



Energy prices

The market fails again

Floyd Kermode

If you have a birthday coming up in July this year, there's one present you'll be getting whether you asked for it or not – higher energy prices. The Default Energy Price will go up by around 25 per cent in the eastern states of Australia, from South Australia up to South East Queensland. There are some small differences, but for households, that's between 21.4 per cent in NSW, and 25 per cent in Victoria, with similar increases for small businesses.

Things are slightly better in Tasmania, where under the last Liberal government in the country, prices are forecast to go up by 12 per cent. Added to this is the fact that the Default Energy Price only applies to “standing offers.” That means what the energy company can offer you if you haven't already signed up with them or found a better price by searching the market. Power companies are free to charge more than that if you're already on one of their schemes. As the Australian Energy Regulator carefully explains, bills will vary according to how much electricity you use, where you live, and who your power company is.

So, power prices are going up. What's going on?

For most of the country, the energy system is a market, run by the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO), and “policed” by the Australian Energy Regulator (AER). Clare Savage is the AER chair, and she's very upfront about what the regulator's priorities are: “We have to make sure retailers can cover their costs.” That's really clear. Not much else about Australia's energy system is.

None of this is how the world has to be. The energy market started in 1998. The AER was set up in 2005. The AEMO was created in 2009. The retailers Clare Savage is so anxious to look after used to be publicly owned utilities. Privatisation gave a short-term blast of cash into state government coffers, and without building any more power generation, unleashed a raft of ticket-clipping middlemen into the power market. Dodgy power companies popped up overnight and door-knocked a lot of consumers into paying more than they had to, with a raft of deliberately complex plans.

MARKET FAILURE

In the classic image of the market, the consumer gets to walk around a small market comparing products, like meat or candles. Businesses compete by making better and or cheaper meat or candles than the store next door. What this rosy neoliberal image overlooks is that businesses can also compete by making it next to impossible to compare the different products. That's why we have



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information boxes on the side of cereal packets that make shoppers feel like they're back in high school chemistry classes, phone plans that baffle even seasoned lawyers, and energy plans that can't be compared with the best will in the world.

There have been timid reforms, because the market is sacred. So it is that the Victorian Labor Party has started a website to help consumers choose the best plan.

That same Victorian government promised to bring back the State Electricity Commission (SEC). They've done it, kind of. The old State Electricity Commission was responsible for all the electricity produced in the state. The new SEC will be another power company among many, competing with other companies to buy renewable power from the growing supply of rooftop solar power.

That may well turn out to be a positive step, but compared to the stirring slogan “We're bringing back the SEC” it's not the radical change Victorian voters were promised.

Similarly, the default market offer is supposed to make it easier for consumers to compare plans. That's “easier,” not easy. It's not in the interests of competing power suppliers for consumers to make easy comparisons, so the power companies do their

level best to muddy the waters with a myriad of plans and offers.

Clare Savage's advice as she did media interviews about the price hikes, was to “shop around,” and to see if you're eligible for concessions.

PIECEMEAL REFORMS

So, prices are capped, in a way, but the capped prices are going up by almost a quarter. We also have the cold comfort that prices could be higher if things were different. The Albanese government is congratulating itself on an intervention into the market last December which temporarily imposed caps on bills and offered low and middle income earners a rebate on power bills.

Meanwhile, the Australian Energy Regulator, anxious to look after the retailers, doesn't seem to want to impose price caps. Monash University Professor Ariel Liebman is suggesting further price caps, as the competition for retail prices “is really not serving Australians very well.”

One culprit is outages at fossil fuel generators and high fossil fuel prices. These might have less of an impact if the whole nation had the policy of reserving gas supplies for domestic consumption.

Massive investment in renewables would certainly have left us less at the mercy of

aging coal-powered generators, but the country which can afford to give more than \$250 billion in tax cuts to people who are already wealthy, and \$368 billion to submarine manufacturers, cannot spare anywhere near as much for expanding renewables.

PUBLIC OWNERSHIP

We don't have to use our imagination to see how things could be different. We could remember back before 1998 when a Liberal government set up the market. Australians didn't have to do all the legwork so they could be rewarded for “shopping around.” They just paid for the power, and if the prices were too high, the government couldn't hide behind a maze of retailers and associated bureaucracy.

We could also look at the present, to Western Australia. WA did not sell off its power generator. The state also reserves a portion of gas produced for domestic consumption. Consequently, West Australia has the most stable power prices in the country, and has been largely spared the “bill shock” that has plagued the rest of the country.

Australia's energy is a public good. It needs to be fully publicly owned, and properly funded. ✪

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Guardian

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The Voice in context

In 2007, Operation Outreach, involving 600 Australian Army soldiers was launched against Indigenous communities to implement the Howard Coalition government's Northern Territory Intervention policy. The Intervention was reinforced by the Rudd and Gillard Labor Governments and the Abbott Coalition government. It was extended for a further ten years under the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012.

The Intervention policy's regressive features included:

- imposition of government leases on Indigenous land;
- mandating that 50 per cent of Indigenous peoples' welfare income be spent on items and in stores approved by the government;
- further welfare restrictions for Indigenous families who are deemed to not be adequately looking after their children;
- additional, intrusive police powers "to enforce restrictions on alcohol and pornography";
- restrictions on the consideration of customary laws and cultures in criminal court processes.

The changing of Indigenous communal title, previously protected under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976, to leasehold was a significant attack on Indigenous land title and land rights.

The Intervention, with the aid of the Northern Territory government, attempted to move Indigenous community-run councils into bureaucratic structures and to de-fund smaller Indigenous communities, with the aim of disempowering them.

The underlying purpose of the Intervention was to free up indigenous lands for exploitation by the mining companies. This is shown for instance by the use of Indigenous land at Muckaty in the Northern Territory for nuclear waste disposal and the rapid increase in mining leases in mineral rich areas. The government relaxed the restriction of uranium sales overseas, prompting a surge in mining company interest in gaining access to Indigenous lands.

The method used by the Intervention is to gain public support by fomenting hostility against Indigenous peoples. These slurs were backed by a revival of the demand that Indigenous people assimilate into white society. It incorporated the authoritarian attitude that "We will tell you how to spend your money" and "We will tell you how to raise your children – and if you don't comply with our rules, we will take the children from you."

The Intervention was an extreme form of racism contrived for the purpose of satisfying the profit hungry mining companies.

The struggle of Indigenous people against the mining companies draws them into a parallel struggle – that of the working class who are subjected to exploitation by the mining companies and their ilk. It is the same enemy, with the same pro-capitalist government doing their bidding.

This struggle is not unique to the Northern Territory but affects Indigenous people across Australia who are subjected to racist policies and practices.

There is a compelling need for both the Indigenous people and the working class to recognise the common enemy and to forge ties of understanding and solidarity in the struggles that lie ahead.

The Communist Party of Australia is committed to the following policies:

Recognition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original occupiers and owners of Australian territory and their right to own and control their land and resources on the basis of communal and inalienable title.

Provision of basic services to Indigenous communities, including housing, health services, water and education and training with communities having a say and ownership in their provision.

The restoration of the Community Development and Employment Program (CDEP) program to all Indigenous communities that request it.

The establishment of a genuinely representative national Aboriginal advisory body to be elected by registered Aboriginal voters at the same time as each Federal election.

The ongoing campaign for the restoration of unpaid wages to Aboriginal peoples as a result of previous policies.

The establishment of a Federal Ombudsman with sole responsibility for investigating complaints by Indigenous people of their treatment by the criminal justice system of the states, territories and Australian governments.

Introduction of Indigenous languages as part of the curriculum in all primary schools.

Implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the Bringing Them Home Report.

The CPA calls for a Yes vote on the Indigenous Voice to Parliament.

Tooth and nail

The National Tertiary Education Union has expressed serious concerns the University of Newcastle is preparing to game new workplace laws to drive down pay and conditions.

The University of Newcastle has applied for the Fair Work Commission to deal with a bargaining dispute after NTEU members rejected management's settlement offer.

The scope of the university's application is broad, and includes key workplace rights of University staff.

The NTEU fears this is proof management wants to use new intractable bargaining processes to gut staff working conditions. These new laws come into effect from 6th June.

NTEU members at the University of Newcastle took strike action for 24 hours when there was a community rally in Newcastle CBD.

To access an intractable bargaining determination, disputes must have been previously referred to the Commission.

The Australian Higher Education Industrial Association (AHEIA) gave advice on how employers can access intractable bargaining processes in a strategy roadmap leaked in March.

University of Newcastle Vice-Chancellor Alex Zelinsky sits on the executive of AHEIA, which highlights intractable bargaining disputes as a way to "redress poor clauses."

NTEU General Secretary Damien Cahill said universities that pursue unprecedented anti-worker tactics in an attempt to cut pay and gut conditions will meet strong resistance.

"Pay and conditions being decided through arbitration will likely leave staff worse off than an agreement between the NTEU and management.

"Universities that find common ground with the NTEU always reach deals which benefit staff, students and the institution.

"Instead, the University of Newcastle is determined to undermine pay and conditions by using the bosses' association's disgraceful industrial game plan. It's little surprise the Vice-Chancellor sits on AHEIA's executive committee."

University of Newcastle's last attempt to sideline the union from bargaining led to a humiliating defeat when staff overwhelmingly voted against a substandard pay deal in December.

"That vote sent a loud and clear message to management that staff want the union to negotiate a fair outcome with management. But they have ignored that message, and appear hellbent on using every last tactic to avoid enterprise bargaining.

"The NTEU is drawing a line in the sand. We will fight tooth and nail against any attempt to use workplace laws to sideline workers." 🗳️



Activists from both ACFS and CPA – Perth Sunday 28th May at the Elizabeth Quay bridge on the Swan River in Perth. The action against the blockade is part of the international campaign Bridges of Love held the last Sunday each month in several cities around the world.



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Injured workers kicked off compo

The Australian Services Union has turned the spotlight on the Victorian government's proposed cuts to the workers' compensation scheme for injured workers. These changes would reduce eligibility for workers compensation and kick people with long-term injuries off the scheme.

Under the changes, workers won't be able to claim weekly payments if they are unable to attend work due to stress from excessive workload or inappropriate behaviour, or due to mental injuries developing over time. Any medical treatment would only be covered for 13 weeks after injury.

Workers with long-term injury and disability will also be kicked off WorkCover payments if they can't meet an arbitrary "20.1 per cent Whole Person Impairment" test. The guides for this test are not designed for assessing work capacity.

They do not factor in individual circumstances, such as transferable skills, language skills, age, place of work. The AMA Guides themselves say, "It must be emphasised and clearly understood that impairment percentages derived according to the Guide's criteria should not be

used to make direct financial awards or direct estimates of disabilities."

This would mean, even if your doctor was to agree that you were unable to return to work again, you would no longer be eligible to receive payments beyond two and a half years.

