Rs 12 (\$0.15), which can increase to Rs 15 (\$0.18) with an additional bonus.

The workers of the aggregator app, who are called "delivery partners" or "delivery executives" by the company, and angry about the loss of their basic income at a time when inflation is soaring at 5.66 per cent.

Globetrotter

# Less than best from Best&Less

**Clothing brand Best&Less have refused to sign the International Accord, an industry standard workplace safety mechanism covering garment workers in Bangladesh.**

This is despite the the recent 10-year anniversary of the deadliest catastrophe in the history of the clothing industry – the Rana Plaza building collapse in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The disaster on 24th April 2013 took the lives of 1132 garment workers and injured 2500 more, mostly women.

The Accord has been signed by many other Australian clothing brands including Just Jeans, Kmart, Big W and in recent months “The Iconic” and Mosaic Brands – owner of Katies, Rivers and Millers.

The International Accord, an acclaimed safety agreement created in response to the Rana Plaza disaster, ensures safe workplaces for Bangladeshi garment workers.

Over the last 10 years, the Accord has conducted nearly 56,000 inspections across 2400 garment factories in Bangladesh and identified 170,000 health and safety issues with 91 per cent of those successfully remediated. The inspections the Accord undertakes, and subsequent safety repairs, are funded by brands which have signed up to it.

Best&Less have 20 factories in Bangladesh which makes up 25 per cent of their global sourcing.

Tamazer Ahmed, Women’s Rights Manager at ActionAid Bangladesh, who supports garment workers to claim their labour rights, says it’s very disappointing that Best&Less have not signed the Accord.

“It is very disappointing Best&Less have failed to put the safety of women garment workers ahead of company profit. Brands like Best&Less signing on to the International Accord is a vital step towards ensuring another Rana Plaza never happens,” she said.

“The ready-made garment sector employs over two and a half million women and represents 80 per cent of Bangladesh’s exports yet these workers have historically worked incredibly long hours for little pay in often dangerous conditions.”

“While there have been major changes in fire safety and building safety since the Rana Plaza collapse, and some progress in raising the minimum wage and getting baseline maternity leave, we can’t make further progress unless Australian brands like Best&Less get on board.”

Michelle Higelin, ActionAid’s Australian Executive Director, says Best&Less needs to put the safety of women garment workers before profit.

“Best&Less need to do the right thing and at the very least ensure the women making their products in Bangladesh have the most basic right to return home safely from work each day,” says Michelle Higelin.

“Best&Less have an ethical and corporate responsibility to financially contribute to safety improvements across factories in their supply chain. By refusing to sign the Accord, Best&Less are out of step with the rest of the industry.”

New research from ActionAid has revealed the continuing challenges faced by survivors of the collapsed Rana Plaza building in Dhaka on 24th April 2013. The study involving 200 survivors who were injured in the tragedy found:

- More than half (54.5 per cent) of survivors are currently unemployed, with their physical health being the key reason for why they aren’t in paid work.
- More than one-third of survivors (36.8 per cent) said they struggle with back pain, while a quarter (24.6 per cent) said they suffered from headaches.
- Out of the 29 per cent who said they were still traumatised from the event,



Therapeutic theatre counselling is one of the rehabilitation approaches being used for the survivors of the Rana Plaza building collapse.

Photo: ILO/Sarah-Jane Saltmarsh – flickr.com (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

more than half said they lived in fear because of their experience of building collapse.

Mousumi was working on the sixth floor of the Rana Plaza building on the day of the collapse and was badly injured after being trapped under the rubble.

“The horrible memories of those three hours under the rubble still haunt me. I feel the same fear the moment I enter or stand

under a building. I constantly wonder if I will ever again have the courage to go to a building for work.”

On the 10th anniversary of the Rana Plaza building collapse, ActionAid is calling on Best&Less to join other Australian brands and sign the Accord to put the safety of workers before company profits. ✪

## President Lula demarcates six Indigenous territories

**No new Indigenous reserves were created during the administration of former President Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022).**

On 28th April, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva signed the demarcation of the first six Indigenous territories since 2018.

“Today we demarcated six Indigenous territories, an important step. Do not stop organizing and demanding. The government exists to serve the interests of the people,” Lula said on social networks.

The President made the announcement on the occasion of the closing of the 19th edition of the “Terra Livre” (free land) camp, an annual meeting that gathered thousands of Indigenous people from all over the country this week.

