



Give us a Peace Budget

Denis Doherty

Decaying capitalism is turning the world upside down. Australians are sleeping in the streets and going without food and health care while half a trillion dollars will be spent on nuclear submarines, long range missiles, hypersonic weapons and more military hardware. This is an immoral, inhuman, inexcusable crime – and it must be reversed. We must have a peace budget now.

The recent federal budget showed what we can expect – the skewing of our resources to support the US drive to war with China while wages remain low, jobseeker gets a slight increase, and housing remains lost in a whirl of pretend policies which will not produce one social house until 2025, let alone the public housing this country needs.

JOBS

Spending on the military rather than civilian areas of the economy results in a net loss of jobs. This is because military spending is less effective at creating jobs than virtually any other form of government activity.

The government wants 4000 extra university places and has committed "\$150 million to start delivering the skills and workforce we need to deliver Australia's nuclear-powered submarine program."

Australia's future depends on a healthy planet, but military spending amounts to a war on the environment.

But these are jobs for death and destruction. Where are the jobs for a happy and sustainable future?

In 2008 the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Australian Conservation Foundation produced a report that said Australia could become a world leader in creating green industries generating up to a million green collar jobs by 2030 as well as multi-billion dollar export opportunities in green technology.

WAR ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Australia's future depends on a healthy planet, but military spending amounts to a war on the environment. All military activity is highly polluting and a major contributor to climate change.

We must have a peace budget that includes developing stronger disaster preparedness and response capabilities. This includes dealing with fire and flood in Australia as well as aid for Pacific communities which are being hit with repeated disasters, including devastating cyclones, tidal surges, and sea-water inundation.

NUCLEAR WASTE

Under AUKUS, Australia will be responsible for storing the nuclear waste from the decommissioned submarine reactors.

However, Australia has not found a permanent site to store

low-level nuclear waste, let alone highly radioactive waste.

When the first three subs are at the end of their lives – in about 30 years according to Marles – about 600kg of highly enriched uranium will have to be stored. Because the fuel is weapons-grade, it will need military-scale security.

Every site suggested so far has been on indigenous land and opposed by its traditional owners.

WRONG PRIORITIES

Australia's military budget is on the cusp of surging past \$50 billion a year and the recent Defence Strategic Review encouraged a further \$19 billion spending, including \$4.1 billion for long range strike missiles, \$3.8 to strengthen northern bases, and \$400 million to retain Australian soldiers – all signs of an increasing move to war.

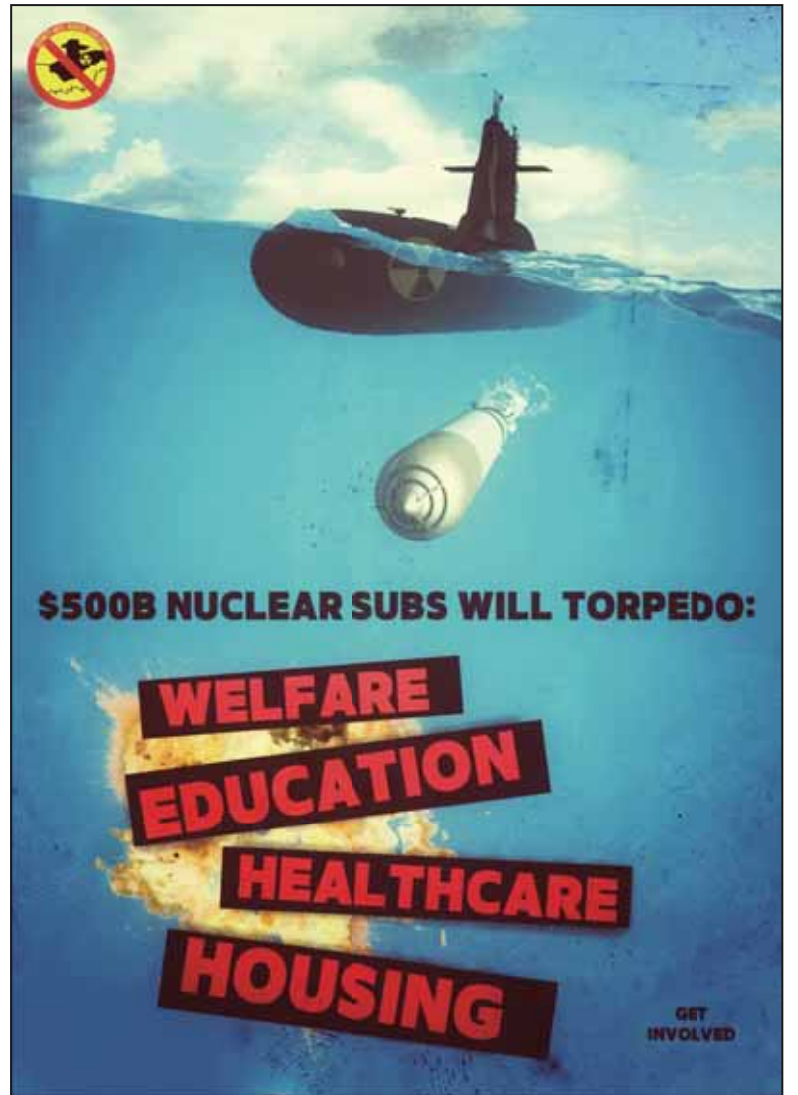
Instead of these lethal destabilising purchases, a peace budget would allow Australia to develop stronger disaster preparedness and response capabilities and climate-adaptation initiatives.

This is important so we can deal more effectively with Australia's escalating fires, floods, and droughts but it is also critical for Pacific communities hit with repeated devastating cyclones, tidal surges, and sea-water inundation.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The military is profoundly influencing foreign affairs. The Murdoch papers crudely put it as: "Australia's push to curb China's regional coercive ambitions has been given a \$2 billion boost allowing for more regional deployment of soldiers, sailors, and police."

Another \$52 million over two years has been set aside for diplomatic activities to support AUKUS. This is not true diplomacy, but



Sydney Anti-AUKUS Coalition poster.

coercive efforts to overcome the concerns of Indonesia, Malaysia, and others in South East Asia and the Pacific about the AUKUS pact.

A PEACE BUDGET

We should follow the example of our Pacific neighbours who have a policy of "a friend to all and an enemy to none."

We must engage in co-operation with the region, including China, and maintain an independent foreign policy which engages with all countries. We must develop mutual respect for all our neighbours.

This change of attitude will see a different approach to the military, cancelling all aspects of the AUKUS agreement and cutting the defence budget by 10 per cent.

A peace budget would see the half a trillion dollars planned for AUKUS used instead to properly fund medicine, child care, aged care, education, electricity, public housing, public transport, the NDIS, and a wide range of other services as well as environmental protection and sustainable development.

While the recent Federal budget did begin to move things in the right direction, much of it was incremental and fell well short of solving the many problems facing Australia.

Australia is one of the richest countries in the world. We can afford to tackle climate change, increase unemployment benefits, care for our aged, and provide free childcare if we want to.

We should scrap the \$500 billion AUKUS. With these freed up resources, we could lower emissions, cut the cost of living and lessen inequality.

We must have a peace budget to deliver these good things.

CPA CAMPAIGN

On the United Nations Day of Peace last year, the Communist Party of Australia called for the Albanese government to step back from war preparations, and to instead adopt a peace budget.

It should be obvious by now that countries trying to outspend one another by buying more and more deadly weapons systems does not create peace or security. It has not worked in the past and it never will.

It is time for us to join together and call on governments around the world to cut military spending, and to instead invest in the true needs of the people and the planet to build a just and sustainable future. ★

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In Solidarity with Cuba

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Guardian

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Time for action

“Are we there yet?” This is the perennial question of bored children in the family car on a long trip.

For some time now, humanity has been asking, like a fearful version of the impatient children, when we’ll get there. In this case “there” is the 1.5 degree climate threshold, the increase of global temperatures over preindustrial levels. Scientists have warned that global heating above the 1.5 degree level would set off changes which would be both catastrophic and irreversible. Now, according to *New Scientist* magazine, it looks like we will breach 1.5 degrees by 2027.

We might also ask “are we there yet?” when it comes to capitalism fixing this problem.

It’s not like capitalism hasn’t had time. The principles of global warming were worked out a long time ago, in 1850. The idea that human activity could contribute to it was proposed in 1889. That it might be a bad thing for us was first suggested in 1938. The fact that human activity was actually changing the climate was shown in 1965, and was acknowledged by US president Lyndon Johnson at the time. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was set up in 1988 in response to evidence that climate change was actually happening. In 1991, the multinational oil company Shell knew enough about climate change to produce a short film, *Climate of Concern* warning about the dangers.

We live in a neoliberal society. Whoever you vote for in Australia, you are guaranteed to have a government that believes in the power of the free market. As the Communist Party of Australia has pointed out many times, this belief is impervious to evidence. There is no such thing as a fully free market. What there is, is a system of capitalist oligarchy. Big companies get listened to by government. Working people, all too often, don’t.

Capitalism has had a lot of power, and a lot of time to stop us from getting “there.” It has not succeeded. In fact, capitalists have done their best to make things worse, by pouring huge resources into lobbying against effective action on climate change. They’ve done this because they want to make more money. In fact, they have to make more money – the rules that companies operate under dictate this. Shell’s media unit made *Climate of Concern*, but Shell the company poured money into climate denial.

So the creativity and energy that Marx recognised in capital has gone into increasing climate change through new forms of fossil fuel extraction, and through organised denial. Not that the denial hasn’t been creative. It has moved from outright denial of scientific fact, through distractions like suggesting as-yet-nonexistent technological fixes instead of actual solutions, as well as what’s called “doomism.” Doomism is the unlovely last stage of denial in which the argument amounts to “it’s too late, we should give up trying.” Let’s not forget “greenwashing,” whereby a company applies some green to its website and maybe plants a few trees somewhere. All these should be debunked and resisted.

The 1.5 degree threshold is terrifying, but it’s not a magical number. Every degree of warming towards 1.5 is a dangerous as we’ve seen in unprecedented bushfires, floods, and heatwaves. Conversely, every degree of temperature increase we avoid is a victory. Mass action has brought many victories. We know victories over capitalism are possible. We’ve seen them achieved.

Capitalism has had a long time to fix this. It hasn’t fixed it. What can fix it is socialism, achieved through mass action of working people. People like us.

It’s not too late. Every fraction of a degree matters, but the system we live under isn’t going to change things. They’ve had enough time. We need to work for socialism right now while we still can, because every fraction of a degree matters.

Sunshine Coast Branch celebrates the 50th Anniversary of the foundation of the Polisaro Front

Che Janz

On the 10th May CPA Sunshine Coast Branch members travelled to Brisbane to take part in a stand out in front of the ADF Offices. The purpose of this was to raise awareness of the plight of the Sahrawian people which is so often ignored or unknown in the Western world, as well as to show general Anti-AUKUS sentiment by distributing flyers and AUKUS-focused issues of the *Guardian*.

10th May was the 50th anniversary of Polisaro’s foundation. Polisaro are a revolutionary activist group that has fought for an independent socialist state for the Sahrawian people in their native lands free from Moroccan imperialist exploitation and genocide.

We handed out the article “Freedom for the Sahrawian People is long overdue” which gives a good general overview of the subject to the general public, and proudly displayed a large Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic flag.