These changes will force workers back into the job market before they are ready, or force them into poverty. "Our response to workplace injuries must be driven by best health practices and accept that mental health plays a key role in this," states the union. "Ignoring stress and burnout in 21st century workplaces fails to ensure the scheme's success in the future."

"We have listened to injured workers who already know the struggles of obtaining adequate support after being injured at work. We have listened to our members in legal and advocacy positions who work every day to ensure injured members receive what they're entitled to. We have listened to our members who know how difficult it is to access medical services, particularly specialist and psychological support.

"We stand with injured workers and unions opposing these changes." ✪



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"Inhumane"

The Refugee Action Coalition has grave concerns for the welfare of "Mahdi" (not his real name), an Iranian asylum seeker now in his 23rd day (as of 19th May) on hunger strike in Melbourne's detention centre, MITA (Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation). It is understood that the 42-year-old asylum seeker has now stopped taking fluids.

The hunger strike has been one of the most serious to have taken place in immigration detention in recent years.

It has been Home Affairs' recent practice to allow hunger strikers in detention to collapse before providing medical attention to rehydrate them. This practice also avoids detainees being able to consciously deny treatment, as is their right.

Mahdi has been found to be a refugee but the Minister has refused to grant the visa on character grounds. That refusal follows the cancellation of his bridging visa in 2016.

Mahdi has been in a mental hospital and then prison just four months from August to December 2016, but he has now been in immigration detention for almost seven years!

Mahdi is a victim of s501 of the Migration Act which allows the government to impose extrajudicial punishment on non-citizens. He is one of the refugees who is a victim of the government's indefinite detention policies that UN special rapporteur on torture Alice Edwards has called "inhumane."

Immigration Minister Andrew Giles has said many times that

the government is committed to "risk-based immigration detention policies," and that "people should be living in the community if they do not pose a risk." So why are Mahdi and others like him still in immigration detention?

Daily protests have been held in Yongah Hill detention centre for more than two weeks calling for immigration detainees to be freed.

Mahdi has already been diagnosed as suffering from PTSD from his treatment in Iran. His prolonged time in detention has left him even more traumatised.

Mahdi told the Refugee Action Coalition a few days ago, "Brother, I don't want to live any more, I'm tired of everything." After the criminal justice system sentenced Mahdi to four months in prison, the immigration system has imposed a life sentence.

"It's time to end the torture," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition, "Mahdi should be released."

Meanwhile, the more than 500 Sudanese refugees in Indonesia are one of the groups that have been left behind by the Labor government's failure to increase the humanitarian refugee intake or end the ban on accepting refugees from Indonesia.

Some of the Sudanese refugees have been in Indonesia since 2011, waiting for resettlement. Some have not even been interviewed by the UNHCR. None have been referred to Australia.

There are also Sudanese in PNG, in mainland detention and in the community in Australia who need permanent visas.

The generals' war engulfing

Sudan has seen around 800,000 people flee to neighbouring countries, mostly into Egypt, yet Labor is yet to provide immediate and comprehensive support for Sudanese refugees and their families that goes beyond extending temporary visas for those already in Australia.

Sudanese refugees in Indonesia have begun protests outside UNHCR offices. There were protests in Jakarta and Makassar. A protest was held in Pekanbaru. More protests are being planned.

"The situation in Indonesia is intolerable," said Ian Rintoul. "The refugees are living in poverty. And there is every sign that Australia has been systematically discriminating against Sudanese refugees.

"The government must end the ban on UNHCR refugees coming from Indonesia, and take immediate steps to bring Sudanese refugees to Australia.

"There are Sudanese refugees who are part of the 10,000 asylum seekers who have been rejected under fast track. Fast track was always flawed, and the conditions in Sudan have deteriorated significantly. They should all get permanent visas."

"It is shocking that Labor is spending \$420 million to maintain offshore detention on Nauru when that money could be used to expand the humanitarian intake and provide security for the Sudanese refugees stranded in Indonesia," said Rintoul. "Labor is not just leaving refugees behind, their policies are also being left behind." ✪

Pitting worker against worker

Labour hire may sound unassuming but behind the label hide terrible wages, unreliable jobs, and poor conditions creeping into all industries.

Labour hire is when a "host" employer hires a worker from a labour hire agency. Initially, employers did this to fill short-term gaps. But over time, "host" employers have learnt to game the system.

This way of outsourcing workers – rather than directly hiring employees – is a loophole that large corporations use to skirt around wages and conditions set in Awards or enterprise agreements.

The practice is rife in aviation, mining, manufacturing, transport, as well as hospitality, agriculture, meat processing, security, and cleaning. But it's not limited to these industries.

A report from the ACTU has found that big business is outsourcing workers in Australia at rapidly rising rates. At least 600,000 workers are employed through labour hire (see "Labour hire divide" page 4).

At the same time, Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show increase in labour hire use and labour hire employees is outpacing employment growth. When you consider how much labour hire rips off workers, that's a major concern.

HOW DOES LABOUR HIRE RIP OFF WORKERS?

What makes labour hire so attractive for big business is how deeply unfair it is on workers. Labour hire workers who perform the same job as direct employees are excluded from receiving the same pay and conditions as the direct employees.

It's also unfair on direct employees whose own pay and conditions are undermined when their employer uses labour hire.

What does this unfairness look like?

It's when two workers work alongside each other and do the same work, but one is on a much lower rate of pay; labour hire workers earn about \$4,700 a year less than ordinary workers.

It's when 81 per cent of labour-hire workers work full-time hours yet they do not have full-time jobs – their employment is insecure and unreliable.

It's also when the labour hire industry has annual revenue of over \$30 billion while workers' wages go backwards.

And it's when some big businesses use loopholes in our current laws to get out of paying proper wages and entitlements such as sick leave and annual leave – some 84 per cent of labour hire workers do not have paid leave and most have no guaranteed minimum hours.

Big business has worked out how to exploit the system to cut wages and job security. They might think it's clever, but it's simply exploitation of workers via legal loopholes.

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THIS WAY

Wages are going backwards and have been for 10 years. Add to this the cost of living and the housing crisis and many people are really struggling.

Too many jobs have been contracted out or made insecure.

Big companies like Qantas have used loopholes in workplace laws to drive down wages, contract out work, and take away working conditions.

Australia's workplace laws need updating to protect workers from loopholes used by some big business to drive down wages and conditions. ✪

Find out more about the

Communist Party of Australia

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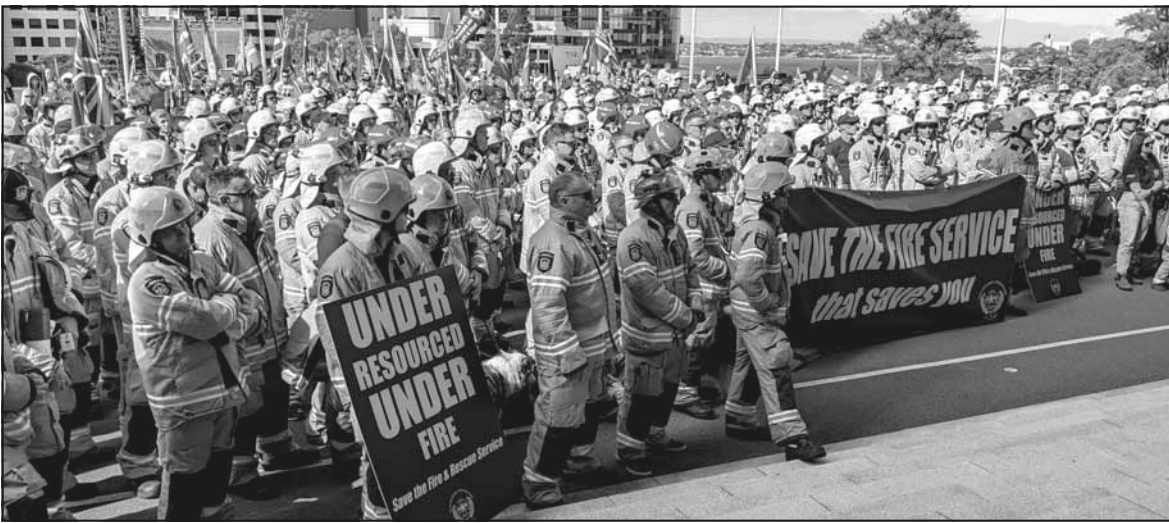


Photo: Richard Titilius

Firefighters rally for wage justice

Richard Titilius

On Thursday 25th May, several hundred members of the United Firefighters Union of WA and their supporters, principally from other trade unions, marched from the Supreme Court Gardens wearing their uniforms, to take their struggle for a better wage outcome, improved conditions, and increased resources to Parliament House.

Like most of the state public sector unions who commenced their latest round of improvements in wages and conditions in December 2021, the United Firefighters Union has been met with resistance from the government to bargain in a principled manner. Led by Premier and Treasurer, Mark McGowan, this anti-worker position is being enforced by Industrial Relations Minister Bill Johnston and Emergency Services Minister Steve Dawson.

When the firefighters were at Parliament House, they were addressed by Minister Johnston, a former trade union official himself, who insisted the initial and only offer put on the table was a take-it-or-leave-it offer. This came with a threat of legal action attached as they had undertaken the march and rally in defiance of an order by their employer.

The firefighters responded by turning their backs on him and booing loudly in disapproval. This tactic of the government was similar to the one used against the

Australian Nurses Federation (ANF) last year, when that union's members went on strike and marched on Parliament House.

The Commission on 26th May fined the ANF \$350,000 and its state secretary Janet Reah, \$10,000. The nurses and the police in WA are yet to settle their wage claims with the McGowan government. The government's offer of 3 per cent per annum and a \$3000 cost of living payment upon signing by the government is the same offer made to all public sector unions in WA and is out of touch with the current rate of inflation which is over 7 per cent.

The union is asking for 5 per cent per annum over two years, better overtime rates, and higher employer superannuation contributions. A speaker from the union membership Pippa Williams said that firefighters were often leaving the industry as they were suffering from broken bodies, cancers from exposure to chemicals during fighting fires, exhaustion, and burnout. Owen Whittle, secretary of peak union body, Unions WA, said all unions in WA support their campaign for improved wages and conditions. Whittle added, "Only by doing it together for your members can we push the government to change their offer."

Unlike the gap between what the firefighters want and what the government will offer. Whittle, concluded, "There is no gap between unions in their support for the industrial campaign by the United Fire Workers Union."

Clem Chan, state President of the United Firefighters Union asked, what does the government think you are worth, especially when it says its offer is generous even though it remains the first and only offer they have made. Chan added that the "well of goodwill" had run dry between their members and the government.