The six new demarcations approved (two located in the Amazon) are: TI Arara do Rio Amônia, TI Kariri-Xocó, TI Rio dos Índios, TI Tremembé da Barra do Mundaú, TI Uneiuxi and TI Avá-Canoeiro.

“I am sure that the indigenous people will be proud of minister Sonia Guajajara and Joenia Wapichana at Funai.

“The struggle for the demarcation of

indigenous peoples is a struggle for respect, rights and protection of our nature and our country. Let’s go ahead,” Lula said.

The leftist president said that this is a process that takes time, and “we are going to have to work hard so that we can demarcate as many indigenous lands as possible.”

According to Lula, the maximum amount of demarcated lands is necessary “if we want to reach 2030 with zero deforestation in the Amazon, we are going to need you as protectors of the forests.”

Lula decreed the resumption of the National Council of Indigenous Policy (CNPI) and the constitution of the Management Committee of the National Policy of Territorial and Environmental Management of Indigenous Lands (Pngati).

In addition, more than 2 464 000 dollars was given to the National Foundation for Indigenous Peoples (Funai) to recover the productive capacity of the Yanomami Indigenous communities.

The latest census (2010) indicates that 800,000 Indigenous people live in Brazil. Most of them live in reserves that occupy 13.75 per cent of the national territory.

TeleSUR 28th April ✪

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Hunter Workers  
South Coast Labour Council

April 29, 2023

Mr. Jesus Crispin C. Remulla  
Secretary, Department of Justice of the Philippines  
Email: communications@doj.gov.ph/osecmig@gmail.com

### Strongest protest at the murder of union organiser Alex Dolorosa

Dear Secretary Remulla,

The Philippines Australia Union Link has been working since 1984 to strengthen solidarity between Australian and Filipino trade unions and workers.

We strongly condemn the murder of union organiser and worker advocate Mr Alex Dolorosa at Bacolod City, Negros Occidental, on or about Sunday night April 23, 2023. His body was found with at least 15 stab wounds on April 24. Four days before his death, Mr Dolorosa had been helping out colleagues with four labor cases in Bacolod City.

While we note the police investigation is looking at a robbery motive, we firmly believe that the murder of Mr Dolorosa is the work of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) and underlines the defiance by our government of its commitments to labor rights, especially the commitment to the ILO High Level Tripartite Mission to the Philippines in January this year to cease defining trade unionism as terrorism or a national security threat.

Alex Dolorosa, aged 38 and an open LGBTQ+ person, joined the Business Process Outsourcing Industry Employees Network (BIEN) in 2016, as a volunteer. He since became a full-time organizer and paralegal officer for BIEN. According to BIEN, Dolorosa was instrumental in its chapter-building in Negros Occidental. Two of BIEN’s national leaders are also facing trumped-up charges meant to silence them, and BIEN members are red-tagged.

BIEN reports that Dolorosa had experienced state surveillance and harassment on January 25, 2021; January 4, 2022; and May 4, 2022. The first harassment incident was at the office of Bayan Muna party-list in Bacolod City, while the second and third incidents were at the local Gabriela office. During one of the Gabriela incidents, Dolorosa took a video of a surveillance team’s vehicle, causing the driver to speed off. Dolorosa had also reported seeing two men surveilling his residence in Bata Subdivision, causing him to relocate.

We call on your government to end the impunity for political killings and harassment, to properly investigate the role of state security forces in this murder, and to abolish the NTF-ELCAC.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Murphy  
Secretary

Cc: UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Killings, Commission on Human Rights, Australian Foreign Minister, Shadow Foreign Minister, Greens Foreign Affairs Spokesperson, Andrew Wilkie MHR, UN Information Office, BIEN, Karapatan, CTUHR, KMU.



# CEOs cash in as Oxfam calls for tax reform



Photo: Thank You – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

**Globally, the top-paid CEOs across four countries enjoyed a 9 per cent pay rise last year, while workers' wages fell 3.19 per cent during the same period. The global analysis also revealed:**

- Workers on average worked six days "for free" last year because their wages lagged behind inflation.
- Women and girls are putting in 4.6 trillion hours of unpaid care work every year.
- Shareholders saw record payouts of USD\$1.56 trillion in 2022, a 10 per cent real-term increase compared to 2021.

The figures, adjusted for inflation, are based on the latest data from the International Labor Organization (ILO) and government statistics agencies.