Obviously the flag had some recognition, as some members of Brisbane’s Islamic community waved and held up their thumbs in approval upon seeing it, while others took the article in good faith to better educate themselves on the subject.

Overall the day was a success. As the saying goes “constant dropping wears away the stone,” and we are doing our best to bring about a free Western Sahara. ✪



Win for native forest campaigners

In a win for native forest campaigners and for long-term grass-roots campaigners everywhere, the Victorian Andrews government has announced that native forest logging in Victoria will cease by the end of the year. Friends of the Earth forest campaigner Alana Mountain described the decision as “a huge moment for

everyone who has worked tirelessly to end logging and bring forward this transition date” and as “justice for climate, forests, and humanity.”

Mountain also welcomed the announcement of an additional \$200 million to support workers exiting the industry, saying that a Just Transition has always been “at the core of FoE’s campaigns”

Mountain acknowledged a large and varied group of organisations that had campaigned for over a decade on the issue, as well as acknowledging the Victorian Greens advocacy. She also voiced her appreciation of the work of Victorian Environment Minister Ingrid Stitt. ✪

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Cancel Stage 3 tax cuts!

Anna Pha

Over the past two decades the bottom 90 per cent of Australians on average have received only seven per cent of economic growth per person while the top ten per cent have pocketed 93 per cent. The Stage 3 tax cuts, to come into effect from July 2024, will exacerbate this trend.

Factors such as record profits, real wage reductions, the rise in precarious employment and, most recently, rapidly rising interest rates and inflation have played a part in this process. So has a gradual and regressive flattening of marginal tax rates over the past 40-50 years that has increasingly benefited the rich and served to widen the wealth gap.

Australia once had a progressive tax system where those on higher incomes paid a higher percentage of their income in taxation. In the early 1950s there were 29 marginal rates, each one higher for each additional increment of taxable income. A marginal rate is the rate at which tax is paid on every additional dollar of income.

REGRESSIVE

The top personal income tax rate reached more than 90 per cent between 1944 and 1963, peaking at 94 per cent during the Second World War.

Today there are only four marginal rates with the highest rate of 45 per cent on taxable income over \$180,000. This represents a massive flattening of the tax brackets and a halving of the highest marginal rate.

Today the marginal rate on income from \$45,001 to \$120,000 is 32.5 per cent and 37 per cent on income from \$120,001 to \$180,000. When the Stage 3 tax cuts are introduced, these two rates will be replaced by one flat rate of 30 per cent on income between \$45,001 and \$200,000.

The result is a reduction from four to three marginal rates, and the higher the income the larger the tax cut for the rich.

"We've always said when we can afford to give tax relief, particularly to low- and middle-income earners, then that's a worthy objective as well, and governments of both persuasions have done that over time," Treasurer Jim Chalmers told ABC TV.

"These tax cuts kick in at \$45,000 – that's a fact, which is sometimes lost in the conversation."

Chalmers conveniently omits to mention that at the same time as someone on \$200,000 or more per annum, including politicians like himself, pockets a tax cut of \$9,075, the low- and middle-income tax offset (LMITO) will end. It ranges from \$675 for someone on \$37,000 up to \$1,500 at an income of \$48,001 to \$98,000.

The Australia Institute (TAI) notes, "For someone on the current median income of \$65,000 the LMITO was worth \$1,500. That has now gone and has been replaced by a \$500 tax cut under Stage 3. That means that

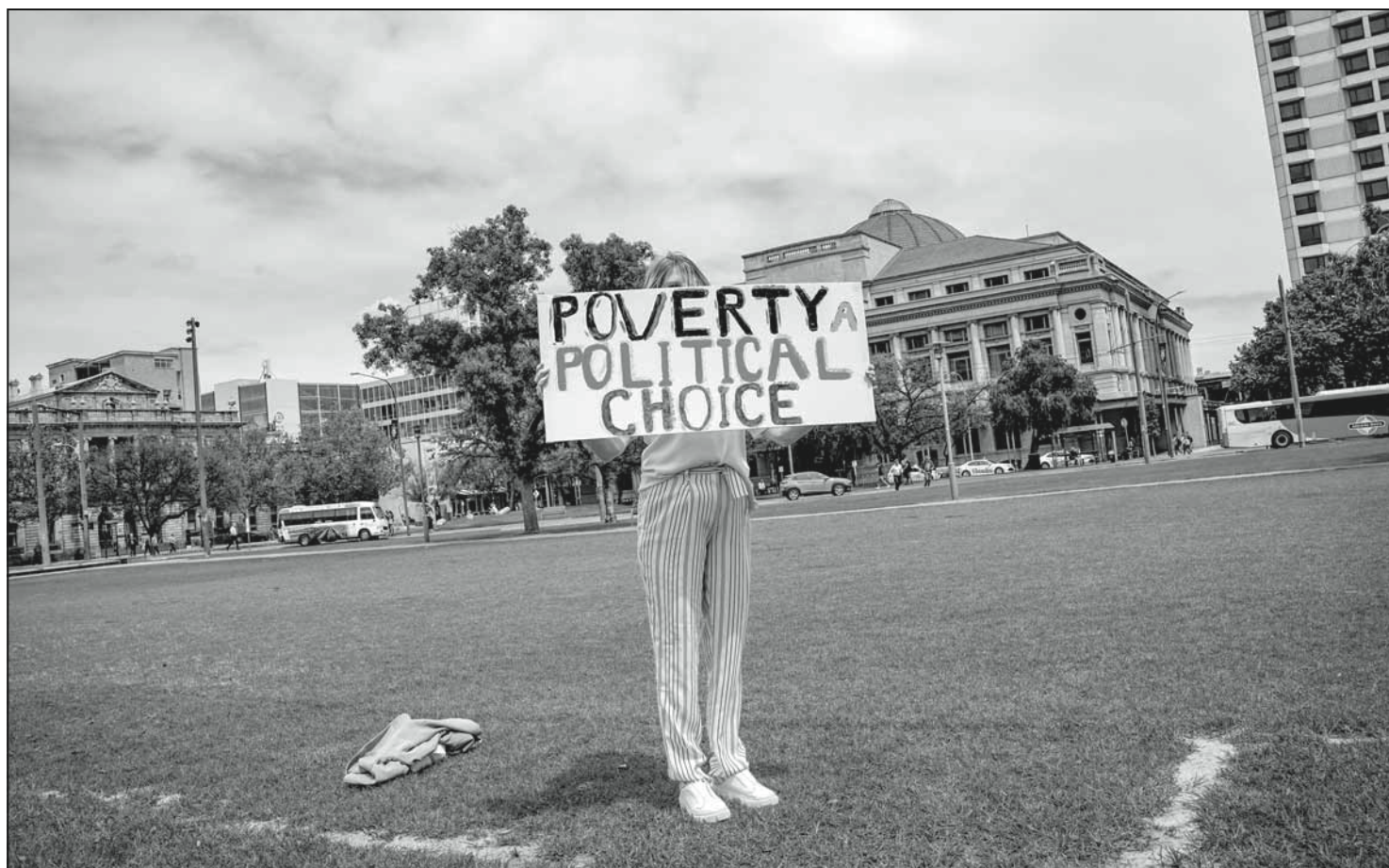


Photo: Noah Sutherland / Antipoverty Centre (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

person will pay \$1,000 more in tax once the Stage 3 cuts come into effect in 2024-25 than they did last year."

So that's what Labor calls a "worthy objective." An income tax cut for the rich and an increase for those on low and medium wages!

The legislation for the Stage 3 tax cuts was passed by the Morrison government in 2019 with Labor's support. Since coming to office Labor has steadfastly refused to repeal the legislation.

With inflation high and wages still falling far behind rising prices and interest rates, the tax increase for those on low and middle incomes adds another burden for families struggling to make ends meet. These workers include nurses, teachers, paramedics, aged care workers, retail and hospitality workers, and a host of others.

"Almost half of the total benefits go to the richest 3 per cent, and so massive are the costs at \$300bn over 9 years, that you could raise Jobseeker from its current rate of \$693 a fortnight to \$1,925 and you would still end up with a smaller government deficit in 2032-33 than you would with the Stage 3 tax cuts," research by TAI shows.

In addition to lifting hundreds of thousands of people out of poverty, raising Jobseeker would have economic benefits by increasing demand for goods and services and generating jobs.

Income tax on company profits has also been slashed from a high of 49 per cent in 1986 to 30 per cent and 25 per cent for small businesses – also reducing government revenue by billions of dollars.

The Howard government introduced the Goods and Services Tax (GST) of 10 per cent in 2000. This is a regressive flat tax. People like the unemployed and pensioners spend the greater proportion of their income on goods and services that it taxes.

PRIORITIES WRONG

Public services are in crisis whether it be healthcare, education, aged care, housing, the NDIS, transport, women's refuges, legal centres, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services. Successive governments, including the Albanese government, talk in terms of "balancing" spending and "making tough decisions."

Compounding the tax cuts, the government plans to spend hundreds of billions of dollars on war preparations. It will continue to cry poor when it comes to funding services such as healthcare, public education, the NDIS, and aged care.

Such priorities are central to neoliberal ideology. Former Coalition Treasurer Joe Hockey stated that the objective was to wind

back the taxation of incomes to zero and fund government spending through indirect taxes such as the GST.

Such an aim goes hand in hand with the neoliberal philosophy of "self-provision" and "small government" whereby government abdicates its responsibilities for the well-being of the nation.

Labor must be forced to dump the Stage 3 tax cuts and take steps to restore marginal rates so that the taxation of personal income once again becomes progressive.

The GST should be replaced with a new super profits tax on larger corporations raking in massive profits.

The allegations against the big accounting firm PwC of misusing internal Australian Taxation Office (ATO) information obtained through its work for the ATO illustrate the problems that can arise through contracting out private work and revolving doors between staff of accounting firms and the ATO.

Contracting out of government responsibilities not only costs more because of the layers of private profit but also benefits the private sector in other ways. It should end.

Such reforms along with the cancellation of the nuclear submarines would provide hundreds of billions of dollars to meet all the crises facing the public sector, social security and to address climate change. ✪

Visy workers first industrial action in 60 years

With an annual turnover of more than \$7 billion, Visy is the largest privately-owned company in Australia, with its executive Anthony Pratt worth an estimated \$14 billion. Yet, when it comes to the negotiation table, management cries poor, and the workers are fed up!

Faced with a pay offer that would amount to an effective pay cut when inflation is taken into account, workers walked out for the first time in the 60 year history of the Shepparton Vic site.

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) organiser Danny Miller said, "You have the most profitable company in Australia with the fifth wealthiest family at its helm, yet they are still trying to shortchange their workers. It's a disgrace. This site has made them money, there's no doubt about that, especially during covid."

"Supply chains were a shambles, but the workers here kept up with increased demand supplying Campbells, SPC, and Simplot, ensuring all Australians had access to those kitchen staples." ✪

BHP has resorted to an unfounded fear campaign over the Albanese Government's promised Same Job Same Pay laws, the Mining and Energy Union (MEU) said today.

BHP has today written to its workforce suggesting the new laws would be bad for jobs.

But BHP's real fear is having to share some of their record profits, said MEU General President Tony Maher.