In regard to the Industrial relations Minister's threat of compulsory arbitration, Chan stated, "Don't dictate, negotiate!" The offer presented, added Chan, was not enough and that is why they were on the steps of Parliament House, "our members will not be ignored." The members seek an offer that respects their workload and the difficult conditions under which they often work.

The firefighters will continue their campaign for a decent wage rise and improvements to their conditions. The Communist Party of Australia supports the United Firefighters Union in their claim for a better wage outcome, improvement in conditions, increased staff, and more resources.

This is especially necessary as climate change has increased the severity of weather conditions that precipitate more severe fires and floods to which firefighters are called to respond. The CPA also applauds the unity and solidarity shown by the many sectors of the organised working class who turned up to the march and rally in support of the Fire Fighters Union. ✪

Labour hire divide

Casual labour hire workers at GrainCorp's Port Kembla Grain Terminal have been told they will be sacked if they don't turn up for work while their full-time colleagues, who work directly for GrainCorp, take protected industrial action.

The 10 full-time GrainCorp employees, who operate GrainCorp's grain export terminal, have been locked in negotiations with the company since December. Their enterprise agreement expired in March and are set to take a week of protected industrial action.

The Fair Work Commission has authorised industrial action but the casuals on site have been told by management if they don't turn up to work they will not be rostered for anymore shifts.

The Australian Workers Union says there is no place for intimidating and threatening casual workers while their full-time colleagues are taking protected industrial action.

"GrainCorp management are so out of touch they think it is okay to threaten insecure, casual workers

with the sack while full-time workers legally withdraw their labour," said Tony Callinan, AWU State Secretary.

"It is a fundamental right of any worker in Australia to participate in protected industrial action sanctioned by the Fair Work Commission and GrainCorp shouldn't be threatening the rest of the workforce.

"This is a classic use of vulnerable casual labour hire workers to undermine the full-time workforce.

"Full time workers are upset because GrainCorp wants them to perform extra duties while only offering a paltry pay rise to compensate them for the extra work.

"GrainCorp's share price is up 17 per cent in the last week and has doubled over the last year, yet they are offering a low wage to their employees.

"During the drought when grain yields were low workers accepted substantially lower wage increases, but on the back of two years of bumper crops and record GrainCorp profits, workers expect a wage rise that at least keeps up with inflation," noted Callinan.

GrainCorp's Port Kembla Terminal has capacity to manage 250,000 tonnes of product at any one time from grains for export to oil and cement for import. ✪



Child advocacy group, SHINE for Kids, has released distressing findings of a national survey which reveals the suffering and compounding disadvantages experienced by the voiceless victims of crime, children. The findings of a landmark national survey have given a clear snapshot of the serious and compounding disadvantages suffered by the over 40,000 children in Australia who have a parent in prison and the concerning lack of government support. Of the carers surveyed, 30 per cent said their children had been suspended or expelled from school and a staggering 50 per cent reported their children were regularly absent. The survey also found that these children suffered from disability at rates far higher than their peers, ADHD and anxiety were reported at a percentage three times higher than in the community, while depression was similar. Only a third of survey respondents said the children in their care were connected to any support service, sport or hobby. SHINE for Kids commissioned the study which was conducted by Monash University in conjunction with the Australian National University, and Griffith University and information was gathered over a four month period. SHINE for Kids CEO, Julie Hourigan, said the findings are an indictment on the plight of children who have a parent in the criminal justice system, and the government needs to take immediate action. "This research is a wake up call for our policy makers in Australia," Hourigan said. "We already knew about the discrimination, stigma and emotional toll taken on individual children by the incarceration of a parent, but this is the first time we've had such an in depth look at the true struggles and compounding issues families are facing, often with little to no support. These children are some of the most disadvantaged and overlooked in our community with a range of complex needs. Not addressing these issues now is leading to lifelong serious consequences for children. They are essentially being punished for their parent's crime." Teachers aren't trained to help these kids, prison visits can be costly and confronting and any other complicating factors like disability, mental health issues or poverty are dramatically heightened, Hourigan pointed out.

The Independent Education Union of Australia NSW/ACT Branch, which represents over 32,000 teachers, support staff, and principals in the non-government education sector, has secured significant pay rises for a large group of support staff working in Catholic systemic schools in 10 dioceses in NSW and the ACT. After 18 months of negotiations, almost all classroom and learning support and administrative staff will receive pay rises of between 5 per cent and 13 per cent, backdated to the beginning of the year. The pay rises bring Catholic support staff in line with their colleagues in the public sector. The union noted that this is a historic deal that has been a long time coming and that the way it clears the way for significant improvements for teachers going forward.

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: The Voice will divide the nation, cries the party that divides Australians into "lifters or leaners".

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US\$45 trillion looted

India demands compensation from Britain

Graham Holton

The meeting of the Quad leaders, on 20th May 2023, has given special political influence to Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi of India, and his demands for the return of thousands of looted temple objects and art treasures, presently held in the world's famous museums.

More importantly, during the British colonial period, an estimated US\$45 trillion was looted from India, turning it from one of the world's richest countries into one of the poorest. PM Modi was in Australia last week meeting Prime Minister Anthony Albanese for talks on immigration, regional security, and the rising military tensions in Asia.

In 2021 the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) returned stolen artefacts to India, in Australia's largest repatriation of stolen art. It included six sculptures, six photographs, a painted scroll and a processional standard. This was the fourth time the NGA has handed back antiquities to the Indian government, for which the NGA had spent \$10.7 million on acquiring. PM Modi thanked Australia for their return, during a summit in March 2022.

Modi, leader of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, is campaigning for the repatriation of billions of dollars worth of looted objects now held in Britain, as a "reckoning with the past." Since Modi became prime minister in 2014, more than 300 objects have been returned to India, many of them depictions of Hindu deities.

A key policy, and his personal commitment, is the return of the Koh-i-Noor diamond, one of the largest cut diamonds in the world. The 105-carat diamond once topped the Mughal emperors' Peacock Throne. It was worn by the Sikh

dynasty of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, before it was surrendered in a treaty with the East India Company, and given to Queen Victoria after the annexation of the Punjab in 1849. Queen Victoria took on the imperial role of Empress of India in 1877. The Punjab had great wealth, with one of the world's earliest great civilisations, around 3000 BC.

The Koh-i-Noor adorned Queen Mary's Crown during the 1911 coronation of King George V, but it was not displayed at the Coronation of King Charles III on 6th May, to avoid provoking India. India's Vice President, Jagdeep Dhankhar, was in attendance.

Govind Mohan, secretary for the Indian ministry of culture, said the return of the stolen art treasures "is of huge importance to the government." The Archaeological Survey of India has approached Oxford's Ashmolean Museum for the return of a bronze statue taken from a temple in southern India. The repatriation of stolen artefacts requires a royal permission or parliamentary legislative change for it to proceed, which places political pressure on Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, leader of the Conservative Party, and is the first Hindu Prime Minister in British history.

The British Museum will face claims for its collection of Hindu statues and the Amaravati Marbles, which were taken from a Buddhist stupa by Sir Walter Elliot. The Victoria and Albert Museum's Indian collection houses the famous mechanical tiger biting a mechanical British soldier and the throne of Rajit Singh, a Sikh emperor. These also face reparation claims.

One problem is that such museums are bound by law to keep their collections intact, potentially putting India at odds with Westminster, which has refused to countenance changing legislation to facilitate other claims, such



Replica of the Koh-i-Noor (Mountain of Light). Photo: aiva - flickr.com (CC BY 2.0).

as the return of the Parthenon Marbles to Greece. The National Trust is responsible for the Indian artefacts stolen by Robert Clive, the first British Governor of the Bengal Presidency. Amongst these are the treasures of Tipu Sultan, a Muslim foe of the East India Company, who was killed and his palace looted in 1799.

In 2019, Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, India's External Affairs Minister, addressed the Atlantic Council in Washington DC, asserting that under British colonial rule India suffered "humiliation" for two centuries and US\$45 trillion was looted from the country. The recent growth of the Indian economy and its importance in the emerging multi-polarity of global politics, the G-20 and the Quad, means that "the West needs India." Modi is playing a multifaceted political game, with the end game being the return of India's looted treasures and India being an international player. ✪

AUKUS drone swarms

The US, UK, and Australia have shown off new AI-powered drone swarms, marking the first-ever collaboration on autonomous UAV technology between the members of the AUKUS security pact, described by officials as a way to counter China.

The alliance carried out the three-way "capabilities trial" late last month in Wiltshire, Britain, where they achieved the "live collaborative retraining of models in flight and the interchange of AI models between AUKUS nations" for the first time, according to the US military.

"The work saw the initial joint deployment of Australian, UK, and US AI-enabled assets in a collaborative swarm to detect and track military targets in a representative environment in real time," the Pentagon said in a statement.

Formed in 2021 as part of the China-deterrence strategy in the Indo-Pacific region, the AUKUS pact has repeatedly come under fire from Beijing. Under "Pillar I" of the deal, the United States pledged to furnish nuclear submarine technology to Australia "at the earliest date possible."

Hosted by the UK's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, the drone tests were conducted as part of "Pillar II" of the AUKUS partnership, which calls to "develop and provide joint advanced military capabilities" between the three allies in order to "promote security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region."

The Chinese Foreign Ministry insists that the new military initiatives will only "motivate an arms race,

damage the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and harm regional stability and peace," urging the three members to stop "ignoring the concerns of the international community."

While officials have not offered extensive details about the UAV trials, the British military said they involved "more than 70 military and civilian defence personnel and industry contractors," who tested swarms of Blue Bear Ghost and Boeing/Insitu CT220 drones.

UK forces provided several tanks and armoured vehicles for the demo, while private contractors supplied a number of self-propelled howitzers and Soviet-era BMP vehicles produced in the former Czechoslovakia. The gear was used to test the drones' ability to track military targets on the battlefield. "This trial demonstrates the military advantage of AUKUS advanced capabilities, as we work in coalition to identify, track, and counter potential adversaries from a greater distance and with greater speed," former British General Rob Magowan, now a senior Defence Ministry official, said in a statement.

The Australian military stated that the tests "achieved several world firsts," including the live retraining of the drone swarms in flight.

Russia also sees the West's expansion of its military presence in Asia as a risk that could lead to prolonged conflict. "I cannot imagine the great Asian civilisations toeing the line the way the EU unfortunately did, and obediently delivering Washington's agenda," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in March.

RT ✪

PEACE NOTES

Hannah Middleton

Papua New Guinea is being pressurised by the US and Australia to join their plans for war on China.

PNG's location north of Australia makes it strategically significant. It sits in a chain of several hundred US military bases running through Tokyo to Saipan, the Philippines and Guahan (Guam), forming a noose tightening around China.

In May this year, the United States and Papua New Guinea signed a security pact that will underpin the expansion of the US military presence and increase joint training exercises between the two countries.

The final text of the arrangement has not been made public.