One billion workers in 50 countries took an average pay cut of USD\$685 in 2022, a collective loss of \$746 billion in real wages, compared to if wages had kept up with inflation.

Women and girls are putting in at least 380 billion hours of unpaid care work every month. Women workers often have to work reduced paid hours or drop out of the workforce altogether because of their unpaid care workload. They also continue to face gender-based discrimination, harassment, and less pay for work of equal value as men.

"While corporate bosses are telling us we need to keep wages down, they're giving themselves and their shareholders massive payouts. Most people are working longer for less and can't keep up with the cost of living. Years of austerity and attacks on trade unions have widened the gap between the richest and the rest of us. On a day meant to celebrate the working class, this glaring inequality is both shocking and sadly unsurprising," said Oxfam International's interim Executive Director Amitabh Behar.

"The only rise workers have seen is that of unpaid care work, with women shouldering the responsibility," Mr Behar said. "This incredibly hard and valuable work is done for free at home and in the community."

Big business chiefs however are thriving. Oxfam's analysis of corporate and survey data for 2022 found that:

- 150 of the top-paid executives in India received \$1 million on average last year, a real-term pay rise of 2 per cent since 2021. A single Indian executive makes in just four hours more than an average worker earns in a year.
- 100 of the highest-paid CEOs in the US made \$24 million on average in 2022, a real-term pay hike of 15 per cent from the previous year. The average worker in the US would have to work for 413 years to match what a top-paid CEO makes in 12 months. 50 per cent of women of colour in the US make less than \$15 an hour.

The UK's 100 best-paid CEOs were paid \$5 million on average in 2022, and received a 4.4 per cent real-term pay hike. They earn 140 times more than the average worker in the UK.

Exorbitant shareholder payouts benefited the richest in society, exacerbating already high levels of inequality. In the US, for example, the richest 1 per cent hold 54 per cent of shares held by US households.

"Workers are tired of being treated like sacrificial lambs every time a crisis hits. Neoliberal logic blames inflation on everyone except profiteering corporations. Governments should stop relying only on interest rate hikes and austerity that we know hurts ordinary people, particularly those living in poverty. Instead, they should introduce windfall taxes on excessive corporate profits. They must also ensure minimum wages keep up with inflation, and that everyone has the right to unionise, strike and bargain collectively," said Mr Behar.

Australia is no exception to these trends; workers here took a 4.6 per cent real term pay cut in 2022, and Oxfam has joined a chorus of voices calling for the scrapping of the stage three tax cuts and a windfall tax on corporations to tackle growing inequality, the root cause of poverty in Australia and globally. ✪

## Statement of the WPC about the threats of the US administration against the DPR of Korea

**The World Peace Council (WPC) expresses its strong condemnation of the recent statement of US President Biden in which he openly threatens the DPR of Korea to end its existence.**

The escalation of threats and sanctions comes along with military drills of the USA with its allies from the region around the Korean Peninsula, with sanctions and coercive, unilateral illegal actions against the sovereignty of the DPRK and its people.

The USA has never given up its strategy to deploy tens of thousands of troops in South Korea, a Missile Defense Shield (THAAD) and heavy weaponry which, together with the 7th US Fleet in the Pacific Ocean, constitute the main threat to peace and security in the region. The imperialist plans of the US and its allies with the "Quadrilateral Cooperation" and the "AUKUS" are proof for the offensive plans towards the region.

The World Peace Council defends the right of every country

to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity and supports the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula along with our firm position for the abolition of all nuclear weapons worldwide.

**The Secretariat of the WPC  
28th April 2023  
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Conseil Mondial De La Paix  
10 Othonos Street  
10557 Athens Greece  
www.wpc-in.org  
wpc@otenet.gr ✪**



## Global Briefs

**SUDAN:** Doctors Central Committee has reported that the number of people killed in clashes between the armed forces and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) rose to 425. 2091 people have been injured and 16 hospitals bombed since the start of the conflict. The continuing crisis has caused a humanitarian disaster in the country with thousands of people desperately trying to escape into neighbouring countries. The capital's residents have limited access to basic necessities and have to endure fighters who loot and destroy homes, shops, open-air markets and businesses. Over 75,000 people were internally displaced in the first week of the fighting. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that the violence could spread to other countries in the region "lighting a fuse that could detonate across borders, causing immense suffering for years, and setting development back for decades."