"BHP is right to fear that Same Job Same Pay will lift their wages bill, because they have been

exploiting labour hire mineworkers for years," said Mr Maher.

"BHP has replaced thousands of good, permanent mining jobs with insecure, lower-paid labour hire jobs.

"Along with other big mining companies, they have exploited weak laws allowing them to avoid paying the wages and conditions achieved through genuine enterprise bargaining.

"Same Job Same Pay laws will close this loophole.

"BHP mineworkers have nothing to fear and everything to gain

from Same Job Same Pay laws, which will help end the culture of division on their mine sites.

"Our mining companies have been pocketing billions in record profits from Australian commodities, and they can afford to do the right thing by the workers generating the wealth."

The Communist Party of Australia stands with any workers fighting casualisation. ✪

No fear: BHP workers have everything to gain from Same Job Same Pay

BRING THEM HERE

End offshore detention

Manus Island and Nauru first became the locations for Australia's offshore immigration detention centres in 2001, when former Prime Minister John Howard launched the "Pacific Solution".

Labor re-opened them in 2012 as part of a plan to prevent any asylum seeker arriving by boat from gaining resettlement in Australia. Liz Thompson, a former migration agent involved in refugee-assessment interviews on Manus, described the process on SBS's *Dateline* as a "farce," saying, "Manus Island is an experiment in the ultimate logic of deterrence, designed to frustrate the hell out of people and terrify them so that they go home."

Offshore detention is designed to be so brutal that asylum seekers are forced into despair and agree to go back home to whatever they have fled. Twelve refugees and asylum seekers have died there.

Dumping people in such remote locations also means denying them proper legal support, medical services, and contact with the Australian public. Nauru is 3000 kilometres from the Australian mainland, while Manus Island lies 300 kilometres north of the main island of Papua New Guinea.

NAURU AND PNG

By December 2022, there were 77 refugees and asylum seekers left on Nauru. The first six went to New Zealand under the resettlement deal agreed in the dying days of the Morrison government in November 2022. Others have gained resettlement in Canada and the US.

There are also around 1200 refugees who were detained on Manus and Nauru now in Australia, after arriving for medical treatment, including under the

Medevac law. This is one third of the entire number originally sent offshore. They have been refused permanent resettlement, and told "Australia is not an option for you" even though some have been here as long as nine years, and have children in school and made lives here. They need permanent visas to allow them to stay here.

Around another 92 refugees are left in PNG, dumped in Port Moresby in 2019 after the closure of the Manus Island detention centre. Australia abandoned them and declared them officially the responsibility of the PNG government in 2019. They still need resettlement too. Some may get to New Zealand under a separate deal with the government there, but their future remains uncertain. They continue to face the threat of attacks and robbery in a dangerous situation while in PNG. The Australian government should accept responsibility and bring them here for resettlement urgently too.

WHERE HAVE THEY BEEN RESETTLED?

Refugees have spent almost ten years in limbo as a result of Australia's offshore detention policy. Efforts to resettle them in third countries have been appallingly slow and difficult, with most countries rejecting Australia's efforts to abuse human rights and keep out refugees.

In 2016 a resettlement deal was stuck where the US agreed to take 1,250 of the refugees on Nauru and Manus Island. The first refugees were resettled in late 2017, after more than four years of detention. But six years after the deal was first announced some refugees approved under the deal are still waiting to go to the US. At 30 November 2022,

1075 had been resettled there with around 200 others approved to go.

Others have gone to Canada under a sponsorship scheme, which required supporters in Australia and Canada to fundraise around \$18,000 per refugee to have them accepted.

In March 2022, a deal with finally agreed with New Zealand, which agreed to take 150 refugees over three years. But less than 40 refugees from Nauru will end up in New Zealand, with most already heading to the US or Canada. The bulk of the places in New Zealand will go to refugees from offshore detention now in Australia, who were transferred for medical care or under the Medevac law.

Most of them do not want to go to New Zealand, having already lived in Australia for years. The process will also take three more years, when they have waited almost ten years already, and there are not enough places for all of them, with 505 to miss out.

The attempt to send refugees to Cambodia in 2015 was also farcical. Just seven were "resettled" there, at a cost of \$55 million. Only three remain there as of May 2017, with the others regretting the decision to go to Cambodia and returning home in despair.

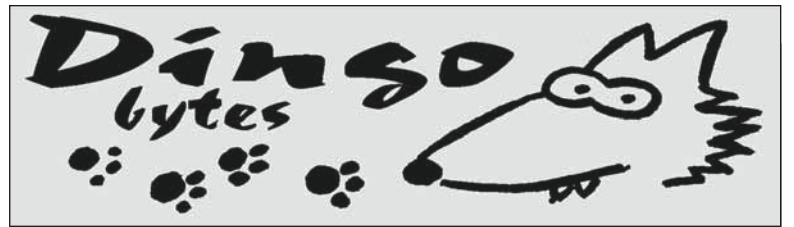
Cambodia is one of the world's least developed countries and has no infrastructure for resettlement. The Philippines has also refused to accept refugees from Manus or Nauru. Kyrgyzstan was even floated as an option.

The asylum seekers and refugees must be brought to Australia, the country the whole world views as responsible for them. The offshore detention centres on Manus Island and Nauru must be closed.

Refugee Action Coalition ✪



Photo: Tom Pearson



It is timely to revisit the cause of the conflict in Ukraine. The issue behind the strife in Ukraine is the fact that the presence of NATO and US bases, military forces, and nuclear missile systems put Russia's western border under continual threat. Over the past decade Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, Romania, and Estonia have provided a home to these weapons, maintaining a constant war footing. This is in complete violation of agreements made at the end of the cold war that NATO would not expand eastward. NATO's expansion now includes not only Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic — in 2004 seven additional countries were added. NATO once numbered 12 members; now it comprises 28. Furthermore, the NATO military alliance is looking at Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine as possible future members. Another factor to be considered in the current crisis is the fate of the four million Russians living in the areas of Luhansk and Donetsk, Ukraine. Agreements reached in 2014 with respect to their autonomy have never been implemented by Ukraine's government. These regions opposed the 2014 US-backed coup that overthrew the elected president of Ukraine, Victor Yanukovich. For their opposition in 2014 the separatists were attacked and killed by the Azov Battalion, a fascist military detachment of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists — Bandera faction (OUN-B), a neo-Nazi outfit. Sources have numbered the casualties at 14,000. During the coup fascist thugs attacked the trade union federation headquarters, locked its occupants inside and set the building on fire. Democratic mechanisms in Ukraine have been abolished. After the 2014 state coup, real policy on its territory is increasingly dictated by aggressive nationalist bands. Representing an absolute terrorist minority, they hold Ukrainian people in fear and impose control over members of the political establishment.

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: Qantas announced last week it is set to post a record \$2.48 billion full-year profit for the 2023 financial year. The airline attributes its skyrocketing profits to surging demand for travel, lower fuel prices and steadily resolving supply chain issues. The union movement knows otherwise — this has been driven by Qantas gaming the system. Said ACTU President Michele O'Neil: "Qantas workers know that a huge share of this profit is the result of outsourcing their jobs to multiple companies, and that Qantas has set up labour-hire companies, enabling the airline to drive down wages and conditions for the benefit of outgoing chief executive Alan Joyce and Qantas shareholders. Qantas customers know that standards have fallen dramatically, with constant flight delays and lost luggage, all because good, secure jobs were outsourced to drive down wages and conditions, hurting both workers and customers. The Australian people know that Qantas took \$2 billion of taxpayers' money during 2020 and 2021 under cover of the pandemic, then unlawfully sacked 1,700 workers. It is time the government closed loopholes to protect Australian workers against Alan Joyce's business model. If two workers at the same company are doing the same job, they should be paid the same amount — nothing could be simpler or fairer than that."

Casual workers losing out

Casual workers are falling further behind their permanently employed counterparts, new research by the ACTU shows.

Across the board, casual employees earn \$11.59 less per hour than their permanent counterparts: \$28.95 per hour versus \$40.54. This is a pay gap of 28.6 per cent which has been growing steadily since 2016 and is now the highest on record.

When comparing workers at the same skill level or within the same occupation, the pay gap between casuals and permanents is between \$3.55 to \$3.84 an hour or about 11 per cent. This is despite casuals being owed an additional loading of up to 25 per cent.

New ACTU research also shows that 50 per cent

of casual workers now report being financially worse off than they were 12 months ago, up from 36 per cent recorded a year earlier.

Up to 2.6 million workers in Australia — or just under one in four — are on casual work arrangements. Women comprise 55 per cent of all casual employees; and the sectors with the highest rates of casualisation include retail, accommodation, food services, health care and social assistance, accounting for 55 per cent of all casual employees.

The ACTU is calling for Morrison-era changes to the law to be scrapped, and a commonsense definition of casual work to be introduced as part of the government's further IR reforms. ✪

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Victorian Budget 2023

The rich pay a little, the workers pay a lot

Victoria's 2023 state budget is being eagerly sized up all around the country by commentators with an axe to grind and an interest in seeing a successful Labor government come a cropper. Debt is high, largely due to unavoidable spending during the COVID pandemic, but also due to the cost on borrowing increasing as a result of recent interest rate changes. Tables of winners and losers are being rolled out by media outlets around the country.

The Andrews ALP government's budget document is titled *Doing What Matters*, and comes with a cheering picture of a person of colour in a hard hat and safety vest who we're meant to assume has just been working on some much needed infrastructure for the state. A better title would be "Doing what we have to."

The budget is designed to address several different concerns.

First priority is debt. Debt is an elastic thing in Australian politics. When a party (usually conservative) is in opposition, debt is the worst thing in the word. It's a looming catastrophe and is only caused by governments spending irresponsibly, because government spending is exactly like household spending. At least it is until that same party becomes the government,

whereupon they discover the truth that government spending is *not* like household spending. Governments can tax people and businesses, households can't. Governments can spend money on things that will produce more income in the future, households (usually) can't. Banks know these things, and are a lot more indulgent to governments than they are to you and me.

Debt is politically elastic too. The Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison government came to power partly by complaining about a debt apocalypse, and proceeded to make that debt much larger without paying a political price. The Albanese government has just put the whole country on the hook for more than \$368 billion dollars, but has not been punished by the mainstream media because "defence" is different.

Actual Victorian state government debt is \$116.7 billion, and is estimated to climb to \$171 billion. Those are big figures, but Victoria is a big state. Net debt in Victoria is about a quarter of its economy. However, the government wants to be seen to be doing something about debt. Guess who's paying?

As usual in a capitalist society, workers. Four thousand public service workers are due to lose their jobs.

Another priority is to be seen to be progressive. While public service

workers are paying with their jobs, Victoria's subsidised and entitled private schools are paying a little. In a very Labor move, some "high-fee" private schools will lose their payroll tax exemption. Naturally, they're complaining about this in apocalyptic terms. Companies with payroll of more than ten million will have to pay 0.5 per cent more payroll tax. People who own investment properties and holiday homes are now more likely to pay land tax with a tax-free threshold being lowered from \$3000,000 to \$50,000. Taking a cue from the private schools, real estate lobby groups have wasted no time threatening tenants and hinting that this change will make housing harder to find.