Prime Minister James Marape said there would be an increased presence of US military personnel and contractors but that a US military base would not be established.

However, questions have been raised about how the growing interdependency with the AUKUS powers will impact on PNG's sovereignty and foreign policy.

Many in the Pacific are concerned about the increasing militarisation of the region and that Papua New Guinea could be stuck between China and an increasingly aggressive US.

University students held protests at campuses against the signing of the Defence Co-operation Agreement, while some opposition politicians have warned it might undermine the country's relationship with China.

Former prime minister Peter O'Neill accused Marape of placing the country "at the epicentre of a military storm between China and the USA."

Opposition leader Joseph Lelang said his country "should not be blinded by the dollar sign or be coerced into signing deals that may be detrimental to us in the long run."

PNG and the US also signed an agreement which will permit the US Coast Guard to patrol PNG waters, ostensibly to help crack down on drug smuggling and illegal fishing. Part of the agreement allows PNG military personnel to be trained on board the US vessels.

The Obama administration shifted US military focus to the Indo Pacific with its 2011 Pivot to Asia. In the following year the Gillard government agreed to increase the US military presence in the north of Australia. This was officially established under the 2014 Force Posture Agreement (FPA).

The FPA allows the US military access to, and in some cases control over, dozens of local bases. It also provides for the presence of 2500 US marines in Australia, as well as increasing interoperability between the two countries' air forces and navies.

In a similar manner, Australia now has access to PNG's Lombrum Naval Base on Manus Island. This was established with the 2019 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the Joint Initiative at Lombrum Naval Base which aims to redevelop it and to increase interoperability between the two nations' defence forces.

It is rumoured that secretive MoU arrangements permit aspects of the multimillion-dollar redevelopment to remain hidden even from PNG cabinet ministers.

The question now being asked is whether Australia and the US are planning to use Lombrum as an AUKUS nuclear submarine base.

The US has also recently gained access to four new bases in the Philippines. These include three on the main island of Luzon, close to Taiwan, and one in Palawan province in the South China Sea.

The new US facilities will be inside existing Filipino bases. US troops will come in small groups and on rotation.

The new bases, opened under the 2014 Enhanced Defense Co-operation Arrangement, allow the US to rotate troops to nine bases throughout the Philippines.

The US return to the Philippines is strongly opposed by many community and political groups. Renato Reyes, secretary general of New Patriotic Alliance, says: "The Philippines has been forced to shoulder the social costs. There's a history of rape, child abuse and toxic waste."

These developments are all part of US military agreements throughout the region, including plans to share defence technologies with India and to deploy new US Marine units to Japanese islands.

Earlier this year, the US Marines also opened a new base on the already heavily militarised Pacific atoll of Guahan (Guam). Camp Blaz could eventually host 5000 Marines.

Child labour is back

Harm Venhuizen

USA: Lawmakers in several states are embracing legislation to let children as young as 14 work in more hazardous occupations, for more hours on school nights, and in expanded roles, including serving alcohol in bars and restaurants.

The efforts to significantly roll back labour rules are largely led by Republican lawmakers to address worker shortages and, in some cases, run afoul of federal regulations.

Child welfare advocates say the measures represent a coordinated push to scale back hard-won protections for minors.

“The consequences are potentially disastrous,” said Reid Maki, director of the Child Labour Coalition, which advocates against exploitative labour policies. “You can’t balance a perceived labour shortage on the backs of teen workers.”

Lawmakers proposed loosening child labour laws in at least 10 states over the past two years, according to a report published earlier this year by the Economic Policy Institute. Some bills became law, while others were withdrawn or vetoed.

Legislators in the states of Wisconsin, Ohio, and Iowa, are actively considering relaxing child labour laws to address worker shortages, which they blame for driving up wages and contributing to inflation. Employers have struggled to fill open positions after a spike in retirements, deaths, and illnesses from COVID-19, decreases in legal immigration, and other factors.

The job market is one of the tightest since World War II, with the official unemployment rate at 3.4 per cent – the lowest in 54 years.

In Wisconsin, lawmakers are backing a proposal to allow 14-year-olds to serve alcohol in bars and restaurants. If it passed, Wisconsin would have the lowest such limit nationwide, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

The Ohio Legislature is on track to pass a bill allowing students ages 14 and 15 to work until 9pm during the school year “with their parents’ permission.” That’s later than federal law allows, so a companion measure asks the US Congress to amend its own laws.

Under the federal Fair Labour Standards Act, students that age can only work until 7pm during the school year. Congress passed the law in 1938 to stop children from being exposed to dangerous conditions and abusive practices in mines, factories, farms, and street trades.

Republican Arkansas Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders signed a law in March eliminating permits that required employers to verify a child’s age and a parent’s consent. Without work permit requirements, companies caught violating child labour laws can more easily claim ignorance.

As a political cover, Sanders later signed separate legislation raising civil penalties



Photo: stocksnap.io (CC0 1.0)

and creating criminal penalties for violating child labour laws, but advocates worry that eliminating the permit requirement makes it significantly more difficult to investigate violations.

Other measures to loosen child labour laws have been passed into law in New Jersey, New Hampshire, and Iowa.

Iowa Republican Governor Kim Reynolds signed a law last year allowing teens aged 16 and 17 to work unsupervised in childcare centres. The state legislature approved a bill this month to allow teens of that age to serve alcohol in restaurants. It would also expand the hours minors can work. Reynolds, who said in April she supports more youth employment, has until 3rd June to sign or veto the measure.

Republicans dropped provisions from a version of the bill allowing children aged 14 and 15 to work in dangerous fields including mining, logging, and meatpacking. But it kept some provisions that the Labour Department says violate federal law, including allowing children as young as 14 to work in freezers and meat coolers, and extending work hours in industrial laundries and assembly lines.

Teen workers are more likely to accept low pay and less likely to unionise or push for better working conditions, said Maki, of the Child Labour Coalition, a Washington-based advocacy network.

“There are employers that benefit from having kind of docile teen workers,” Maki said, adding that teens are easy targets for industries that rely on vulnerable populations

such as immigrants and the formerly incarcerated to fill dangerous jobs.

The Department of Labour reported in February that child labour violations had increased by nearly 70 per cent since 2018. The agency is increasing enforcement and asking Congress to allow larger fines against violators.

It fined one of the nation’s largest meatpacking sanitation contractors \$1.5 million in February after investigators found the company illegally employed more than 100 children at locations in eight states. The child workers cleaned bone saws and other dangerous equipment in meatpacking plants, often using hazardous chemicals.

National business lobbyists, chambers of commerce, and well-funded conservative groups are backing the state bills to increase teen participation in the workforce, including Americans for Prosperity, a conservative political network, and the National Federation of Independent Business, which typically aligns with Republicans.

The conservative Opportunity Solutions Project and its parent organisation, the Florida-based think tank Foundation for Government Accountability, helped lawmakers in Arkansas and Missouri draft bills to roll back child labour protections, *The Washington Post* reported. The groups, and allied lawmakers, often say their efforts are about expanding parental rights and giving teenagers more work experience.

“There’s no reason why anyone should have to get the government’s permission to get a job,” Republican Arkansas

Representative Rebecca Burkes, who sponsored the bill to eliminate child work permits, said on the House floor. “This is simply about eliminating the bureaucracy that is required and taking away the parent’s decision about whether their child can work.”

Margaret Wurth, a children’s rights researcher with Human Rights Watch, and a member of the Child Labour Coalition described bills like the one passed in Arkansas as “attempts to undermine safe and important workplace protections and to reduce workers’ power.”

Current laws fail to protect many child workers, Wurth said.

She wants lawmakers to end exceptions for child labour in agriculture. Federal law allows children 12 and older to work on farms for any amount of time outside of school hours, with parental permission. Farm workers over 16 can work at dangerous heights or operate heavy machinery, hazardous tasks reserved for adult workers in other industries.

Twenty-four children died from work injuries in 2021, according to the Bureau of Labour Statistics. Around half of the deadly work incidents happened on farms, according to a report from the Government Accountability Office covering child deaths between 2003 and 2016.

“More children die working in agriculture than in any other sector,” Wurth said. “Enforcement isn’t going to help much for child farm workers unless the standards improve.”

People’s World ★

Fresh food workers go union

Mark Gruenberg

New York City residents who patronise the city’s leading outdoor fresh produce markets, run at various locations by the non-profit GrowNYC, now will have a new reason to increase their purchases: The staff are going union.

The card-check recognition for the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union will cover GrowNYC’s 200-250 workers, spread across all five boroughs. Now the workers will receive fresh food and city farm services from workers who will be far less exploited, once the two sides agree on their union contract.

Card-check recognition was a reversal for GrowNYC’s managers, compost driver April Jane Black

told RWDSU. Until then, GrowNYC had employed the notorious union-buster Littler Mendelson law firm. Black said Littler Mendelson is famed for its “stalling” in battling unions. Los Angeles-based Littler advertises itself as the nation’s top “union avoidance” consultant.

Key reasons the organising drive succeeded included RWDSU fielding worker concerns about “workplace harassment including sexual harassment, unstable scheduling practices, seasonal layoffs with no call-back structure, a lack of structure” in job duties and work tasks “and favouritism by management.” The union said the contract “would begin to alleviate some of these issues.”

Black cheered GrowNYC’s card-check decision, but unlike other workers RWDSU interviewed, she’s still sceptical about

management union-busting via wrecking bargaining.

“I’m worried that leadership wants to have their cake of good optics giving vocal public support of our efforts while eating it too, by taking a more obtuse union-busting route. It won’t wear us down, though,” Black vowed. “We aren’t going to sit on our hands indefinitely. We’ll see what happens at the bargaining table.”

RWDSU President Stuart Appelbaum noted the overwhelming card count forced recognition.

“The strength GrowNYC workers have shown throughout their union effort convinced their employer to recognise them,” he said in a statement. “Their strength at the bargaining table will gain them the necessary protections they need to continue to service our

city’s greenmarkets, farm stands, and CSA, composting and educational programs. GrowNYC did the right thing.”

The GrowNYC card-check win was the third recent resounding victory for RWDSU. Workers at the Barnes & Noble-run college bookstore at Rutgers University in New Jersey voted unanimously on 12th May to join the union. Assuming bookstore management, which is separate from the larger B&N chain, doesn’t challenge the victory, the union will represent approximately 70 workers.

And just before that, workers at the Recreational Equipment Inc. (REI) store in Chicago’s gentrifying Near Northwest Side neighbourhood voted 84 to 16 per cent on 4th May to unionise with RWDSU. Key issues were “more consistent hours

and schedules,” worker/organiser Andrew Loveland said. They’re the fourth REI store nationwide to unionise. RWDSU will represent around 60 people there.