**FRANCE:** May Day demonstrations were the largest in the last 30-40 years, with an estimated 2.3 million people taking part. People continue to protest against the pension reform despite the Constitutional Council approving the key article of the pension reform bill which will raise the age of retirement from 62 to 64 years by 2030. Around 12,000 law enforcement officers were deployed across France, with 5000 officers in Paris alone.

**LATIN AMERICA:** May Day was widely celebrated in Latin American countries.

**ARGENTINA:** Social and trade union organisations gathered to defend workers' rights and reject International Monetary Fund (IMF) interference in domestic economic policies.

**BRAZIL:** The Workers Central Union (CUT) and other organisations came out in support of President Lula da Silva. The president announced an increase in the minimum wage and a bill will be sent to Congress so that it is adjusted to the annual inflation rate.

**BOLIVIA:** President Luis Arce led the Great March convened by the Bolivian Workers' Central (COB) to commemorate International Workers' Day.

**CHILE:** The Workers' Unitary Central (CUT) and other social organisations held a massive rally in Santiago city. Chileans demanded tax reform to improve the wealth distribution, an increase in pensions for retirees, more jobs for young people, and the implementation of Convention 190 against workplace violence and harassment.

**ECUADOR:** The Unitary Front of Workers (FUT) and social organisations took part in the traditional Labour Day march and demanded the resignation of Guillermo Lasso, a right-wing president who has failed to solve the main problems that people face.

**VENEZUELA:** The United Socialist Party (PSUV), labour unions and social organisations called on citizens to gather and march in support of Nicolas Maduro.

PERU, URUGUAY, and PARAGUAY celebrated International Workers' Day as well.

**MEXICO:** Mexico's Senate passed reforms to mining laws, including a landmark rule that mining companies must pay a percentage of profits to local communities. The legislation also reduced the maximum length of mining concessions from 50 to 30 years. According to new laws, if no work was done on concessions for two years, the concessions can be cancelled. Authorities claim that foreign companies, usually small ones, often do exploratory work to estimate the presence of minerals, and then sit on the land waiting for bigger companies to bid. The Canadian Ministry of Commerce protested against the legislation, saying that it will affect Canadian companies.

*Have your say!  
Write a letter to the Editor*

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

# “Carnation Revolution”

2023 is the 49th anniversary of the “Carnation Revolution” also known as the 25th April, which overthrew the authoritarian Estado Novo regime on 25th April 1974 in Lisbon, producing major changes in Portugal and its overseas colonies. The *Guardian* is proud to present excerpts from a speech by Paulo Raimundo, General Secretary of the Portuguese Communist Party on this occasion.

**We celebrate this liberating act that put an end to the long fascist night of 48 years of deprivation illiteracy, prisons, torture, death, colonialism, war.**

A fascist regime, aligned with fascism at the international level, a regime to which imperialism always gave a helping hand, and it was through this hand that Portugal became a founding member of NATO.

Today, just like yesterday, it is essential to know and make known what fascism was, at a time when there are many who try to erase, adulterate or sweeten it, rewriting

history brazenly and without any shame.

April was and is a Revolution. It was not just any evolution or transition, as some would have you believe.

April was a military uprising followed by a popular uprising, in a process that revolutionised social and economic structures.

A collective process, where the working class, the workers, the popular masses and the progressive military, united in the People-Armed Forces Movement alliance, took into their hands the implementation of profound economic, social, political and cultural changes.

The 25th April enshrined freedoms, concrete fundamental rights in the life of the people.

Rights of opinion, demonstration and creation of political parties, broad social and labour rights, free trade union organisation, and the right to strike.

The increase in wages and the achievement of the National Minimum Wage, increase and extension of retirement and disability pensions, the prohibition of unfair dismissals, the extension of vacation time.

April is access to healthcare and the creation of the general and free National Health Service, expansion and improvement of Social Security, the right to education and Democratic Local Government.

April enshrined in law equality between men and women, but also the improvement of their living and working conditions, in the field of wages, working time, maternity leave.

It was with the Revolution that thousands of jobs were created, that cultural activities were developed, that decreased emigration.

It was the April Revolution that ended the colonial war, and which recognised the right to self-determination and independence of the peoples of the former colonies.

The 25th April belongs to the people, to this people, to the progressive military, to the democrats who launched forward all advances and achievements, with their hands, in the streets and in companies.