Also on the "progressive" side of the ledger, the budget is continuing to help the transition to renewable energy with the 100 Neighbourhood Batteries program, and with a very homeowner-focused program of rebates and interest-free loans through the Solar Homes program to help homeowners install solar power. A really just transition would find a way of helping renters access renewables too.

The government will commit a welcome \$7.1 million to help the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service open hubs in Aboriginal communities across Victoria. ✪

Victorian budget 2023

Mixed bag for the homeless

The Victorian budget has delivered \$134 million to provide access to housing and homelessness support.

But more is desperately needed to respond to the increasing number of people seeking support.

The Victorian budget includes \$67.6 million for Housing First responses and supports, which will deliver much needed permanent supportive housing responses to people formerly sleeping rough.

The budget also continues a range of targeted housing and support that meet critical demand.

This includes a range of services for women and young people experiencing homelessness as well as much needed additional health, drug, and alcohol supports to people in crisis accommodation.

Victoria is in the grips of a devastating housing crisis which is pushing more people into homelessness and housing stress.

Victoria's homelessness services are under significant pressure and are still placing over 4000 individuals and families in hotels and crisis accommodation each month so they aren't sleeping in their cars, on the street, or in unsafe situations. These individuals and families need a safe and secure place to call home.

Yet no new capital investment was delivered through this budget with the Victorian government's Big Housing Build still progressing.

With the Victorian budget papers confirming wait times for public housing are set to blow out further – an average 16.5 months for those on the priority wait list – significant and continued social housing growth is essential.

Homelessness services will receive \$35.9 million in 23/24 and \$134 million over the next four years.

Council to Homeless Persons CEO Deborah Di Natale said:

"We are pleased to see this budget delivers some desperately needed support for rough sleepers through investment in Housing First responses.

"Programs like the incredibly successful from Homelessness to a Home program have actually saved the government money in other areas of the budget including health, justice, and prisons.

"We also welcome funding being maintained for crucial existing support services delivering homelessness and housing assistance to women and young people without a home.

"Still the State government should commit to building at least 6000 social housing properties each year for a decade.

"The Big Housing Build is proof this government acknowledges the massive need for more social housing. But with 57,000 households on the waiting list, that initiative simply cannot be a one off.

"As a state we're investing in over 55,000 nights of short-term accommodation each month. This is nowhere near enough to meet demand and does nothing to end someone's homelessness. That's where the combination of housing and support through H2H was remarkable.

"We're looking forward to continuing our work with the State government to ensure future budgets include more decisions which will put us on a path to ending homelessness."

Council to Homeless Persons ✪

GREEN NOTES

Anna Pha

"If emissions follow the trajectory set by current NDCs, there is a less than five per cent chance of keeping temperatures well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and less than one per cent chance of reaching the 1.5°C target set by the 2015 Paris Agreement," UK think-tank, Chatham House concludes in its *2021 Climate Risk Assessment Report*. (September 2021) NDCs or Nationally Determined Contributions are the five-yearly climate action plans to cut greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate impacts adopted by signatories to the Paris Climate Agreement. "Unless NDCs are dramatically increased, and policy and delivery mechanisms are commensurately revised, many of the impacts described in this research paper are likely to be locked in by 2040 and become so severe they go beyond the limits of what nations can adapt to. Heatwaves and drought are among these impacts.

"If emissions do not come down drastically before 2030, then by 2040 some 3.9 billion people are likely to experience major heatwaves, 12 times more than the historic average. By the 2030s, 400 million people globally each year are likely to be exposed to temperatures exceeding the workability threshold. Also by the 2030s, the number of people on the planet exposed to heat stress exceeding the survivability threshold is likely to surpass 10 million a year." "By 2040, the average proportion of global cropland affected by severe drought will likely rise to 32 per cent a year, more than three times the historic average." Yields are predicted to decline by 30 per cent in the absence of dramatic emissions reductions. Global demand for agricultural food products is set to increase by almost 50 per cent by 2050.

"No region will be spared, but by 2040 East and South Asia will be most impacted – with, respectively, 125 million and 105 million people likely to experience prolonged drought. Across Africa, 152 million people each year are likely to be impacted," the Chatham House report estimates.

This is not just the future. According to a food security working group chaired by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation and the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development, almost 23 million people are believed to be highly food insecure in Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya. During the 2011 famine more than 260,000 people died of starvation in Somalia alone. Today around 1.3 million people, 80 per cent of them women and children, have been internally displaced in Somalia by a five-year drought, the longest and most severe in Somalia's recent history. Drought conditions in the Horn of Africa are on a path to being worse than they were during the 2011 famine.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called on the wealthy countries that are responsible for the bulk of historical emissions to speed up climate efforts in order to avert dangerous climate warming. They "must commit to reaching net zero as close as possible to 2040," while emerging economies should aim to do so by 2050, he said. Australia is one of those countries. Instead of spending hundreds of billions on nuclear submarines, long-range strike systems, expansion of US bases, and sacrificing Australia's sovereignty and security to AUKUS, Australian government should be redirecting these funds towards achieving genuine security and wellbeing of the people of the Australia and the region. This includes mitigation and adaptation measures, aid to Pacific Island countries, no new gas or coal projects, and a rapid and just transition to renewables.



Something to say?

Write to the Editor!

editor@cpa.org.au

In solidarity with Cuba

Vinnie Molina

A recent Construction Forestry Mining Energy Union (CFMEU) delegation of seven from around Australia attended the celebration of May Day in Cuba. More than 1200 delegates from all over the world gathered in Havana in defiance of the 63-year blockade imposed by the United States of America on its neighbour less than 145 kilometres away in the Caribbean.

More than 150 delegates were from the United States, mainly young people who defied US law that prevents its citizens from traveling to Cuba. It was a challenge for them as they faced fines, interrogation, detention and harassment by their own government for exercising their right to learn about socialist Cuba on their return to the US.

It is hard to understand the full effects of the criminal blockade on the people of Cuba unless you visit and experience the Cuban reality first hand. The longest ever blockade imposed on any country affects every single family on the island.

MAY DAY CELEBRATIONS

Many of the international delegates missed the one million strong traditional celebration as it was suspended due to shortages of fuel required to mobilise huge numbers of people on a public holiday. May Day became yet another casualty of the US blockade.

Instead, the Cuban government planned smaller rallies in all municipalities across the country. However, this was affected by a storm which hit the island. Especially impacted was the stage set up near the anti-imperialist square close to the Hotel Nacional alongside the seafront known as Malecon. The most desired celebration of May Day was then postponed for the first time ever to Friday 5th May, and to compensate a second public holiday was enacted for the people to be able to celebrate the workers' national holiday.

The 5th May saw more than one hundred thousand people gather in Havana to listen to trade unionists and other leaders of the revolution. This was replicated across the country. Speakers condemned the blockade as the single major obstacle that prevents Cuba's development.

LEARNING THE TRUTH ABOUT CUBA

Delegates had the opportunity of taking to the streets to talk and share with workers and people in general. This was a great opportunity to learn directly from the people who shared their experiences about the direct impact of the blockade on their wages for example.

The exchange rate for US dollars or Euros is high. This is bad news for workers. The purchase capacity of the Cuban peso is impacted and prices are rising. There are also some products not covered by the government's basic card which guarantees basic necessities.

No one starves in Cuba but there are

some products that are hard to get and must be purchased in hard currency or at its exchange rate. Not all people can afford to do that. Cuban creativity is often evident as people work to overcome the limitations imposed on them.

However, the objective of the US blockade is to create scarcity and make things hard for the people and the US finds many ways to make this worse. Recent examples would be blocking access to raw materials needed for vaccine production.

Cuba couldn't access vaccines produced in the US but with its own biotechnology industry developed a number of successful vaccine candidates despite the difficulties they had to overcome. Cuba vaccinated its entire population.

CUBA NEVER ON ITS KNEES

What was evident was that most Cuban people are still prepared to keep their revolution alive and fight against the effects of the criminal blockade.

We also heard about the US "democracy" program that targets young Cubans having an impact with some being tempted by the so-called American dream. US propaganda tells young Cubans that because of the excellent education they have received in Cuba they could go to the US and become millionaires in just a few years.

Of course, this is the minority who have seen many difficulties but fail to see the key reason for the problems and fall victims of the ideological campaign.

We also met those among the older population who directly benefited from the Cuban revolution. They would prefer to die than live on their knees. They will never allow the falsehoods of the "US dream" to touch them or to inspire them to leave their country. Cuba belongs to its people.

TRUMP'S PUNISHMENT

The Trump Administration was very active against Cuba during its four years in government. It introduced 243 coercive measures against the people of Cuba. It restricted trade and enacted Title III of the Helms-Burton Act. Title III had been shelved by previous administrations, as it punishes third countries from trading with Cuba. All Obama's changes were removed.

The other criminal act by President Trump before he left office was to add Cuba to the US list of countries "sponsors of terrorism." The inclusion of Cuba in the list of countries accused as sponsors of terrorism was based on lies, and makes the lives of the people of more than 39 countries currently on that list much harder.

This means Cuba cannot easily purchase or sell anything through the US controlled financial system (Swift system). Even diplomatic representations have been affected as banks have closed accounts. In Australia, despite not having Cuba in any list of sanctioned countries, the banks avoid any financial punishment in the way of fines if trading with Cuba.

The coercive measures mean that if



someone in Australia is travelling to Cuba and exchanges money through a bank or exchange bureau the exchange could be denied if the country of travel is Cuba.

Despite his promises, US president Biden has not really changed any of the measures introduced by the Trump administration which tightened the blockade.

Shame Biden Shame!

ACTIVITIES DURING THE VISIT

Delegates visited several workplaces during the May Day activities. The surprise for us was the fact that serious incidents or fatalities are almost non-existent in Cuban workplaces where the unions and workers play a central role in management and safety on the job. Another fact was the number of women involved in management and leading union positions.

Some of the workplaces were directly involved in construction or the manufacture of construction materials. The presentations clearly showed the impact of the criminal US blockade that affects every single family and the activities in their workplaces.

SOLIDARITY WITH CUBA

A highlight of the visit was the participation in the international meeting in solidarity with Cuba held on 2nd May at the Cuban Convention Centre. This was attended by Cuban president Miguel Diaz-Canel. The more than one thousand delegates in attendance expressed solidarity with the Cuban people demanding the US lift its inhumane blockade.

The meeting supported a formation of a network of Trade Unions against the Blockade. This is necessary to stop the aggressive US policy which is an attempt at genocide of the Cuban people. This may sound extreme but as an example, Cuban access to syringes during COVID was blocked by the US.

This was only overcome by solidarity actions around the world which mobilised to

take syringes to Cuba. These hardships are the daily experience of Cuban people including children who are sometimes denied access to life saving medical equipment because it has more than 10 per cent US parts (that includes screws!). Union solidarity has supported the children's hospital in Havana attempting to minimise the impact.

It is urgent to strengthen international solidarity united against the blockade. The fact that more people in the United States are getting involved in the solidarity movement with Cuba needs to include the US trade unions.

In actions like the Bridges of Love, initiated by Cuban American Carlos Lazo, activists around the world walk across bridges on the last Sunday each month to create awareness of the impact of the blockade on Cuban families living inside and outside the country. Members of the Communist Party of Australia actively participate in these events in solidarity with Cuba through the Australia-Cuba Friendship Societies.