Visual sales lead and worker organiser Sarah Diefenbach said the win also vindicates “the people REI has unfairly fired, denied transfers and promotions to, denied the opportunity to flourish in the proper department to and so many other grievances. We the workers of REI Chicago ... all deserve to be paid a living wage with consistent predictable hours for the expert advice we provide to the community” on environmentally friendly gear “and have a say in the day-to-day running of our store. We want the co-op to be successful and we want to truly share in that success.”

People’s World ★

Japan Communist Party Chair

G7 Hiroshima declaration

“unacceptable”

Japanese Communist Party Chair Shii Kazuo on 20th May issued a statement on “G7 Leaders’ Hiroshima Vision on Nuclear Disarmament.” The full text of Shii’s statement is as follows:

G7 leaders on 19th May published “G7 Leaders’ Hiroshima Vision on Nuclear Disarmament”. With this year’s summit being held in Hiroshima, many people in Japan and abroad expected that the leaders would send out a positive message calling for nuclear disarmament. The Hiroshima Vision, however, has thoroughly failed to meet their expectations.

Hiroshima Vision does mention “a world without nuclear weapons,” but calls it “the ultimate goal,” suggesting that it will not be achieved for the indefinite future.

Most gravely, the document upholds the nuclear deterrence doctrine, noting that nuclear weapons “deter aggression and prevent war and coercion.” Accepting the doctrine means that nuclear weapons will be used when deemed necessary without hesitating which will trigger an inhumane catastrophe like what happened after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Advocating such a position in the atomic-bombed city is totally unacceptable as it is tantamount to making fools of Hibakusha and people in communities that suffered nuclear attacks.

Although Hiroshima Vision cites the historical fact that people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki suffered “immense human suffering,” it fails to criticise or condemn the inhumane nature of nuclear weapons.

The document says nothing about nuclear weapon states’ commitments to pursue nuclear disarmament under article 6 of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, such as “[a]n unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals” (the final document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference).

No mention was made of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. The G7 leaders turn a blind eye on the treaty, which has been signed by more than 90 states, as if there were no such thing.

What did they see during their tour of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum?

The leaders should be ashamed to have declared their adherence to the need to maintain nuclear weapons in the city that experienced an atomic bombing.

With the presidency of the G7 being held currently by Japan, Prime Minister Kishida should be held responsible for issuing such a shameful document. What A-bomb survivors, civil movement activists, and many leaders of governments and states in the world demand is, as Indonesian President Joko Widodo put it, “Nuclear weapons must be destroyed,” i.e. a legal ban and elimination of nuclear weapons. Joko was invited to the G7 summit as his country currently holds the ASEAN presidency.

The JCP demands that the Japanese government abandon the nuclear deterrence doctrine and join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

(Hibakusha: survivors of nuclear war) May 21, 2023 ✪



Photo: CPA.

The Warfare State

Eileen Whitehead

The National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies has released an analysis of the militarised budget in the United States, titled “The Warfare State: How Funding for Militarism Compromises our Welfare.” It has reported that, out of a \$1.8 trillion federal discretionary budget, a staggering \$1.1 trillion – or 62 per cent – of that budget has been spent on militarism and war.

The group noted that during the recent “debt ceiling” debates threats to cut spending for vital domestic programs have featured prominently, but spending on militarism was almost entirely exempt from the discussion. The argument was that it was necessary to reduce the failed military, homeland security and law enforcement spending to instead

fund programs and measures to address the true needs of American communities. It’s interesting to note that we in Australia are currently having the same debate over AUKUS.

These are the key findings of the report:

In FY 2023, out of a \$1.8 trillion federal discretionary budget, \$1.1 trillion was for militarised programs. That includes war and weapons, law enforcement and mass incarceration, and detention and deportation.

Less than \$2 out of every \$5 in federal discretionary spending was available to fund investment in people and communities. These investments include primary and secondary public education, housing programs, child care programs, federal disaster relief, environmental programs, and scientific research.

The US spent \$16 on the military and war for every \$1 that was spent on diplomacy and humanitarian foreign aid. The vast majority

of militarized spending was for weapons, war, and the Pentagon, at \$920 billion. Only \$56 billion was spent for international affairs, diplomacy, and humanitarian foreign aid.

The US spent \$51.1 billion for homeland security, approximately half of which goes to Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, better known as ICE (\$8.8 billion) and Customs and Border Protection, CBP (\$17.4 billion). These are the agencies responsible for deportations, family separations, and violent apprehension at the southern border. That’s nearly three times spending on substance abuse and mental health programs (\$7.5 billion), even as opioid use remains a major cause of death.

The US federal budget allocated twice as much for federal law enforcement as for child care and early childhood education programs. Federal law enforcement includes federal prisons, the FBI and other law enforcement

agencies, and was allocated \$31 billion. Child care and early childhood education programs only received \$15 billion.

Since 2001, the US has added \$2 to the discretionary budget for militarism for every \$1 added to invest in communities. Spending on care for veterans has nearly tripled since 2001, following 20 years of war, repeated deployments for the 3 million veterans who served in the post-9/11 wars, and rampant physical and mental health needs of returning veterans. Spending on homeland security (excluding FEMA) has more than doubled since 2001, and spending on the military and nuclear weapons has grown by 80 per cent, in inflation-adjusted terms.

With the impending AUKUS deal, the militarism compromising the welfare of the American people, is beginning to compromise our welfare here in Australia. ✪

Debt Ceiling: the view from China

Due to clashes between the two major political parties, weak governance, and huge military expenditures driven by a Cold War mentality, the US is now unable to pay back its debts without borrowing new money.

The US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned that the US might face a default for the first time in history on 1st June, provided Congress fails to raise the debt ceiling. US President Joe Biden cancelled his trip to Australia and Papua New Guinea and returned home to hold talks on raising the debt ceilings.

Since the beginning of this year, politicians from both parties have proposed possible deals related to the national debt, but these have all gone nowhere. Republicans have offered two options for solving the debt “crisis” since the federal government hit its legal debt limit of \$31.4 trillion in January. Their

proposals amount to just cutting government spending, which Democrats have rejected.

The debt ceiling is a lawful limit to restrict the US government from borrowing money. As debt has increased over the years, Congress has had to raise the debt ceiling more frequently – 22 times since 1997.

The US has seen federal debts increase exponentially in the past two decades, and there are a few major reasons.

In October 2001, when the US launched its war in Afghanistan, the debt was barely \$5.8 trillion. The amount now, 22 years later, is more than five times higher.

The debt-to-GDP ratio has also become exorbitant. Under the Clinton and Bush Jr. administrations, the debt-to-GDP ratio was kept at 70 per cent. The 2008 Great Recession pushed it above 100 per cent for the first time. The ratio kept soaring as the years passed,

reaching a historical high of 128 per cent in 2020.

Debts are intimately linked with income and budget. The budget and bills proposed by the White House and approved by Congress show the priorities of the US government and speak to its willingness to keep healthy finances. The major spending sectors, from highest to lowest, are Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, the military, education, interest on debt, tax credits, veterans services, and nutrition.

Partisan differences on spending priorities have impeded the federal government’s ability to cut expenditures. Democrats, understandably, insist on keeping Social Security benefits and funds for Medicare; Republicans reject any reductions in military spending.

Since the interest on current debt, which already amounts to 8.8 per cent of annual expenses, must be repaid to borrowers regardless,

the remaining sectors for possible cuts, from the perspective of American politicians, are education, tax cuts, veterans, and nutrition.

Partisan division and the rotating election of new governments replace established policies with newly hatched programs and the investment of fresh overhead – long-term planning becomes nearly impossible.

The US federal government also suffers from weak governance and profligacy, which financially compromises the state. According to reports from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued in May 2022, the total “financial benefits” from reducing fragmentation, overlap, and duplication across the federal government amounted to \$552 billion from 2011 to 2022.

The report sugar-coated money loss as saved “financial benefits.” What about the money wasted for years beforehand?

Instead of restructuring the country’s debts and changing spending habits, the US has, on the other hand, clung to wasting dollars on trying to maintain military hegemony over the globe.

The budget for the Department of Defense in FY 2023 is over \$770 billion, which accounts for more than half of the total deficit of FY 2022.

In terms of military deployment globally, as of 2021, the US has installed about 750 military bases in more than 80 foreign countries. The building of new bases overseas has not halted. Earlier this year, the US secured access to four new military bases in the Philippines.

Who eventually pays for that expanding empire? Who benefits from it? It is clear that most of the spending goes to the military – industrial complex and barely a dime for the average American taxpayer.

People’s Daily via People’s World ✪

Venezuela pledges to abandon US dollar

Venezuela is planning to shift away from the greenback in cross-border transactions, President Nicolas Maduro said, claiming that the measure would help the Bolivarian Republic to free its economy.

It's the latest country to publicly share plans to reduce its reliance on the US dollar. Similar measures have recently been announced by Argentina, Brazil, and Iraq. Meanwhile, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) group of nations are considering the introduction of a new reserve currency to replace the dollar.

"This is the path of Venezuela and the path of a free economy where currencies are not used to punish countries and impose sanctions," Maduro said in an interview with local media.

Venezuela is ranked among the world's five most-sanctioned nations. The South American country has suffered one of the largest economic contractions in history. Last year, Washington allowed US energy major Chevron to resume limited oil production in the country, but the majority of sanctions remain in place and continue to weigh on the Venezuelan economy.

Longstanding sanctions policies pursued by the White House, along with rising inflation in the US, have forced multiple countries around the world to start looking for alternatives to the dollar.

Earlier last month, Argentinian President Alberto Fernandez and his Brazilian counterpart, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, agreed to develop a framework for using national currencies in mutual transactions.

Last month, Argentina confirmed settlements for Chinese imports in yuan rather than US dollars in an attempt to safeguard the nation's decreasing reserves. In March, China and Brazil agreed to abandon the greenback in their bilateral transactions in a bid to reduce investment costs and develop economic ties between the two countries. In February, Iraq's central bank said it would allow commerce with China to be settled directly in yuan for the first time.

Earlier this year, the yuan overtook the US dollar in China's international trade transactions.

countercurrents ✪



Photo: Tim Sullivan – StockSnap (CC0).

Economic sanctions hurt the poor, sick, and vulnerable

A study published by the Washington-based Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) has revealed that economic sanctions, often illegally imposed, have a lasting negative impact on the populations in targeted countries and almost never achieve their stated goals.

The study "Human Consequences of Economic Sanctions" by Francisco Rodriguez, examines the evidence and arguments presented in 32 studies of sanctioned economies,

mostly poor and Global South countries. It concludes that "[it] is hard to think of other policy interventions that continue to be pursued amid so much evidence of their adverse and often deadly effects on vulnerable populations," particularly when they are extremely ineffective in achieving most of their stated goals.

The study finds that they affect the living conditions of the majority population of the targeted countries by making them poorer and more precarious. This is largely because targeted

governments have a reduced capacity to maintain social and economic policies that support most of the population, especially the most vulnerable.