There was no change, advance and progress, from the simplest to the deepest, that was not helped by this powerful and invincible initiative of the popular masses.

The 25th of April belongs to its builders and such is its strength and



Photo: Jeanne Menjoulet – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0)

the value of its project, the depth of its achievements, that decades of counter-revolution and right-wing policies have not yet been able to, nor will be able to destroy.

This right-wing policy that is put at the service of economic groups, their many billions of profits, their 20 million euros of profit per day in 2022, while at the same time the population sees the end of the month increasingly distant, buys less and less food but pays more and more, adds increasing difficulties in meeting housing costs.

This is not April. April is the fair distribution of wealth.

The right-wing policy that disinvests and chokes public services. A situation supported only by the valiant dedication to the public cause of its professionals, in the National Health Service, in Public Schools, in Social Security, and in many other services.

But April is the opposite of this disinvestment.

April is improvement of living conditions, April is living with dignity.

And because April was and is what it is, it is because there were many May Days of struggle, let's make the next May Day a great day of struggle, a great demonstration of the strength of the workers, of their struggle, a great moment of demand to increase wages, rights, a moment of combat against exploitation, and the increase in the cost of living.

Here we are to resist the counter-revolutionary process and fight for a break with right-wing policies and for a patriotic and left-wing alternative, for an Advanced Democracy with April Values in the future of Portugal, for socialism.

We are firmly convinced that the noble and advanced project of April and its values and achievements are affirmed as an objective necessity in the materialisation of a fraternal and progressive Portugal!

LONG LIVE THE 25th OF APRIL! ✪

## Harry Belafonte: Civil Rights and the United Fruit Company

Graham Holton

**Harry Belafonte (Harold George Bellanfanti Jr.) died on 25th March, aged 96. He is remembered not only as a Black singer and actor, but also as an important civil rights activist in the segregated South. He became the first recording artist to sell more than one million copies of an album in a year, outselling Elvis Presley.**

Belafonte appeared in numerous movies including, *Carmen Jones* (1954), *Island in the Sun* (1957) and *Odds Against Tomorrow* (1959). He later won a Tony award for his work on Broadway and was the first Jamaican American to win an Emmy. He performed at President John F Kennedy's inauguration gala.

Belafonte joined the American Negro Theater in Harlem, where he met Paul Robeson. Both the FBI and the CIA kept files on him.

Nearly seventy years ago, the first Freedom Riders journeyed through the South to challenge the segregation of buses, bus terminals, lunch counters, toilets, drinking fountains, hotels and entertainment areas. The activists were confronted by violent police and their dogs, while being filmed by the international press. They were attacked by mobs of ultraconservative Whites and their homes and Black churches bombed.

What was little known by white audiences was that the “King of Calypso” was one of Martin Luther King Jr's confidants. Belafonte's role as a financial recruiter began in 1956, on the first anniversary of the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott. He financially supported

the Southern Christian Leadership Conference during the Birmingham Campaign, supporting the Freedom Rides with its costly political campaigns that required bail money, travel costs, and hospital bills. He established close relationships with Sam Cooke who wrote the inspirational anthem *A Change Is Gonna Come*, and Nina Simone, who recorded *Mississippi Goddam*. He later became friendly with the Kennedy family after the 1960 election, when John F Kennedy became President.

After King's assassination in 1968, Belafonte served as an executor of King's estate and chaired the Martin Luther King, Jr Memorial Fund. He continued to support national and international civil rights and humanitarian issues up to his death.

Belafonte was a strong supporter of the Cuban revolution, and received a Medal of Friendship from the Cuban state for his decades of Cuba-US relations.

Recorded in 1956, *Day-O (The Banana Boat Song)* was Belafonte's biggest hit, reaching number five on the Billboard charts in the US in 1957. *Day-O* is a call and response work song, telling of the dock workers working the night shift loading bananas onto ships. The song describes the dreadful conditions faced everyday by the banana industry workers, working long hours with little pay. It was sung by Jamaican dockworkers, who typically worked at night to avoid the heat of the sun. When daylight arrived, their boss, the “tallyman” would tally the bananas before their shift ended.

*Day-O* is a protest song that inspired workers in their fight against the US corporation, the

United Fruit Company, which in 1954 had requested the US government topple the Juan Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán government in Guatemala. Che Guevara was in the capital, Guatemala City, at the time and left for Mexico where he joined Fidel Castro.