PEOPLE ARE PROUD AND HAPPY

Despite the difficulties we found that the Cuban people continue to express their happiness and hope with music, dance, and politics. We spoke to people on the street who seem to go on with their normal lives and with creativity, saying "Hands and hearts for the Homeland."

They feel proud of their decision to remain independent to build a better society for all, they will never give up or be put on their knees. Cuba is after all more than the clichés of cigars, rum, and classic cars. It is a country that has many things to share with people around the world including Australia.

We thank the Cuban Workers' Central, Cuban Construction Union, and the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples, for their hospitality in hosting the Australian delegation during our visit to their country. 🇨🇺



Rebuild the vocational education system

Eliza Littleton*

After decades without a national plan, the creation of Jobs and Skills Australia sparks an ember of hope for the future of Vocational Education and Training (VET). The independent body will work across state, territory and federal governments, employers, business peaks, training institutions and unions to provide advice to the government on how to equip VET to meet skills and workforce needs.

The body certainly has its work cut out for it. Years of policy vandalism and fiscal mismanagement have eroded the capacity of the VET system to rise to the challenges ahead. Australia faces labour shortages in key VET-intensive industries, an imminent need to ramp up support and quality in care sectors and a challenge to navigate through the coming macroeconomic slowdown resulting from the Reserve Bank of Australia's rapid interest rate rises.

A strong VET system with TAFE as its anchor is vital to supporting a dynamic, innovative economy, and to building more inclusive labour markets. The system requires urgent rebuilding to ensure it can support new skills development, job creation, and opportunity – particularly for disadvantaged segments of the population. This makes it all the more important for the government to tackle these mounting problems – and soon.

The government's recent Jobs and Skills Summit set some broad goals to realise the full productive capacity of the workforce, with a plan for revitalising VET with TAFE at the heart. The government has committed to investing in additional Fee-Free TAFE places, incentivising and expanding apprentice and traineeships and establishing support institutions.

Now they need to repair the damage to accomplish these goals.

POLICY AND FUNDING FAILURES

Unfortunately, the TAFE and VET sector enters the present tumultuous period having already experienced a profound and multi-dimensional crisis from policy failures and fiscal mismanagement during recent decades. These problems remain entrenched. Understanding where policy went wrong will be critical to ensuring that TAFE plays its proper role in a comprehensive public policy-led national reconstruction effort.

Australia's vocational education system was once the source of well-established and dependable education-to-jobs pathways through apprenticeship and traineeship programs. However, the system underwent dramatic restructuring after 2012, with funding cuts to TAFE enforced by government through marketised funding models, expanded scope for private training providers, and delivery of large public subsidies to for-profit private providers in the guise of loans for students.

It's clear now that these experiments in marketising skill development have failed. A recent index comparing education systems and labour market outcomes across 80 countries indicated that Australia's VET system, once the envy of the world, had fallen to 20th place. For mid-level skills capability, including Certificate I-IV, the ranking was even lower, at 38th.

In the five consecutive years to 2020, VET funding had fallen 22 per cent in real terms. Reduced funding after 2012 was compounded by further expansion of the VET FEE-HELP regime, as restrictions on private providers eligible for Commonwealth student loans were lifted. States were required to subsidise training through private providers with uncapped fees, concurrently reducing direct support for the TAFE system.

The subsequent proliferation of poor-quality private programs and providers, combined with a deliberate policy of reduction of

capacity in the TAFE system, and scandals involving the misallocation of public subsidies, have deeply damaged once reliable vocational pathways.

Short-form, piecemeal units of study (including the current fad of "micro-credentials") have expanded, while accredited quality training has collapsed by over 500,000 enrolments since 2015. Shockingly, all VET enrolment growth over the last five years has been in non-accredited programs, which have grown by almost 70,000 enrolments since 2015. As a proportion of all enrolments by provider since 2015, the TAFE system has experienced the greatest losses.

APPRENTICESHIPS

Apprenticeship positions have been another casualty of the crisis in Australia's VET system – falling dramatically since 2012. Even though the government has focused on lifting the number of workers contractually defined as "apprentices," it has done little to guarantee genuine skills training is undertaken or completed. The number of apprentices and trainees in training plunged by almost half after 2012, to just 267,000 in 2020.

Reductions in funding for vocational education are both a cause and a consequence of the decline in participation in programs, contributing to a damaging cycle: reduced enrolments allow governments to further cut funding, which in turn further damages the quality of vocational training, and further reduces the incentive for students to enrol (undermining the confidence of employers in the whole system).

Continued collapse in enrolments and eight years of declining apprenticeship completions make it very clear: Australia's domestic skills pipeline is in disarray. This has implications for whether Australia will have the right workforce with the right skills for the future economy.

FOR THE FUTURE ECONOMY

TAFE and the VET system are critical to supporting millions of Australians to access training, facilitating crisis-accelerated employment transitions, and meeting skills shortages.

According to the National Skills Commission, 47 per cent of new jobs created and 64 per cent of total employment by 2026 will require qualifications from a VET provider, including Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Certificate I/II/III/IV courses. A strong VET system with TAFE as its anchor is essential for the economy and inclusive labour markets.

In 2022, 286 or 31 per cent of all defined occupations were identified as experiencing skill shortages, up from 153 or 19 per cent in 2021. By occupational grouping, shortages of technicians and trades workers were the most acute, with 47 per cent of all occupations in that category facing shortages – including electricians, carpenters, chefs, and motor mechanics.

While technicians and trades fields experienced the greatest number of occupational shortages, large feminised healthcare and services industries present the greatest skills demands measured by volume of workers. Of over one million new jobs generated in the next five years, the highest job growth will occur in health care and social assistance (increasing by 301,000 jobs).

TAFE'S ROLE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority has identified the critical demand for more and better-skilled graduates in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector. An additional 85,000 ECEC workers are expected to be required to raise Australia's system to the OECD average by 2030, and almost 260,000 new



Photo: Anna Pha.

ECEC workers would be required if we are to emulate the Nordic countries (doubling the sector's total employment).

At the moment, ECEC is underdeveloped relative to the needs of both working parents and employers, with the sector only providing care to one-third of children under five. This can be attributed to lack of access to quality and affordable care – but also the challenge of recruiting and retaining enough qualified staff for expanding the capacity of the sector.

Clearly, if Australia is going to expand its ECEC system in line with the needs of working parents and employers, to match the level of provision of other industrial countries, ramping up high-quality vocational education for ECEC workers must be an immediate priority.

The only institution with the capacity for this task is TAFE.

A massive investment in education, certification and regulation of the workforce will be essential to building a bigger, better ECEC system. But the benefits do not stop there. Investment in ECEC will boost labour supply, employment, incomes and gender equality, benefiting all Australians.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF TAFE

Despite years of significant funding pressure and policy mismanagement, the TAFE system continues to make a strong economic and social contribution to workers, businesses and governments every year. The combined economic and social benefits arising from both the direct activity of TAFE and the larger skilled higher-earning workforce that it creates are enormous.

TAFE generates billions of dollars in economic activity and revenue, including through employing staff and paying wages, the purchase of supplies and services, and boosted earnings and productivity of TAFE-trained workers. These benefits all inject additional spending power into the economy, including for governments in the form of higher tax revenues.

But TAFE is more than just an economic powerhouse. It also delivers wider social and fiscal benefits to the Australian community. A more educated, productive and employable workforce reduces government expenditure on health and welfare. And there are the other, harder-to-quantify benefits of greater

participation and social cohesion, resulting from the delivery of skills and education to people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

A recent report from the Centre for Future Work estimates the total social and economic benefits arising from TAFE were worth \$92.5 billion in 2019. This is a huge contribution, worth just over 4 per cent of GDP. The benefits TAFE delivers Australia far outweigh the public investment into the system. Governments currently spend around \$5.7 billion on TAFE per year. That's a small amount relative to the huge benefits the TAFE system delivers for the people in Australia.

TIME TO ACT

Revitalising the TAFE system to its full potential, as the central element of a broader strategy to rebuild a more coherent and effective VET system, is a vital prerequisite for Australia's post-COVID recovery and to meet future skills needs.

At a moment in Australia's economic history when further growth and job-creation is threatened by unprecedented uncertainty and risk, both at home and abroad, this positive anchoring function of high-quality, public vocational education is especially crucial.

Australia will not produce enough high-quality graduates in high-demand growth sectors like ECEC unless it plans for it now. But low VET sector funding, declining enrolments, plunging apprenticeship completions and the loss of the TAFE system's decades-old network of skills planning and coordination does not bode well for the future domestic skills system.

It is necessary for the government to move ahead quickly with the fundamental repair of the overall VET system in Australia. The rebuilding task must revitalise TAFE as the trusted, accountable and accessible anchor institutions of Australia's vocational training infrastructure.

Australia's VET system once provided well-established and dependable education-to-jobs pathways and, with the right policy interventions, it can again. Let's hope Jobs and Skills Australia is up to the task.

*Eliza Littleton is a senior economist at the Centre for Future Work at the Australia Institute. She has published research on higher education policy, gender, employment, and taxation.

The Australian TAFE Teacher ✨

Wildfires hit Canada

Sri Chilukuri

Nearly a million acres have been destroyed in wildfires across the western Canadian province of Alberta, with more than 30,000 people forced to evacuate, and oil production forced to a halt after a state of emergency was declared.

The province, which is the country's largest producer of crude oil and natural gas, has discontinued the production of the equivalent of 145,000 barrels of oil amidst the fires.

While recent rain showers have slowed the progression of several fires, the storms could also bring lightning to the area, which could spark more flames, according to Marc-André Parisien, a research scientist at the Canadian Forest Service. Additionally, more hot, dry conditions in the area could stoke and spread any remaining fires.

The wildfires started after an unusually dry spring in the area and a heatwave, which made an incendiary combination.

Spring always brings the start to wildfire season in Alberta, "but this year, it was more intense, because of the early warmth and how dry the spring has been," said Terri Lang, a meteorologist for Environment

and Climate Change Canada, a government agency.

Scientists point to a weather pattern known as "atmospheric blocking" as a major contributing factor to the fires, which at their height numbered 108. Atmospheric blocking happens when a mass of air in mountainous regions blocks weather patterns from passing through, trapping warmer air and exacerbating wildfire conditions.

The same weather pattern also contributed to hotter, drier conditions that led to the record-breaking heat preceding the 2019 Australian bushfires and the 2016 wildfires in Alberta that caused 80,000 people to evacuate.

"Atmospheric blocking is definitely what sets the table for some large wildfires, because it really dries up the fuels," said Parisien.

Climate change, along with poor land management practices, have helped fuel record-breaking wildfire seasons in recent years, including in areas that don't typically see them. It is under these drier, hotter conditions caused by climate change that turbulent wildfires are emerging. Though climate change defines the circumstances wherein atmospheric blocking occurs, it is difficult for researchers to connect atmospheric blocking itself to climate change due to its varied nature.



Photo: Cameron Strandberg – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0).

In recent years, a longer fire season has meant more opportunities for fuels in the forests and prairies to ignite. The frequency of high fire danger days has been steadily increasing over the past

half century, according to Marc-André Parisien.