The CEPR report also notes that the negative impact of economic sanctions on people is well-known by policymakers and experts. Often, the report says, the worsening of economic conditions in targeted countries is precisely the intention of the measures, in the hope that there will be political upheaval in response.

Sri Lanka Guardian ✪

European trade unionists stand up for right to strike

European trade unionists slammed government attacks on the right to strike and vowed to set up a "solidarity network" to provide rapid support to unions under attack.

The emergency resolution to the European Trade Union Confederation Congress in the German capital, Berlin, moved by the British Trade Union Council (TUC), said, "The right to strike is a democratic right, and intrinsic to the right to organise and collectively bargain."

The resolution drew attention to the "draconian

legislation" in Britain that would "allow government ministers to force workers to attend work during strike action," but also pointed out that attacks on the right to strike were not restricted to Britain.

TUC assistant general secretary Kate Bell said, "The UK may have left the European Union, but the bonds of solidarity that link workers across Europe can never be broken."

In Belgium several union members were convicted for taking strike action and "there have been recent court

rulings against union members and striking workers."

The ETUC said, "Unions must robustly defend our democratic rights and freedoms."

The solidarity network is intended to support unions under attack "due to employer hostility in collective bargaining or industrial disputes." ✪

Iraqi Communist Party condemns cowardly attack on Sudanese Communist Party headquarters

Despite the truce signed by the two parties of the armed conflict in Sudan and their fight for power, the war between them continues, inflicting more destruction, and devastation in Sudan, resulting in more victims and intensifying the suffering of the people due to hunger, the spread of disease, and the cessation of public services.

In this disastrous atmosphere, and the escalation of this destructive war, the Rapid Support Forces, one of the two sides of the armed and bloody conflict, stormed the headquarters of the fraternal Sudanese Communist Party, looting and destroying its contents, and occupying it.

While condemning in the strongest terms this cowardly aggression and demanding

the evacuation of the headquarters immediately and ending the targeting of national parties and citizens in this senseless war, we renew our position calling for an end to this war. We also declare our solidarity with the Sudanese Communist Party, and the patriotic and civil parties and forces, and trade union organisations, in their struggle to stop the war, establish peace, and achieve democratic civil rule. We fully support the struggle to rid Sudan and its people of the ruling generals and their fight over power, and to end the interference of their external backers.

Victory for the Sudanese people.

All solidarity with the Sudanese Communist Party.

Central Committee
Iraqi Communist Party
26th May 2023. ✪



Radical Radiothon

3CR, Melbourne's Community Radio station, has been broadcasting alternative views and Australian music since 1975, and is still going strong. 3CR's annual Radiothon runs throughout June – their theme this year is "Stay Tuned, Stay Radical." The station needs your help to "Stay Radical" and provide a vital platform for the issues that get left behind, and the voices that get silenced. 3CR needs the community to "Stay Tuned" to diverse voices and alternative perspectives in order to create meaningful social change. Please help the station to build and expand this critical media outlet, and encourage others to "Stay Tuned, Stay Radical." Make a donation to 3CR's 2023 Radiothon today. Any amount makes a big difference, and all donations over \$2 are tax deductible. To donate go to 3cr.org.au/donate or call 03 9419 8377. If you donate, please mention the *Guardian – The Workers Weekly*. 3CR podcasts can be heard online and for free at 3cr.org.au.

Black Unionists stand up to De Santis

NEW ORLEANS: Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) President Terry Melvin, keynoting CBTU's 2023 Convention last week, its 52nd, called out the danger of a "racist, anti-democratic America" that wants to see Black and Brown people "eradicated from stories about America's less than perfect self."

"Bring it on!" Melvin declared, speaking of the need to prevent the election of racist ultra-right potential Republican candidates Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and Donald Trump.

Targeting Ron "DeSatan" DeSantis in this primary election period, Melvin said, "A paranoid minority wants us silenced everywhere except on a stage or on a basketball court." CBTU members responded by making it clear they will not be silenced.

"DeSantis might have declared war on wokeness," Melvin continued. DeSantis and the radical right are "weaponising ignorance and repeating lies" as a central strategy at "the core of the radical right assault on democracy and our Black presence on this soil which is saturated with the blood of our ancestors."

DeSantis is also stoking fear of Brown people whom he is cruelly sending from Texas and Florida to other states in an anti-migrant onslaught. In so doing he uses human beings as political pawns and tries to overwhelm and damage the economies of poorly resourced northern cities that don't receive the federal funds for immigrants that go to places like Texas and Florida. He signed Florida Senate Bill 1718 to combat what the right wing characterizes as "dangerous effects of illegal immigration caused by the federal government's reckless border policies."

The legislation makes using

E-Verify mandatory for any employer with 25 or more employees, imposes penalties for those employing undocumented immigrants, prohibits local governments from issuing identification cards to illegal aliens, invalidates ID cards issued to illegal aliens in other states, and requires hospitals to collect and submit data on the costs of providing health care to undocumented immigrants.

Calling out racist murders, an upsurge in "dangerous radical actions being taken by Republican governors and state legislators across the country," and a radical right agenda, Melvin and other speakers called for building the widest possible solidarity to defeat the ultra-right in the primaries and in the coming elections.

The ultra-right is "starting with women's reproduction control over their bodies, banning books and threatening librarians with fines and jail time if they display banned books or other educational materials," Melvin said. "They are attacking the trans community and denying their humanity. They are imposing oppressive measures to dilute or suppress Black power in the voting booth. They are fighting sensible gun safety restrictions while normalizing mass shootings."

PAYCHECK DECEPTION

DeSantis is pursuing a relentless attack on organized labor. On 9th May, he signed a law "designed to undermine most public sector unions across the state, under the guise of 'paycheck protection.'" That concept, which workers and unions call "paycheck deception," is a common Republican anti-worker law nationally.

According to *Orlando Weekly*, this law "imposes new requirements on unions representing thousands

of Floridians who work within the public sector, from bus drivers to sanitation workers, public health-care workers, librarians, 911 dispatchers, social welfare employees, and city and county government workers."

Paycheck "protection" bans unions from automatically collecting dues via payroll deductions, even when the worker agrees. It undermines the solidarity of union members and the entire workforce and leaves unions with the expense of struggling for workers' needs even when those workers are not supporting the union financially. Successful battles require reliable finances.

DeSantis focused his advocacy for this bill on undermining Florida's education unions, whose members regularly vote Democratic. Representing over 150,000 school teachers, school counsellors, educational support professionals, higher education faculty, and other school staff, they make up a sizeable chunk of the state's unionised public sector workforce.

It is noticeable that "unions representing cops, firefighters, correctional, and probation officers – which often endorse Republicans for office, and donate generously to their campaigns – are exempted from most provisions of the legislation."

CBTU has committed itself to educating, organising, and building the widest solidarity to struggle against DeSantis, Trump, and the ultra-right. Melvin said the workers "have to be prepared" to do what is needed to defeat the ultra-right, including fighting for the reelection of a Biden/Harris ticket in 2024.

Akela Snow from Maryland said, "We are all in solidarity. I like the fact that they are educating the younger generation. We have to move them forward." At the local

level union members will be doing door-to-door educational and voter registration work, and mobilising for the 2024 elections.

The need to educate to counter the onslaught of right-wing lies and deliberate distortions of the contributions of Black and brown people to US history also ran as a theme through the convention.

The ultra-right "conspiracy of forgetting and cultural erasure is not new to Black folks but it must be resisted now, sisters and brothers," Melvin said. "We must stand up and pay attention. We will not back down, we will not back up. We will not let our history go untold in this country.

"We are told Black resistance is a threat to the white privilege or comfort zone. Well so be it. Not my problem. We are not content to witness Black people not breathing, or not being allowed to learn about our ancestors' bravery or achievements. Or not have a seat at the

table where our lives and future are at stake. No, Sisters and Brothers, CBTU don't roll like that."

"This convention itself is an act of resistance," he declared.

"They told us in 1972 that we wouldn't survive for five years. We weren't supposed to endorse Barack Obama in 2007. And we were not supposed to be relevant, viable, and still the powerful independent voice of Black workers in 2023. But here we stand, dammit. I'm going to tell all those who are listening ... I'm going to stand up for what is just, for what is right."

"We want to be in the room when decisions are made – and we will be part of the [decisive] group from now on. This issue of who should lead the nation isn't a complicated question."

For CBTU, defeating the ultra-right is an imperative struggle that demands their full engagement now. There is no time to waste.

People's World ✨



Global Briefs

SERBIA: Last week Alexander Vucic, Serbia's president, put the army on high combat alert over Kosovo clashes. The troops moved to the administrative border with Kosovo and Metohija. According to local media, the move was taken in response to violent tactics by Kosovar police against Serb citizens. Kosovo law enforcement forces were attempting to seize administrative buildings in four Serb-populated municipalities in northern Kosovo and Metohija.

SOMALIA: Armed conflict, severe drought and devastating floods forced more than 1 million people in Somalia to flee their homes in the last 4 months – a record rate of displacement for the country. The total number of displaced people is estimated to be 3.8 million. The population of Somalia is 17 million people. The newly displaced people arrive in already overcrowded urban areas and sites where the earlier displaced groups live. Immense pressure on already overstretched resources exposes vulnerable people to increasing protection risks. Over half a million Somali children are severely malnourished. So far aid agencies received only 22 per cent of the resources needed to deliver assistance this year.

HOLLAND: Over 1500 climate activists were detained in the Hague last Saturday during a protest by the Extinction Rebellion group. The group protested against Dutch fossil fuel subsidies by blocking a section of a motorway in the centre of the city. Police used water cannons to disperse the protesters. According to the police, a total of 1579 people were arrested, 40 of whom will be prosecuted on charges including vandalism.

UKRAINE: After the military defeat at Bakhmut, the destruction of the US Patriot system in Kiev and the elimination of NATO-supplied ammunition, Kiev authorities took drastic measures in response – Kiev city council decided to deprive the late Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev of the title of honorary citizen of Kiev. The move was supported by 82 MPs out of 120. "The decision is another step towards eliminating the legacy of the former Communist regime," the city council's statement read. It was pointed out that it was done in line with the "decommunisation" law of 2015. Never mind that Brezhnev died in 1982. Brezhnev was in good company – several other Soviet military commanders and politicians were deprived of the titles of honorary citizens of Kiev. Legendary Vietnamese revolutionary Truong Chinh is also no longer an honorary citizen of Kiev.



The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) holds membership drive for the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists during #DiversityWeek17. Photo: CBTU Membership Reception – flickr.com (CC BY 2.0).

Softening Us Up

AUSTRALIA: Without much fanfare, Australians are being softened up to accept nuclear waste, nuclear power, and nuclear weapons. Not in one step of course, these things take time, but the process has started.