United Fruit dominated the banana industry throughout the Caribbean and Central America. By 1912, that company owned 350,000 hectares of banana producing lands in Jamaica, Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, and Colombia. The company inspired the term “banana republic,” due to its political interventionist policies and the control of the business sectors throughout the Caribbean basin.

In November 1928, 25,000 workers on the banana plantations in Ciénaga, Colombia began a strike against the United Fruit Company. On 6th December it was violently put down with 3,000 workers killed. The massacre inspired Gabriel Garcia Marquez's 1967 masterpiece *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and led to left-wing activity throughout Latin America.

Yale professor in African-American studies, Daphne Brooks, interviewed Belafonte in 2017. She asked what he meant by “the camaraderie of poverty?” He replied, “When one who has experience poverty has to deal with the information of poverty, it's often spoken about in terms of its cruelty and pain, as it should. But camaraderie comes out of poverty. There's a struggle people in poverty go through that you don't experience in any other class construct. We understand each other's plight.” ✪

# Guatemala's Indigenous communities take on the mining TNCs

Graham Holton

**Elon Musk, the CEO of Tesla, announced in 2020, that the production of Tesla electric car batteries required an exponential need for nickel, cobalt, lithium, gold and copper. Nickel is a strategic mineral required in military manufactures such as stainless steel, electrotypes, spark plugs, a catalyst in the hardening of oil and lubricants, and pharmaceuticals. Gold is used in electrical conductors. It is the importance of these minerals that has given mining transnational corporations (TNCs) a controlling hand in negotiations with governments in Developing Countries and the implementation of their mining laws.**

On 28th October 2021, Cultural Survival and 140 other environmental organisations, issued a joint statement in advance of the

climate negotiations at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)'s Conference of Parties (COP 26) in Glasgow, Scotland. The "Declaration on Mining and the Energy Transition" expressed the grave concern that the mining of minerals is having a devastating impact on Indigenous communities, workers and ecosystems around the world. "Our transition to renewable energy sources must be just and equitable and accompanied by a simultaneous transformation away from irresponsible mining." The dangerous waste from the mines has led to deaths and the catastrophic contamination of ecosystems and devastated Indigenous communities.

The increase in demand has created an upsurge in mineral exploration in Central America, especially Guatemala.

The Canadian-owned Bluestone Resources of the Lundin Group acquired Cerro Blanco in 2017, a

decade after the Guatemalan government issued an environmental permit and exploitation license for the project. Bluestone initially planned Cerro Blanco as an underground mine, but changed it to an open cut mine, requiring a new environmental permit. The US\$572 million project is one of the largest gold projects in Central America, expected to produce 73.7 million grams of gold over the 14-year life of the mine. The spot price of gold on the international markets in 2022 was US\$57.7 million per tonne. This mine has a number of major health and environmental issues. The large water consumption, tailings, acid drainage and the arsenic used in the open-cut mine's extraction process, will cause toxic leaching and the contamination of the water supply used for drinking, agriculture, farming, and cattle rearing by local communities.

On 18th September 2022, the residents of the nearby town of

Asunción Mita voted in a referendum to stop the mine proceeding. Nearly 28 per cent of the 30,000 registered voters took part, with 88 per cent of those voting being against the mine. The Asunción Mita Avanza Pro-Mining Industry Association, was in favour of the mine, as it would create employment for 500 employees and contractors.

Bluestone Resources and the military-backed regime rejected the referendum as illegal and illegitimate. Bluestone argued anti-mining groups formed a biased commission to organise the referendum. The indigenous groups' fight continues. ✪

## Review

### Aunty Donna's Coffee Cafe

FJK

**I want to like it. I like almost everything they do. I was really looking forward to it. I like a bit of it I'm glad they tried something different. But it's not their best stuff. The last thing they did was an absolute classic. Try that one first.**

This sounds like I'm talking about a band's expectation-busting-but-troubled second album doesn't it? In fact, I'm talking about the Aunty Donna comedy group's latest series *Aunty Donna's Coffee Cafe* now on ABC free-to-air and iView.

For anyone who doesn't know, Aunty Donna are a comedy trio from country Victoria who moved from live comedy through a series of YouTube videos, to their crowning glory so far, the 2021 Netflix series *Aunty Donna's Big Old House of Fun*. Their humour has been described as surreal, and "post-modern" – meaning they make fun of the process of making a comedy show. They use a lot of music, and make very good use of CGI.