The coming years are expected to bring more wildfires as climate change intensifies global warming and people continue to move into

fire-prone areas. Wildfires are estimated to increase by 50 per cent by 2100 according to a UN report released last year.

Grist.org

Ukraine: Push for negotiations

Roger McKenzie

Separately, China and a group of nations led by South Africa are pushing Russia and Ukraine to begin peace negotiations. The US and many Western European nations, meanwhile, continue pouring more arms into the conflict.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky have agreed to separate meetings with a delegation of leaders from six African countries to discuss a possible plan to end the war in Ukraine, South Africa's president said.

President Cyril Ramaphosa said he spoke with both leaders by phone with each agreeing to host an "African leaders' peace mission" in Moscow and Kiev respectively. Ramaphosa said, "Principal to our discussions are efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the devastating conflict in Ukraine."

The leaders of Zambia, Senegal, Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Egypt would make up the delegation along with himself, Ramaphosa said in a statement. The Russian and Ukrainian presidents both gave him the go-ahead to "commence the preparations," the South African president said.

Four of those six African countries – South Africa, Republic of Congo, Senegal, and Uganda – abstained from a United Nations vote last year on condemning Russia's invasion. Zambia and Egypt voted in favour of the motion.

Ramaphosa did not give a time frame or outline any parameters for the possible peace talks. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres had welcomed the initiative, President Ramaphosa said.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said, "We are in favour of any initiative that could lead us to a peace in line with the UN Charter, in line with international law, and in line with General Assembly resolutions."

The announcement came days after the US ambassador to South Africa accused the country of siding with Russia in the war in Ukraine and even providing weapons to help Moscow. Last week, Ambassador Reuben Brigety said that weapons and ammunition were loaded onto a Russian-flagged cargo ship at a South African naval base in December and taken to Russia.

South Africa has denied sending any weapons to Russia and has said the matter is under investigation.

The country has taken a non-aligned position on the conflict in Ukraine, though it has strong historical ties to Russia – the Soviet Union supported South Africa's now-ruling African National Congress party when it was seeking to overthrow the racist apartheid regime.

China is also engaged in efforts to secure peace in Ukraine and last week dispatched a senior envoy to Europe to build on the peace plan they put forward in February. The country said its envoy met Zelensky during talks held in Kiev.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said the

meeting came amid discussions between envoy Li Hui and Ukraine's foreign minister and other government officials.

"There is no remedy to resolve the crisis," Wang told reporters. "All parties should create favourable conditions and accumulate mutual trust for the political settlement."

The visit followed an earlier phone call between Zelensky and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Over two days, Li and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba discussed "ways to stop Russian aggression," the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Kuleba briefed Li, a former Chinese ambassador to Moscow, "about the principles of restoring a stable and just peace based on respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine."

Beijing released a proposed peace plan in February, but the United States, its allies, and Ukraine gave it a muted response, insisting Putin must withdraw his forces before any ceasefire or negotiations can take place.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry said Li will also visit Poland, France, and Germany, but did not give details of his schedule.

The Pentagon announced that an "accounting error" had miscalculated how much weaponry the US has sent to Ukraine thus far, meaning an additional \$3 billion is now available for exporting missiles and other hardware – in addition to the \$37 billion already spent.

People's World

Fukushima contamination dump

Scientists and environmentalists have raised concerns over Japan's plan to release 1.3 million metric tons of water contaminated during the Fukushima nuclear disaster back into the Pacific Ocean.

The "treated" wastewater, which has been stored in around 1,000 tanks ever since the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant was damaged during the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, is slated to be discharged this year.

The incident at the plant 12 years ago was the world's worst nuclear disaster since the 1986 Chernobyl accident and critics have questioned whether the water contaminated at the time can truly be safe.

"We don't really know," said Ferenc Dalnoki-Veress, an expert in low-concentration radioactivity measurements at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in Monterey, California, in an interview with *Science* magazine in January.

The wastewater was a by-product of the process to cool the plant's reactors, which melted down after it was affected by the earthquake and tsunami.

Large amounts of radiation were released at the time and the water was "severely contaminated," having come into "direct contact" with reactor fuel cores, Greenpeace East Asia said in a report on the incident.

Tokyo Electric Power, or

TEPCO, the plant's operator, has used a filtering technology called Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS) to try to purify the contaminated water.

The treatment was initially said to have been effective in removing most of the 62 "contaminants" in the water, except for tritium, an isotope that is hard to separate from water because it bonds with oxygen to form water.

For years, tritium, which emits a low level of radiation and only poses a risk to humans in large doses, was the focus of the clean-up effort. But then in 2018, TEPCO admitted 80 per cent of its "treated" water contained other dangerous radionuclides as well, including cesium, cobalt, lithium, and strontium,

which far exceeded safe levels for release back into the ocean.

In 2020, TEPCO reported that 72 per cent of the water in its tanks needed to be repurified.

Now, experts are asking whether the water in the tanks has really been fully cleansed.

Dalnoki-Veress said TEPCO has only analysed small amounts of water from a quarter of its tanks, and measured concentrations of tritium and a limited number of other radionuclides.

Ken Buesseler, a senior scientist at the United States' Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) said tritium could be the "least dangerous" of the radionuclides in the water.

"For things like cobalt-60,

cesium, and strontium isotopes, some fraction is much more readily to end up associating with the seafloor sediments than tritium," he said in an interview with *China Daily*.

"In other words, if you put it in the ocean, it doesn't just mix with water. It stays local and starts to build up. And you have biota (living organisms of a region or habitat), they get higher exposure."

He said cobalt-60, for example, if released, would accumulate on the seafloor, where clams and oysters would filter the mud and concentrate the cobalt in their bodies.

"If there is someone eating oysters every day, that's not good, right?" he said.

People's Voice

Pilots call strikes

Mark Gruenberg

CHICAGO: Stagnant pay, staff shortages, and erratic scheduling by their airline bosses forced thousands of pilots at two of the nation's four big passenger airlines – American and Southwest – to overwhelmingly authorise their union boards to call strikes. Pilots at a third, United, are flying in that direction. Pilots at one big freight carrier, Fed Ex, authorised a strike, too.

At least US pilots have yet to be forced to walk. Instead, they're asking the National Mediation Board, which governs airline worker-boss relations, to arrange mediation and arbitration and to start the mandated 60-day clock ticking towards actual strikes, if no contracts are reached.

By contrast, their 1800 colleagues at Calgary-based NatWest, Canada's #2 airline, gave officials their legally mandatory 72-hour notice to strike. They'll walk starting at 3 am Pacific Time on 19th May. NatWest grounded its planes 18th May.

The reasons and the scenario involving the thousands of US pilots are almost identical to those which brought the 115,000 US freight rail workers, represented by 14 unions, to the brink of a forced national strike last November.

Like the railroaders, the pilots face low-ball pay replies from the air carriers at a time of rising company profits: \$9.9 billion combined last year in North America and an estimated \$11.4 billion this year, the International Air Transport Association says.

Like the railroaders, the pilots want to share in the largesse. Their target: Matching or exceeding, over four years, the 34 per cent raise their 15,000 colleagues at the other big US carrier, Delta, got last year. There were scheduling improvements at Delta, too. Pilots are Delta's only unionised workers.

Pilots, like railroaders, also cope with erratic scheduling, and watch overworked and underpaid colleagues leave the profession. They too find the carriers putting profits before people, even the people who fly the planes. That, too, is what freight railroads have done to their workers since 2014.

Pilots and railroaders are subject to the same federal law, the 1925 Railway Labor Act. It's enforced by the same agency, the National Mediation Board. Pilots face the same legal delays in their right to strike and could see Congress impose contracts, too.

Here's the situation at each airline:

United: The 15,000 pilots for the Chicago-based carrier took their campaign to the streets weeks ago, ringing the Sears (Willis) Tower, the site of United's headquarters, just east of the Chicago River in a public protest. They haven't had a raise in four years. They also picketed nationwide on 12th May. "United pilots will always be there for our customers," said Captain Garth Thompson, United council chair for their union, the Airline Pilots Association (ALPA).

"Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about management, who seems to think that a last-minute cancellation of a pilot's scheduled day off, or abrupt trip reassignments that extend into planned days off is acceptable for a pilot's family. ... Pilots want the company and the public to know the bold 'United Next' growth plans cannot work without an updated pilot contract." There are at least 100 pilot vacancies, he says.

Southwest: The Dallas-based airline just celebrated its 50th anniversary and its 10,000 pilots joined in – and on 12th May authorised a strike by a 99 per cent to 1 per cent margin in a 98 per cent turnout.

"You share SWAPA's [Southwest Airlines Pilots Association] dissatisfaction with the current Southwest leadership and their aimless trajectory," SWAPA President Captain Casey Murray wrote to his colleagues after the vote. He noted 124 pilots have left Southwest this year alone, for other airlines or other professions, in disgust. Most of them are younger. Murray predicted that unless bosses change course and put people before profits, passengers would soon follow those pilots out the door.

SWAPA published a list of the departees' comments on its website, and they were scathing. "Making mistakes is how we learn, but repeating the same ones over and over" as Southwest's current managers have, unlike its legendary founder, "is simply unforgivable," Murray wrote.

American: In early May, its 15,000 pilots voted 99 per cent to 1 per cent in a 96 per cent turnout to authorize a strike. Allied Pilots Association President Captain Ed Sicher told Miami's WTVJ-TV bargaining has dragged on for more than four years. "We're hoping they're going to come to the table and look at these win-win solutions we've put on to get guys to go to work – to incentivise them flying on days off, not force them," Sicher said.

Added spokesman Ed Tyjer in a *NewsNation* interview: "Our ideas will definitely do something to repair and bolster the summer reliability, but management right now is just not seeing that."

Fed Ex: Pilots will picket at its main air hub, in Memphis, Tennessee, on 24th May, following a 99 per cent to 1 per cent strike authorisation vote in a 97 per cent turnout. That airline, too, celebrated its 50th anniversary with its pilots saying its original philosophy of people-service-profits has flipped to put the profits first.

The strike authorisation vote "sent an undeniable message to flight management that we are ready to go the distance up to and including exercising our rights to self-help under the Railway Labor Act (RLA) to secure a contract that reflects the value we bring," said ALPA FedEx Council President Chris Norman. Talks have been going on for two years to replace a contract signed in 2015. FedEx has 5500 pilots, most of them in the US.

Negotiating committee chair Captain Pat May told council colleagues on 18th April, in a video now on YouTube. "Management has thrown a lot of roadblocks in front of us, but we're still on our way to our goals ... If the company shows up at the table at any time and says 'We're ready to get the deal done,' that's when we move to the final stages of negotiation. That's when we get to the end game."

NatWest (Canada): The 1800 pilots, also represented by ALPA, plan to strike at Canada's #2 airline at 3 am 19th May. Pilots at Canada's #1 carrier, Air Canada, sent a message of solidarity. Their independent union just merged into ALPA the week before the NatWest vote.