Nuclear waste is with us now, in a small way, because we have a reactor that produces nuclear material for use in medicine. The material and the waste are on a relatively small scale. Australia has a moratorium on nuclear power, but not on nuclear weapons. Our ally who we treat as a master, the USA, refuses to say if there are nuclear weapons on its planes, ships, and submarines. Unlike New Zealand, which told the US that their ships weren't welcome if they couldn't guarantee that there were no nuclear weapons on board, the Australians don't push the issue. So for all we know, we have already hosted countless nuclear weapons.

More nuclear waste is inevitable, because we have been committed to spending \$368 billion – a floor, not a ceiling, as the ALP like to say – on nuclear-powered submarines. When those submarines turn up, Australia will have working nuclear reactors, and be responsible for much more nuclear waste. As a first step, the government has to change legislation connected to our moratorium on civil nuclear power.

So it is that Richard Marles, our Defence Minister, has introduced a Bill amending the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Act 1998 and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. In introducing this Bill, Marles promised parliament that he wasn't touching the nuclear moratorium, but



was just taking “the first legislative step in support of Australia’s acquisition of conventionally armed nuclear-powered submarines.” Marles added that the bill makes it clear that the moratorium on civil nuclear power does not limit “regulatory functions” to do with nuclear-powered submarines. The Bill amends the Australian Radiation and Nuclear Safety Act and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act. It’s fair to say that Marles isn’t abolishing the moratorium on civil nuclear power, but is limiting its’ scope. It’s like telling someone that their house is still their own, but they’re now not allowed to use one of the bedrooms.

Marles also said that he’s going to set up a new regulator,

“the Australian Nuclear-Powered Submarine Safety Regulator.” This new regulator will handle “the unique circumstances associated with nuclear safety and radiological protection” while we have our nuclear-powered submarines.

Until now, the moratorium has meant that Australian government ministers aren’t allowed to do anything towards constructing or running a nuclear power plant. Marles has put in an amendment which makes it clear that he is allowed to “issue declarations” involving nuclear “propulsion” plants in a nuclear-powered submarine.

While Marles has been careful to reassure parliament that he’s not abolishing the moratorium, and that the submarines will be conventionally armed, others aren’t

so sure. Nine newspapers recent nine-page warmongering exercise “Red Alert” only complained that the submarines didn’t go far enough, and seriously suggested that Australia should host nuclear missiles – providing this would be acceptable to the US.

Sentaor Matt Canavan has proposed a bill to remove our ban on nuclear energy, arguing that if Australia will have nuclear submarines it makes “no sense at all” to ban nuclear power. The Minerals Council of Australia, which like Canavan loves talking about nuclear power as an alternative to actually doing anything about renewable energy, agrees. Tania Constable, chief executive of the MCA argues that if Marles is going to lift the prohibition on nuclear power for

submarines, he should go all the way and just ditch the moratorium. Constable added that having a nuclear industry would mean that nuclear submariners could leave their subs and work in Australian nuclear power plants.

The high-skilled jobs the nuclear submarine deal is supposed to be creating have been estimated to cost more than \$18 million per job. The final cost will be higher than that. As economist John Quiggin has said “just as the massive financial cost of the submarines will come at the expense of spending on social needs, and the workers required to build them will divert skills from addressing needs such as decarbonising the economy.”

Value of hope

Wolfgang Münchau

BRITAIN: the UK Labour Party has not put a lot of deep thought into a post-Brexit economic model. Sir Keir Starmer’s hope of a better deal from the EU is delusional, as is his macro policy target of outgrowing the G7.

But there is one big policy shift that is worth noting. It is the plan to end land speculation and, indirectly, the rentier financial model on which England has become over-reliant for its wealth. The Conservatives did not tackle the housing crisis. Nor did previous Labour governments. This is a big shift.

The UK media has reported on Labour plans legislation that would make it economically viable for local councils to issue compulsory purchase orders (CPO) of land owned by developers.

In theory, this is already possible, but it comes at a steep price. Developers often buy cheap land in the hope that it will later be granted planning permission. If a local government issues a CPO for the land, it must compensate the owner not only for the fair-value price, but also for what is known as the “hope value” – what the land would be worth should it receive planning permission in the future.

The new promised legislation will allow local councils to sequester land at a fraction of the price without the hope value attached. If enacted, this policy will end land speculation at a stroke.

The rise in UK land and property prices has been due to a combination of strict planning laws and a steady influx of immigrants, which has led to an increase in demand for housing. The total UK population is now 69

million. In 2000, it was 59 million. Labour and Conservative governments, have shied away from increasing house building. Even when governments promised to build more housing, as Boris Johnson did, they could not deliver.

Starmer has already broken a taboo by promising to build on greenfield sites surrounding urban areas, in what are known as greenbelts. Despite its high population density, England has nature reserves even in the direct vicinity of cities. The opening up of greenbelts to development is a taboo that Labour is now willing to break.

We see the main effect as creating more affordable housing for young people, with a slow drag-down effect on the rest of the housing market. It won’t lead to a collapse in house prices, but it will be one of several factors that could dampen future house

price growth. The other is higher interest rates, which ends demand-led bubbles like buy-to-let schemes.

This is an important policy shift, but possibly not enough. EU membership was highly conducive to the rentier economy model, boosting the role of the City of London as the euro area’s financial centre and the world’s money-laundering capital, and facilitating immigration that kept wages low and house prices high. Without these factors, the UK needs to focus on old-fashioned productivity growth, and harness future growth industries.

But Labour’s land use policies, and the concomitant shifting of finances from central to local government, matter too. Something is moving in the UK, after a long lull.

EuroIntelligence

BRICS gets Bigger

SOUTH AFRICA: BRICS, the economic group of emerging economies that represents Brazil, India, Russia, China, and South Africa is mulling enlargement and a more independent role for what’s often called “the Global South.” BRICS foreign ministers are meeting on 1st and 2nd June in South Africa. According to Anil Sooklal, South Africa’s ambassador to BRICS, the meeting will talk about membership applications from around 20 countries and how to manage

future expansion.

Applications are being considered in Asia, Africa, South America, and the Middle East. Sooklal told the *Japan Times* that the applications demonstrate “the confidence of the Global South in the leadership of our group.” He added that talks will include possible trading in local currencies.

Professor Rajan Kumar, School of International Studies, JNU noted that of the countries that have shown interest in joining the organisation, some have had close ties with the US.

BRICS has increased its’ share of purchasing power parity to 31.5 per cent, compared to the G7’s 30.7 per cent.

The trading in local currencies issue relates to a desire to lessen dependence on the US dollar. Since the US acted to freeze Russia out of the SWIFT banking system, two thirds of trade between Russia and China happen in local currency, and other countries, possibly mindful of the US tendency to use financial sanctions as leverage, have followed suit; Saudi Arabia, Brazil, India, and other countries have started

trading in local currencies. Brazil and Argentina, for example, have signed deals with Beijing allowing them to trade in Chinese yuan. The head of the New Development Bank, former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff has promised that at least 30 per cent of the bank’s loans will be in the currencies of member states in future.

Reducing financial dependence goes along with reducing political dependence. None of the BRICS countries have complied with US-led sanctions on Russia, and many of the applicant countries

probably like the idea of loans from the New Development Bank that mean they don’t have to fall in line with the sort of neoliberal loan conditions that the US and EU dominated IMF and World Bank tend to impose.

After the meeting, the next big event for BRICS is a leaders summit from the 22nd and to the 24th August. South Africa has already granted diplomatic immunity to attendees of the meeting and for the leaders summit in August.

FJK

The Mounties draw a blank

Despite having claimed that two community organisations in Quebec were “secret Chinese police stations,” the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) has produced no evidence of illegal activity. According to spokesperson sergeant Charles Poirier, the presumed police stations were responsible for a “climate of terror” in the local Chinese Canadian community.

The RCMP claimed that the stations were operating under the cover of two respected community groups – Chinese Family Services, founded in 1976, and the Sino-Quebec Center located in the South Shore. News reports mentioned that both groups were headed by Li Xixi, who is also a municipal councillor in the Greater Montreal suburb of Brossard.

No examples were given, and no specific proof was offered to back up vague allegations of “intimidation” and “threats.” The RCMP made sure to cover its back in the initial media release, by explaining that a successful operation can be measured by the “perturbation of malicious acts” even in the absence of criminal accusations.

In other words, the RCMP was to win coming and going. In the total absence of proof of criminal activities, the police can claim credit for preventively stopping them. This way, the RCMP cannot be refuted. The absence of proof becomes a sign of success of the “perturbation” operation.

The media immediately jumped

on board, splashing sensational headlines about “Chinese interference” across front pages.

Curiously, as of 6th May there has been no further information from the feds. No one has come forward to confirm the allegations. The two groups in question have offered to fully collaborate with the RCMP investigation and have not even received a call back.

On 28th April federal Public Safety Minister Marco Mendicino claimed that the RCMP had indeed successfully shut down all “Chinese police stations” in Canada. The RCMP has still not explained the exact nature of these stations.

Regardless, the RCMP claimed victory on 5th May, asserting that they had indeed successfully “perturbed” the illegal activities. No further details of what these activities may have been offered. We are meant to believe that the operation was so efficient that the illegal activities simply disappeared without leaving a trace.

The farce would be laughable were it not for the devastating effects on the local Chinese Canadian community. Despite lack of proof and specific allegations, the two community groups saw their funding completely cut off by the Quebec government, resulting in a loss of vital services for vulnerable members of the community.

A climate of fear is indeed present in Montreal’s Chinese community, and it is a direct result of the RCMP’s dirty tricks.

The same day the RCMP claimed total victory, members of

the local Chinese Canadian community held a press conference, demanding that the RCMP provide answers. They were accompanied by Yuen Pau Woo, independent senator from British Columbia, who called on the RCMP to “provide information, clarity, and in the meantime, don’t create more problems for the community.”

Local immigration lawyer Walter Tom had harsh words for the RCMP’s tactics, “By associating, in such an irresponsible manner, these two [community] organizations with secret police stations, and particularly by flashing the names of these two organizations every time that there are headlines about secret police, they are creating an atmosphere of fear.”

The baseless allegations may fade from the headlines, as the lack of evidence becomes impossible to ignore, but irreparable damage has been done to the community. Not only have funding and services been cut, but the ambient Sinophobia has been reinforced. The RCMP dirty tricks are clearly the by-product of US geopolitical efforts to ratchet up the new Cold War against China. Demonising the Chinese community in Canada makes it easier to get people on board with increased military spending and gearing up for war to counter the “Chinese threat.”

Racism and xenophobia against the Chinese community are nothing new in Canada. Now, they are being used to serve the ends of US imperialism.