Anyone who has ever had a bad time with a Real Estate agent should search for "Aunty Donna Real Estate agent" on YouTube. I'm sure it's a favourite with our comrades at RAHU (the Renters and Housing Union).

*Big Old House of Fun*, a six episode special in which the three Aunty Donna members have surreal and self-referential fun in a sharehouse, is the absolute classic. The trio also have the "locals made good" appeal, coming from rural Victoria to doing a show with Netflix, with guest stars such as *The Office's* Ed Helms (playing neurotic producer "Egg Helms") and *Flight of the Conchords* and *Bob's Burgers* star Kristen Schaal (playing an annoying talking dishwasher).

By the time *Big Old House of Fun* had been enjoyed

even by out-of-it types like me, expectations were high. What would they do next? More of the same would have been fine, but admirably they've decided to stretch themselves.

So we find them in an 8 part ABC series set in a Melbourne coffee shop trying to be pretentious enough to stand out in a city full of pretentious coffee shops (and, lets' be fair, very nice coffee). It's a sit-com! No, it's a surrealistic sketch show! It's both! It's neither!

Speaking as someone who lives here, I think both Melbourne and Melbourne coffee shops are funny enough, besides which it's not like we're awash with Melbourne cafe-themed comedy. Sydney hipsters have had their turn with the "Soul Mates" series from the Bondi Hipsters. Now it's Melbourne's turn. What could go wrong? Sadly the answer is "heaps."

What has gone wrong, or at least fallen short, is that the self-referential humour is feeling pretty strained by now, and it isn't helped by a succession of guest stars who combine chewing the scenery with looking awkward.

In fairness, as well as flat and not-their-best bits, there were moments that made me literally cry with laughter, and songs I'd cheerfully sing to everyone in my family if they weren't so rude (the songs, not my family).

You also have to admire the work Aunty Donna have put in (ie, presumably, hanging around in Melbourne a lot) – there are a stream of spot-on gags about the wage theft, bullying, and manipulation that are the lot of a huge number of casualised hospitality workers.

Check it out if, like me, you're an Aunty Donna addict. If you aren't, go look at *Big Old House of Fun*. We'll always have that.

*Aunty Donna's Coffee Cafe* is now streaming on ABC iView. ✪



#### Outspoken / 'awt'spkən /

You know, you could do an entire book on weasel words which are really a way to cover up speaking obnoxiously when you could just stick a sock in it. There's controversial, forthright, assertive, blunt, feisty, and this week's entry, "outspoken." According to a profile in the sinophobic *Sydney Morning Herald*, Shingo Yamagami the departing Japanese ambassador is "outspoken." Outspoken about what exactly? As luck would have it, Shingo Yamagami is outspoken about one of the Nine-Fairfax papers favourite subjects, the threat China poses to peace and security in the Asia-Pacific by (a) existing and (b) not being the United States. People with an "outspoken style" are usually mouthing off about subjects we're into. If they're outspoken about things we dislike, there's a whole other range of adjectives.

#### Substantive / 'sbstəntɪv / (discussions)

A very serious way to describe a topic you're not doing anything about at the moment. You're just talking about it, but you're doing it in a substantive way, so the nothing you're actually doing about the problem sounds heavier.

#### Needed / 'ndəd /

Our super-objective ABC has a few weak points, and one of them is the tide of gush that surrounds Britain's Windsor family from time to time when they do something especially royal. This time around, Charles Windsor is being coronated at a vast expense (about \$186 million), so that underpaid teachers, train drivers, and nurses will have something to feel nice about.

Today's gem is about the Stone of Scone. It's an old stone, and Charles has to sit on it when the coronation happens to remind the Scots who's boss or something. The ABC describes the stone as "needed," as though this lump of rock is air, water, food, or indeed the adequate wages the teachers, nurses and train drivers are striking for.

#### Neoliberal / ,noʊ'ihɪbərəl /

Neoliberal is always a bad word around here, describing as it does the ideology that has been with us since Margaret Thatcher became the UK Prime Minister in 1979. It describes the idea that the "free market" can fix anything, hence everything should be a market of some kind. If you've ever been doorknocked by a dodgy power company, you're a victim of neoliberalism, as has anyone who's been alive in the last 45 years.