People's World ✪



Global Briefs

JAPAN: Dozens of anti-nuclear activists protested to demand Japan scrap its plans to dump radioactive waste water from the Fukushima nuclear plant into the ocean (see page 8). The tsunami and earthquake on 20th March 2011 damaged the Fukushima Daiichi plant's cooling systems, damaged three nuclear reactors, causing their cooling water to become highly radioactive and leak into the basement of the buildings. Japanese officials insist that the water is safe to discharge into the ocean and that it will be further diluted there, making it harmless. However, some scientists point out that the impact of long-term low-dose exposure to tritium and other radionuclides on the environment and people is still unknown and the release should be at least delayed. "The Pacific Ocean does not belong to Japan. It belongs to all living things in the ocean and everyone who depends on it for their livelihoods," a Korean Radiation Watch coordinator said.

CUBA: Russia is to resume regular flights to Cuba as of 1st July 2023. The Russian deputy prime minister said that "Cuba is Russia's key partner in Central America, and it is absolutely logical for economic relations to expand in all spheres." Currently the travel from Russia to Cuba is conducted by charter flights. There will be two regular flights a week by Rossiya Airlines, which is part of Aeroflot group. The move is expected to encourage the tourist flow from Russia and it is expected to exceed 150,000. The news comes within the framework of the Cuba-Russia Business Economic Forum held in Havana. The two countries have also confirmed agreements for the credit sphere, supplies of wheat, oil and its derivatives, among others.

HUNGARY: Hungary is demanding a personal explanation from the EU president Ursula von der Leyen concerning reports of a possible interruption of oil supply from Russia to the EU via the Druzhba (Friendship) pipeline. International treaties guarantee Hungary transit oil supplies from Ukraine. Any attempt to disrupt the energy supply to the country is an infringement on the country's sovereignty. "We have received no explanations concerning this from Kiev, I think this is an issue of such importance that the European Commission's president should personally present explanations as energy security is a question of sovereignty," the Hungarian Foreign Minister said.

NORTHERN IRELAND: Northern Ireland voters went to the polls on 18th May 2023 to elect new local councils. For the first time Sinn Fein won a majority of seats in the local government. Sinn Fein won 30.9 per cent of the vote, which is an increase of 7.7 percentage points from the 2019 elections. The number of seats won rose from 106 to 144. Thus, the supporters of unification with Ireland have a majority in both local councils and the regional parliament.



Photo: pxfuel.com

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The right to protest

Politics in the Pub – Local Hotel, South Fremantle

Richard Titelius

As capitalism and its extractivist resource corporations continue exploiting the last portions of carbon from this earth and putting it into the atmosphere to keep their profit making turning over, there is a growing public awareness that this cannot continue if we wish to live on a habitable planet with a sustainable future for all.

Nowhere in Australia is the subject of this discourse more on show than in the Western Australian capital of Perth whose skyline is dotted with the skyscrapers of mining and energy corporations. On 28th April one of them, Woodside Energy, held its Annual General Meeting at the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The meeting drew protesters both inside and outside the venue. Woodside CEO Meg O’Neill described the annual protests as “frustrating” as they kept many of their retail shareholders from attending.

Climate change activists see Woodside in a different light. Woodside is the proponent of one of the largest potential emitters of carbon emissions in the Scarborough gas field off the north west coast of Australia. Its opponents rightly see projects like this and others as a threat to life on this planet.

Federal and State governments in Australia are also lining up behind these carbon emission polluting industries by making it more difficult to protest through anti-democratic laws. Yet, as the carbon energy dinosaurs are heating up our planet, the fight to resist their unsustainable and life-threatening industries is also gaining momentum.

On 2nd May at the Local Hotel in South Fremantle, Greens Member of the Legislative Council, Brad Pettitt held a Politics in the



Speakers from left to right: Josie Alec, Sophie McNeill, Violet Coco, Joana Partyka.

Pub on the Right to Protest which was attended by over 150 people. Pettitt opened the proceedings by declaring we have a climate emergency, we need to act now in a country and especially in a state where we continue to dig up and extract fossil fuels.

“We are cracking down on protest and making it more difficult to challenge these extractionist activities.”

The four speakers were headed by Sydney Harbour Bridge traffic stopper, Violet Coco, Josie Alec, Kuruma Marthudunera traditional custodian and member of Saving our Songlines from Karratha, Sophie McNeill of Human Rights Watch and Joana Partyka, artist and environmental activist who had recently sprayed the Woodside Energy logo across the Perspex covering the Frederick McCubbin 1889

painting, “Down on his luck,” being exhibited at the WA Art Gallery.

Violet Coco pointed out that it was as a consequence of bipartisanism between the government and the Coalition that this country now has some of the most restrictive protest laws in this country.

She warned that the resources transnationals run the country, where blocking traffic with a truck for 25 minutes can lead you to be sentenced for a year in imprisonment. “We are on the verge of civilisation collapsing and we are in the end game,” added Coco

Josie Alec is protesting the removal of Aboriginal rock art from the Burrup Peninsular “which contains the law of her ancestors on how life should be lived. The laws are about water, land management, family, animals, trees, and everything that is us.” Alec’s

protests are aimed at the construction of the Perdaman urea plant using natural gas from Woodside Energy’s Scarborough gas project to make urea fertiliser.

Sophie Mc Neill began her presentation by noting with concern that 120 climate protesters have been imprisoned in Australia in the last two years. To underscore the lack of commitment to meaningful change, COP 26 held in Glasgow, Scotland/UK in December 2021, was the last UN climate conference where protest and dissent was allowed.

The last speaker was Joana Partyka who as a consequence of her WA Art Gallery protest had her home raided by the police, where they seized her devices and asked her for her access codes which she refused.

Partyka’s fight with the legal

authorities is ongoing. Partyka said that we should fight for the right to protest.

In this way said Violet Coco, we turn climate anxiety into climate action.

The Communist Party of Australia supports the militancy of the climate activists to bring about a heightened consciousness of the climate emergency which all of us face. The capitalist system, as the iconic climate activist Greta Thunberg noted, is unsustainable and nothing the system or status quo and its apologists can say can make it sustainable.

That is why we need a change away from the capitalist system based on exploitation and theft, to a system based on satisfying people’s needs and the flourishing of humanity. ✪

Queensland’s forensic debacle

Graham Holton

On 16th May 2023, the Queensland Health Minister, Yvette D’Ath, announced that Queensland’s Health Forensic and Scientific Services (QFSS) have a backlog of more than 10,000 cases awaiting DNA testing, placing the QFSS under “incredible pressure.” Two days later Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk announced an urgent cabinet reshuffle, with Shannon Fentiman taking over the health portfolio and D’Ath returning to her attorney-general position.

The cabinet changes in key ministerial positions are an attempt to deal with the government’s bungling of youth crime, housing, and health issues.

Queensland’s forensic testing backlog has created a “debacle” that places increased pressure on the judicial system. A damning inquiry into the state’s forensic testing regime at QFSS, found that many forensic DNA samples, the genetic material such as blood and skin left at the crime scene, went untested and the laboratory incorrectly ruled other samples as “insufficient.”

Health Minister D’Ath said, “We do have a backlog in relation to just the normal evidence that comes through the doors of forensic services every week. That is due to

a range of reasons including shortage of the scientists but also because we did lose staff through the commission of inquiry and had to rebuild our processes.”

In December 2022, following a four-month public inquiry by Former judge Walter Sofronoff KC, thousands of serious criminal cases had to be reviewed. For years the QFSS had failed to properly test DNA evidence, due to “grave maladministration involving dishonesty.” The public hearings into the QFSS revealed a “toxic” workplace culture with “divided allegiances” and the “complete failure” of management to take responsibility. “The methods, systems and processes used at the forensic DNA laboratory do not, in many ways, measure up to best practice.”

Initial problems with the QFSS were first revealed a decade ago, after a police investigation into the stabbing death of Shandee Blackburn in Mackay. The blood samples taken at the scene, came back as having “no DNA evidence” and the alleged murderer was acquitted. In late 2021, following adverse publicity against the Forensic Lab, the Queensland Premier and the Health Minister were forced to address the issues. The Inquiry revealed that the Managing Scientist, Cathie Allen, had allegedly misled her immediate supervisor and senior police. In May 2022 the Queensland Police Service

(QPS) delivered a written submission to the Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce, asserting their lack of confidence in the QFSS dealing with sexual assault cases.

In September 2022, Dr Bruce Budowle, former head of the FBI’s forensic unit, gave evidence to the Commission of Inquiry into the QFSS. The unusually high testing threshold adopted by the laboratory in 2018 was designed to save money and improve efficiency, but resulted in thousands of crime scene samples not being tested. Dr Budowle said the QPS approved the Queensland Health options paper without comprehending the medical terms used.

Issues with underfunding have, “led to outcomes which prioritised some QPS priorities (such as turnaround times) over broader criminal justice system priorities such as obtaining all forensic evidence relevant to a case, and explaining clearly the uncertainties and caveats that should properly be placed on results reported by the laboratory.”

The failures are down to the laboratory being an appendage of the Department of Health, mismanagement and dishonesty by senior managers, and a culture which discouraged open discussion of scientific disagreements.

In the case of retrials resulting from botched DNA results, Queensland prohibits double jeopardy in successive prosecutions

for the same offence, with the exception of murder and tainted acquittals. The ruling against double jeopardy within Australia’s criminal justice system is recognised by s34 of the *Human Rights Act 2019* (Queensland), which provides: “A person must not be punished more than once for an offence in relation to which the person has already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with law.”

The only exceptions are in the case of murder, when “fresh and compelling evidence” is uncovered, and tainted acquittals. These exceptions, introduced in the Amendment to the Double Jeopardy Bill 2007 of Section 678B of the Criminal Code 1899 (Queensland), ensure the courts can retry, “a person acquitted of murder or a lesser offence to be retried for murder if there is fresh and compelling evidence of guilt.”

The Queensland government has announced it will provide \$95 million to establish a new framework to set up reforms to DNA and forensic services. Premier Palaszczuk said the government would take steps to address the recommendations handed down by the Commissioner in his final report. The Premier promised to “get to the bottom of issues surrounding DNA testing in Queensland.” ✪

Angela Davis and the importance of Malcolm X today

Graham Holton

On 19th May 2023, Amy Goodman from *Democracy Now!* interviewed Angela Davis, author, feminist political activist and distinguished academic to mark Malcolm X's birth on 19th May 1925. Why is Malcolm X's legacy so enduring?

Davis says that Malcolm X understood that "ideology's role is precisely to make the conditions of our lives appear to be normal. And as a matter of fact, the more normal something appears to be, the more likely it is to be produced in and through ideology."

She added, "We're on the verge of substantial shifts in the way people think about race and racism. And those who want to prevent these shifts from happening are frantically trying to turn back the clock. At least 36 states have adopted or introduced laws that impede educational projects about race and racism." The vision of black activists had to be broader. "It had to move, Malcolm said, across the borders of nation-states. It had to be transnational. It had to be international. The framework that Malcolm urged us to use was human rights."

Professor Davis is a long-time member of the Communist Party USA and a founding member of the Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism. The Communist Party has a long history of supporting the class struggle of African Americans, and was the only left-wing party to espouse the idea of complete racial equality.

This attracted a significant black constituency, but this was also used during the Red Scare and by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to attack and discredit the Civil Rights Movement.

In the USA, Britain, and South Africa, X is remembered as a human rights activist, who helped end racial segregation in the USA. He advocated Black empowerment and the promotion of Islam within the Black community. Unlike Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X advocated that black people should protect themselves "by any means necessary," against violence, including that instigated by the white police force.