People’s Voice ☆

Greece’s New Democracy on top despite dire record

With 99.65 per cent of votes counted in the elections to the Greek parliament the conservative New Democracy (ND) party led by incumbent Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis emerged as the single largest party with 40.79 per cent of the votes and 146 seats. However, it fell short of a simple majority. The major opposition party, Syriza, led by Alexis Tsipras, secured only 20 per cent of the votes and 71 seats (-15). The liberal-socialist PASOK-KINAL coalition and the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) significantly improved their performance, winning 41 (+19) and 26 seats (+11), respectively. The elections saw a turnout of 60.92 per cent despite voting being compulsory.

According to reports, ND is unwilling to form a coalition with any other party and Mitsotakis has expressed willingness to go for a repeat vote in June

where he might get a majority due to different electoral rules.

The elections were held amid a great deal of dissatisfaction with the major political parties. The ND government’s attacks on the rights of workers across sectors, especially health, and education, were met with protests from trade unions. The government also faced a backlash after a horrific train accident and a wire-tapping scandal.

Under the ND government, austerity policies intensified. Close to 30 per cent of Greeks are at risk of poverty or social exclusion and real wages of workers have declined by 25 per cent since 2007. Greece has also been a key supporter of Ukraine, sending weapons and tank operators and spending 3.5 per cent of its GDP on defense, more than any other NATO member. ☆

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WEASEL

WORDS

Speculate (not wanting to)

Some words are weasleish not because they are misleading in themselves, but because they are selectively and dishonestly applied. Speculating, in the sense of wondering about things, is a perfectly normal human activity. It’s hard to get through a day without speculations such as “I wonder if it’ll rain before I get home,” or “I think the Hawks won’t get the flag this year.” Politicians speculate all the time, except when they’re pretending that it’s something they don’t do because they’re so principled.

Case in point: Kathryn Campbell has been given a \$900,000-a-year job as an AUKUS advisor. Campbell’s main claim to fame is that she oversaw the illegal, costly, and harmful robodebt scheme. Asked why the government was rewarding failure this way, Penny Wong tried to hide behind the robodebt royal commission, saying that she didn’t want to speculate about its’ potential findings. If Wong really wanted to know, she could just read up on it. The families of people whose suicides were linked to robodebt don’t need to speculate.

hitlist (being on)

This sounds bad! Is someone being targeted for assassination? Is someone being targeted for something unfair (the more common and less dramatic use of the term)? Have no fear, “hitlist” is being used in a weasly way to suggest persecution by a rorter who’s having a totally unearned privilege very slightly trimmed. In this case it’s some of the larger and pricier private schools in Victoria who – hold on to your hats – will be eligible to pay payroll tax now, like other employers have to. Naturally the “independent” (but not of our money) school lobby are squealing like stuck pigs over this, and darkly suggesting that they’re on a hitlist. No doubt Daniel Andrews is coming for their swimming pools and polo grounds next. As they say on the internet, stop threatening us with good things.

Mum and Dad

Mum and Dad are nice suburban battler types, doing their best to bring up kids, making sandwiches, driving kids to sport events, hosting birthday parties, cleaning the house – you get the picture. That’s how they’re supposed to be. No wonder all manner of exploitative breadheads want some of this comforting suburban niceness to rub off on them. Hence “mum and dad investors.” The Victorian state budget has lowered the tax-free threshold for land tax from \$300,000 to \$50,000. This will not apply to family homes, so a lot of actual mums and dads won’t be affected. Naturally property groups which work for developers have warned that this will be a tax on “mum-and-dad investors” – often the kind who can afford to have other people make their sandwiches.

Decline

This word is weasly by omission, in what isn’t said when it’s used. Sure things decline and other things increase, but it can be weasly to not state what or who was responsible. It’s like using the passive mood, as when a victim of the police “died” without any mention of why. In the case of union membership, “decline” is used as though the number of people in unions declines all by itself, like a glacier calving. True as far as it goes, but it is weasly not to mention the sustained long-term attacks on union rights that have helped the decline along.

Racialise

(Your semi-regular reminder that opposing the Aboriginal Voice to Parliament puts you on the side of actual racists). This term is used both weasly and inaccurately. Peter Dutton, former totalitarian Home Affairs and Defence minister, and current Leader of the opposition, says that the Voice to Parliament will “re-racialise Australia,” as if our fair land had been somehow de-racialised without the rest of us noticing. Dutton hasn’t explained when Australia was de-racialised, and presumably turned into a race-blind utopia, but it couldn’t have been when he was energetically lying about Black Australians during the disgraceful “African Gangs” campaign, or more recently when he was throwing around unsubstantiated allegations of child abuse about Aboriginal people.

US Military Build-up in Australia

What Can We Expect?

Graham Holton

In the upcoming Exercise Talisman Sabre war games, between the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and United States military, an expected 30,000 military personnel will participate in the largest exercise in Australia-US history. It is in preparation for future conflicts in the Russia-Ukraine War and with China over Taiwan. The war games are part of the US military upgrade of Australian defence bases, following the AUKUS agreement in September 2021, overseen by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. The US Under Secretary of Defense, Dr Mara E. Karlin, said there will be “rotational fighter and bomber aircraft deployments ... ground forces training and increased logistics cooperation.” Karlin said Australian bases will now include logistics facilities, fuel storage, munitions storage, and airfield upgrades.

As the number of US military in Australia grows, during war games and stationed in bases, how will Australian troops react to US arrogance and cultural imperialism? Australians take pride in their history and culture. Once again it will be Australia versus the USA on Australian soil. Historically, US military personnel do not conform to local behaviour, customs and food. Instead troops are made to feel that they are on US soil. They expect everyone to conform to them. The only correct way is the American way, in politics, religion, food, or speech. Such cultural arrogance has resulted in numerous conflicts around the world.

The US has access to its facilities and training areas across Australia. This includes the surveillance base at Pine Gap; Naval Communication Station Harold E. Holt; the Robertson Barracks army base for the 1st Armored Regiment; and the Australian Defence Satellite Communications Station that intercepts communications from regional satellites. The US agreement with the Australian government allows US personnel, paid in US dollars, to not pay Australian income taxes. At Pine Gap, only one in ten of the personnel are Australian citizens, the others are US citizens. Australia pays \$12 million per annum towards the running of the facility.

In preparation for Talisman Sabre, Australian troops have been ordered not to use Australian slang, while the US soldiers are stationed here, so as to not confuse them. No training will be given to US troops on Australian customs and expressions.

In World War II racism was a major issue with US troops in Australia. More than 10,000 African American troops were based in Queensland. From anecdotal evidence, Black troops found their white officers extremely racist, but the local Australians treated them like human beings. In April 1942 some 600 African-American troops of the 96th Engineers General Services Regiment Battalion in Townsville rioted after a white officer killed a Black sergeant. A and C Companies fired heavy machine guns at the white officers' tents. In the 8-hour battle that followed, more than 700 rounds were fired. Officially 19 were killed, though locals remember the figure as nearer 100. In a separate incident at Mt Isa, 73 Black



Talisman Sabre war games in Queensland – June 2005. Photo: CPA

soldiers mysteriously died after drinking alcohol boiled in disused cyanide drums from the mines. There was no investigation into their deaths.

These incidents were covered up by General Douglas MacArthur, who believed Blacks were inferior to whites. They served in segregated units and were only given menial jobs. The famous general had an unsavoury history, different from the heroic image portrayed in the US press. On 28th July 1932, MacArthur, as chief of staff of the Army, personally led a cavalry attack on unarmed World War I veterans protesting living conditions. In World War II he was evacuated from the Philippines, leaving behind his troops to suffer brutal treatment under the Japanese Imperial forces. For this he received the Medal of Honor. In the Korean War MacArthur was in charge of the US troops until he was dismissed by President Harry S Truman in 1951 for insubordination.

Over one million US servicemen were based in Australia. In November 1942 a riot broke out in Brisbane, Queensland, between US military personnel and Australian troops, later called the Battle of Brisbane. Brisbane then had a population of 330,000, plus 80,000 US troops. The conflict began with US personnel being better paid than the Australian military and US military uniforms being more appealing to women than Australian uniforms. The US Army provided silk stockings, chocolate, and army rations to American troops, who handed them out to Australian women. Black troops were forced to stay in South Brisbane and were severely beaten by US Military Police (MPs)

if seen north of the Brisbane River. As Black Americans were liked by Australian troops, witnessing such vicious racism only added to the resentment. In the first night of the riot, one Australian serviceman was killed, eight people suffered gunshot wounds and several hundred people were injured. On the second night, eight US MPs, one serviceman and four American officers were hospitalised, with countless others injured. No US personnel were prosecuted. Similar riots broke out in Melbourne in 1942, Bondi in 1943, Perth and Fremantle in 1944. There were other riots in Townsville, Rockhampton, and Mount Isa in Queensland.

The US military insisted that its personnel be tried by US military courts and not by local courts, a denial of national sovereignty. Edward Leonski, a US soldier, was a serial killer who strangled three women to death in Melbourne in 1942. Leonski confessed to the crimes and was convicted and sentenced to death at a US general court-martial on 17th July 1942. General MacArthur personally signed the execution order and Leonski was hanged at HM Prison Pentridge, Melbourne on 9th November.

With more than 800 US military bases around the world, conflict between US troops and locals are not infrequent. In 2022, on the 50th anniversary of the return of the island group into Japanese control, after 27 years of American rule, the governor of Okinawa asked the Japanese government to reduce the US military presence on the island. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida insisted that the US military presence be maintained. Japanese missile defence and the amphibious

capabilities on Ishigaki, Miyako, and Yonaguni are important because of the island's proximity to Taiwan. Sexual assaults and crimes are major complaints against the US military. In 1996 the base was almost closed after the 1995 rape of a schoolgirl by three US military personnel, which led to massive anti-US demonstrations. Okinawan authorities continue to face denials by the US in criminal and environmental investigations.

Up to 1999 the Panama Canal Zone held massive US military bases protecting shipping in the Canal. The Zone was far richer than nearby Panama City. It was not just the difference in obvious wealth, but the perceived lack of sovereignty of the Panamanian people, that caused frequent anti-US feelings. In 1963, President John F Kennedy agreed to allow the Panamanian flag to fly alongside the US flag at all non-military sites in the Canal Zone. When this agreement was annulled after his assassination, 200 students demonstrated at Balboa High School, carrying their school's Panamanian flag and a sign proclaiming their country's sovereignty over the US Canal Zone. A scuffle broke out and the Panamanian flag was torn up, resulting in an angry crowd of 30,000 Panamanians crossing into the Canal Zone. Demonstrations then spread to Colon, at the opposite end of the Canal. Fifteen Panamanians were killed by the US military, their deaths are remembered in Martyrs' Day, 9th January. The incident led to the 1977 signing of the Torrijos–Carter Treaties, which dissolved the Canal Zone in 1979 and transferred full control of the canal to the Panamanian government on 31st December 1999. ✳



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