A weasly use of it came from a very rusted-on ALP supporter on the ABC's *The Drum* show recently. Asked why Labor couldn't just raise the rate of Jobseeker allowance now that they're in power, the rusted on self-styled lefty squirmed a bit, pointed out that there were a lot of jobs in Ballarat where she lives, and finally blurted out that JobSeeker isn't all about money and that it's "neoliberal" to think that it is.

Call us neoliberal all you like, we think money is important to the thousands of people who are on JobSeeker and in poverty. Still, if it's not all about money, anyone thinking of paying this commentator for their next speaking engagement can just give them less than a living wage if they don't want to be neoliberal.

Is a Weasly word getting on your wick? Send it in to [editor@cpa.org.au](mailto:editor@cpa.org.au) and we'll give it the treatment.

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# May Day 2023

## ADELAIDE – MARCH & FUN DAY

Hundreds joined the May Day March and Family Fun Day in Adelaide Saturday 29th April with the March from Tarmatangga (Victoria Square) on Kurna land in the heart of the city to Pakapakanthi (Victoria Park) in the West Parklands. Guest speaker at the city rally, ACTU president Michelle O'Neil, urged all unionists, workers and supporters present to maintain their struggle, despite having Labor governments in power and some recent gains for working people. As unionists, O'Neil stressed how everyone should support the Yes vote for the Voice to Parliament and constitutional recognition.

The March to Pakapakanthi was a rousing, colourful spectacle, with the May Day banner especially prominent among those of Australia's strongest trade unions. The CPA banner stood out notably as one of only a few political parties participating. Slogans carried by activist marchers effectively highlighted issues of significance – AUKUS is an obscenity, HOMES NOT SUBS, Tax the rich so everyone can all live with dignity.

The CPA stall offered, among quite a number of items, copies of the Communist Manifesto to mark this historic document's 175th anniversary. The *Guardian's* centrefold May Day poster was also on display. Long Live May Day! In a spirit of solidarity, the Party shared facilities with our Australia Cuba Friendship Society (ACFS) compaero in recognition of the monumental struggle for socialism that continues for the Cuban people against a monstrous capitalist foe.

A feature of the day at Pakapakanthi was the "union family hub" where families could enjoy face painting for children and a petting zoo, along with live music and a free sausage sizzle.

Truly, it was a great day for reconnecting with friends and comrades, and for our Party to promote the continuing struggle for fairer society.

Ron Hall

## FREMANTLE – RALLY & MARCH

30th April this year was the first time since 2019, that trade unions and their members have celebrated May Day with the traditional rally and march through the streets of Fremantle. 3500 union members and other social and political activists attended, including the Communist Party of Australia, ACFS, Stop AUKUS, and the Greens.

There were speeches by Rikki Hendon, Senior Vice President of Unions WA and Secretary of Community and Public Sector Union CSA, who said that the union movement had continued to advocate for workers during the pandemic and brought about rights dealing with working from home, COVID leave, and increases in JobSeeker for the many workers who lost their jobs as a consequence of the pandemic. The last four years have also seen new health and safety laws brought in which have beefed up protections and rights for workers to have a safe workplace. There has been some progress in implementing industrial relations reforms but much more needs to be done.

The theme for this year's May Day in WA, was trade unions in support of Yes on the referendum for the Aboriginal Voice to Parliament, as well as an acknowledgement of the exploitation of Aboriginal workers on which this nation is founded. Owen also spoke of the history of this nation's longest strike, the Pilbara Aboriginal workers strike of 1946 which lasted over three years, for proper wages and conditions for Aboriginal pastoral workers. Following the rally, unions marched behind their respective banners through the streets of the port city of Fremantle to remind people that Western Australia has a proud tradition of active and militant unions fighting for the rights of workers and the communities in which they live.

Richard Titilius

## SUNSHINE COAST – MARCH & CELEBRATION

The new Sunshine Coast Branch of Queensland had a great Sunday 31st April at the Caloundra Shark's Rugby field, where our stall was amongst the many unions celebrating the day. There was a lot of interest shown with our representation, with a number of the workers remarking that the Communist Party was back in the Sunshine Coast.

On May Day, the Sunshine Coast joined with the Brisbane Branch to march from Leichhardt Street to the Royal Show Grounds in the Fortitude Valley. A lot of interest was shown with the Party marching and the stall. The comrades had a great time celebrating the important event.

Graham Holton



Adelaide



Fremantle



Sunshine Coast (Caloundra)



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