Born Malcolm Little he changed his surname to "X," as "Little" was a slave-owner's name. After his pilgrimage to Mecca, he became a hajj, and changed his name to el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz.

The FBI opened a file on Malcolm X in 1950, when he wrote to President Truman opposing the Korean War (1950-1953), stating that he was a communist. On 1st December 1963, when asked to comment on the assassination of John F Kennedy, Malcolm said that it was a case of the "chickens coming home to roost," in reference to Kennedy's policies towards Cuba, Guatemala, and Indo-China.

On 2nd July 1964, the Civil Rights Act bill was signed into law by President Johnson, making it illegal to separate people in public places by race or to discriminate against anyone based on their race, colour, religion, gender, or national origin. Malcolm met with Martin

Luther King Jr. on 26th March 1964, during the Senate debates regarding the Civil Rights Act. He later addressed public meetings of the US Socialist Workers Party at their Militant Labor Forum in New York City. In an interview in *The Egyptian Gazette* Malcolm X said he wanted to "take the racist American government before the World Court and have the racists in it exposed and condemned as the criminals that they are." On 21st February 1964, while addressing the Organization of Afro-American Unity in Manhattan, he was assassinated, and died from 21 gunshot wounds.

Thomas Hayer, Norman Butler and Thomas Johnson were convicted of his murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. Butler and Johnson had alibis and no physical evidence linked them to the crime. The New York City Police Department, the FBI and the CIA were accused of a massive cover-up. In 2021, Butler and Johnson were exonerated of the murder after it was revealed that the FBI and the NYPD had withheld key evidence during their trial.

On 21st February 2023 the Civil Rights attorney, Ben Crump, and two of Malcolm X's daughters, filed a wrongful death lawsuit for US\$100 million against the NYPD, FBI, and the CIA. Ilyasah Shabazz, the co-administrator of the estate, said that these agencies had concealed evidence from the accused who were "wrongfully convicted for the assassination of Malcolm X." The fight for racial justice continues in the USA. ✪



Malcolm X. Photo: Public domain.



Skye Dannaher

On Tuesday 11th April, the Western Australian branch of the Australian Nursing Federation was compared to Hitler at an Industrial Relations Commission hearing, simply because they refused to follow an unjust order that disallowed them from going on strike. While not seeking the previously threatened deregistration of the union, this was a disgusting attack on a union largely composed of women and queer people, reflecting the demographics of the industry.

This mirrors attacks on workers in other industries dominated by women and queer people, such as early childhood education and teaching, with politicians and the media claiming that the burden on the rest of society is too high for the workers to strike. They'll say that striking teachers and early childhood educators care more about money than the children in order to undermine the public's view of their plight.

But why are the media and politicians able to play up this idea that it's selfish for workers in these industries to demand better pay and working conditions so that they can live comfortably and care for people as best as possible? I believe that it's at least partially because these industries are viewed as an extension of the unpaid, often thankless domestic labour that is seen as the duty of women and queer people under capitalism. Nurses, who do the majority of work tending to patients, making sure that they're comfortable and healthy, and early childhood educators and teachers, who raise our children just as much as their families do, are either consciously or subconsciously seen as simply fulfilling the roles that they were born into.

This further reinforces the idea that it is women and queer people's duty to do unpaid domestic labour for cisgender* men. People see that women and queer people are expected to carry out thankless caring roles in their work life and extend that attitude to the home. Cisgender men see how they are cared for by their nurses and how they were raised by their teachers and expect women and queer people to do the same labour, that was paid, at home for free.

The mutually reinforcing nature of labour in caring industries being seen as an extension of domestic labour and that labour being devalued by the devaluation of the labour done in caring industries means that this exploitation of women's needs to be challenged on two fronts: the home and the workplace.

On the home front, we need education and cultural change. We must be teaching children in schools both to value domestic labour and that domestic labour is not the realm of women and queer people but of all people. We must also institute programs that reshape the public's view of domestic labour, through literature and art that upholds a progressive view of domestic labour.

In the workplace, we must combat the idea that workers in caring industries are selfish for demanding better compensation and conditions. This can only be done by ensuring that the voices of workers are heard through continued strikes and union campaigns.

*Cisgender: someone whose gender identity corresponds with the sex they were assigned at birth.

G7 in Hiroshima history

Leaders of the Group of Seven rich nations were met with peace demonstrations as they gathered in the Japanese city of Hiroshima on 19th May. Protesters stressed the irony of a meeting to discuss pumping more military hardware into Ukraine in the place where the first atomic bomb was dropped in 1945.

The United States, the only country to have used the atomic bomb, killed 140,000 people in Hiroshima on 6th August before, three days later, killing another 70,000 at Nagasaki.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida reportedly chose the city in part to highlight his country's nuclear non-proliferation efforts.

Japan is part of the United States "nuclear umbrella" and has been rapidly expanding its military as the US ramps up its cold war against China. But ahead of

the summit there was the first of a series of planned peace demonstrations during the meeting.

Sueichi Kido, an 83-year-old "hibakusha" or survivor of the Nagasaki explosion, says he is sceptical about the prospects of making real disarmament progress.

"But because they are meeting in Hiroshima I do have a sliver of hope that they will have positive talks and make a tiny step toward nuclear disarmament," Mr Kido said. "I earnestly want the leaders to have a firm understanding of what the atomic bombs did to human beings. ... Many people think of the mushroom clouds, but they often don't know what happened to the people under them."

Prime Minister Kishida has been criticised by survivors for his plans to double Japan's defence budget in the next five years.

Morning Star ✪

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Scotland

Five months of industrial action

Graham Holton

While the nightly news broadcasts cover the strikes and violent clashes in France, the five months of continuing union industrial actions across Scotland have gone largely unreported. There have been strike actions in universities, hospitals, schools, civil services, fire services, airports, railways, petroleum installations, postal services, and lighthouses. Union solidarity continues in support of better pay, redundancy reduction, and to stop the slide into increased poverty.

On 1st April UK-wide strikes involved 40,000 workers from Network Rail and 14 other train operators over ongoing pay and working conditions disputes. The Network Rail, representing 20,000 signallers and maintenance workers, and the Rail Delivery Group (RDG) representing 20,000 workers at 14 train companies, ensure safety on the railways.

The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF), and the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT), announced continuing strike action into June. RMT general secretary, Mick Lynch, said that another six months of strikes is "a possibility." The industrial action is for a 9 per cent pay rise over two years. As inflation is above 10 percent, it means the offer represents a pay cut in real terms.

On 25th April unions took industrial action against government "failure" at the Northern Lighthouse Board, in a pay dispute and growing concerns over safety at sea. The workers operate Scotland's lighthouses, beacons and buoys ensuring vessels and ships safety. Over 90 per cent of Unite members (able seamen, base assistants, cooks, and technicians) supported the strike action.

Also in April, Scotland's teachers in the Educational Institute Scotland (EIS) union held rolling strikes over pay disputes. The general secretary, Andrea Bradley, said that "the offer of a 9 per cent is a real-terms pay cut" will "never be acceptable," while the cost of living continues to soar." The University and College Union's (UCU) held strikes across fifteen Scottish universities, over pay, working conditions and pensions. Jo Grady, the UCU general secretary, said, "The university sector in the UK has over £40 billion sitting in reserves."

On 15th March the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) held a 24-hour strike, the same day that the Chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, unveiled his Spring Budget.



It continued on from the 1st February strike of 21 Scottish departments. PCS represents the Education Scotland, Transport Scotland and the National Galleries of Scotland. The PCS demands improved job security, pensions, improved redundancy terms, and a 10 per cent pay rise.

On 3rd March, Petrofac workers on BP offshore installations in the North Sea held a 48-hour strike for increased pay and improved conditions. The dispute comes after shift rotation negotiations failed. BP announced that its profits had doubled to £23 billion in 2022.

In February, Unite workers including security staff, baggage handlers, ground crew at all eleven Highlands and Islands Airport Ltd (HIAL) airports went on strike for better pay and conditions. Unite general secretary, Sharon Graham, said "this is entirely the fault of airport management and the Scottish government."

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN), Royal College of Midwifery (RCM), and General Trade Union (GMB) unions have been negotiating a pay rise. Pat Cullen, the

RCN general secretary, said, "the First Minister is in no doubt that we will take strike action if the proposals being outlined do not deliver a significant improvement by the end of February."

NHS strikes in Scotland were averted after the unions' members voted to accept the Scottish government's pay offer. The unions called for the Scottish government to "live up" to its promise to reform the Agenda for Change and make nursing a career of choice once again.

In February, thousands of workers joined the UK's biggest day of industrial action in a decade. The industrial disputes were sparked by pay failing to keep up with soaring inflation rates and the cost-of-living crisis. Trade unions are angry at the UK government's plans to limit the right to strike of workers in certain key sectors.

The strike by postal workers, the Communication Workers Union (CWU), was called off after the Royal Mail raised a legal challenge. The CWU attacked laws that are "heavily weighted against working people." The union will return to negotiations with

Royal Mail, but if talks fail, "we will significantly step up the programme of strike action."

A strike by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) was postponed after Scottish Fire and Rescue Service employers increased their pay offer to 7 per cent, backdated to 1st July 2022, and a further 5 per cent increase from 1st July 2023. The general secretary, Matt Wrack, said this still amounts to an effective "pay cut."

Scotland's economy is larger than that of Italy, New Zealand, or South Korea. Yet despite this wealth, according to the *Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2017-20* report, there are 650,000 working-age adults in poverty after housing costs; 400,000 working-age adults in relative poverty; and 150,000 pensioners also living in relative poverty.

Income and wealth inequalities are fundamental causes of health inequalities, with mortality rates being twice as high in poor areas compared to wealthier ones. In Scotland the capitalist system has failed the most vulnerable – the poor it has created. ✪

Call for anti-racist action

Scotland's Trade Union Council has demanded "all-out opposition to neo-Nazis throughout Scotland" as it called on the nation's trade unionists and anti-racists to rally.

Supported by author Irvine Welsh, comedian Frankie Boyle and musician Eddie Reader, the demonstration seeks to bolster work done to fight the fascists targeting of 200 refugees housed at the town's

Muthu Glasgow River Hotel since February.

Racist Patriotic Alternative and its Homeland splinter have worked to inflame tensions through misinformation and fear-mongering.

But from community councils to weekly demonstrations outside the hotel itself, they have been countered at every turn by the local Paisley and District TUC and the Young Communist League, amid

complete silence from the British government.

STUC general secretary Roz Foyer said, "The UK government's policy on refugees is a disgrace.

"The Erskine community and communities across Scotland are subject to a cost-of-living crisis and cuts to vital services.

"It is government not refugees who bear the responsibility for that.

"The far right and neo-Nazi

thugs like Homeland will be left in no doubt that, when we mobilise in all out opposition, our communities utterly oppose their racist and divisive attitudes.

"At this Sunday's rally we're sending a clear message that Scotland welcomes those fleeing war and persecution; that we can be a safe haven for those in their hour of need when they need it most.

"Time and time again, the trade

union movement and anti-racist groups like Stand Up to Racism have driven out the poison of fascism from our communities.

"This weekend will be no different and we would appeal to anyone who shares in that goal to rally."

There will be a collection of food and clothing for local foodbanks on the day.

Morning Star ✪



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