



Robodebt

CRUEL, UNFAIR & ILLEGAL

Anna Pha

“Robodebt was a crude and cruel mechanism, neither fair nor legal, and it made many people feel like criminals. In essence, people were traumatised on the off-chance they might owe money. It was a costly failure of public administration, in both human and economic terms,” the Royal Commission into Robodebt says in its lengthy and thorough report handed down on 7th July.

Robodebt commenced with a pilot in 2015 and ran until 2020.

The Royal Commission was initiated by Labor in August 2022 and headed by former Queensland Chief Justice Catherine Holmes. The report is a damning indictment of the inhumane and stigmatising approach taken towards welfare recipients by Coalition government ministers and senior public servants. It is a tragic story of needless human suffering.

Robodebt targeted some of the most vulnerable people in society resulting in not only trauma but stigmatisation, shame, anxiety, mental ill-health, and even suicide.

“It affected members of the community who were or had been reliant on social security payments, imposing tight timelines for responses, requiring technological literacy to engage with the process and employing the services of debt collectors if no response was received, even in circumstances where the recipient did not receive the original letter from Centrelink advising them of the debt,” the report says.

“Many people against whom debts were raised under the Scheme were vulnerable members of society, ill-equipped to engage with a system that had not been designed with its users in mind.”

The Commission notes that fraud in the welfare system is “miniscule,” “but that is not the impression one would get from what ministers responsible for social security payments have said over the years.”

The Commission continues: “Anti-welfare rhetoric is easy populism, useful for campaign purposes. It is not recent, nor is it confined to one side of politics, as some of the quoted material in this report demonstrates ... largely, those attitudes are set by politicians, who need to abandon for good (in every sense) the narrative of taxpayer versus welfare recipient.”

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) and other advocacy groups had informed government ministers and the government departments involved that debts were being issued that were incorrect.

The report is scathing of Kathryn Campbell, then Department of Human Services Secretary:

“Ms Campbell had been responsible for a department that had established, implemented and maintained an unlawful program. When exposed to information that brought to light the illegality of income averaging, she did nothing of substance. When presented with opportunities to obtain advice on the lawfulness of that practice, she failed to act.”

There were other adverse findings against former government ministers including Scott Morrison and senior public servants. In classic Trumpian style, Morrison has rejected the findings and is considering legal advice.

In January 2017 Christian Porter, when Minister for Social Services, told ABC Radio National that the debt recovery program was “working exceptionally well.” He also said, “I think this [the Scheme] is about as reasonable a process as you could possibly derive ...” Later that year he became Attorney General.

ILLEGAL

“It is remarkable how little interest there seems to have been in ensuring the Scheme’s legality, how rushed its implementation was, how little thought was given to how it would affect welfare recipients and the lengths to

which public servants were prepared to go to oblige ministers on a quest for savings. Truly dismaying was the revelation of dishonesty and collusion to prevent the Scheme’s lack of legal foundation coming to light.

“Equally disheartening was the ineffectiveness of what one might consider institutional checks and balances – the Commonwealth Ombudsman’s Office, the Office of Legal Services Coordination, the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal – in presenting any hindrance to the Scheme’s continuance.”

It is hard to imagine more damning findings of a government program.

Robodebt involved automated fines based on annual income. Under the Social Services Act, welfare benefits are not based on an annual income but on each separate fortnight, taking into consideration when someone is working or not working. As a result, hundreds of thousands of debt notices were incorrectly sent out to existing and former welfare recipients. There was no human oversight.

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YES TO THE VOICE

Guardian

Issue 2061

17th July, 2023

Common cause

In 2014 mining magnate Andrew Forrest presented the Abbott Coalition government with “Creating Parity,” a government-commissioned report that was a recipe for wiping out Native Title, clearing outback Indigenous communities off their land, private sector control of their lives and assimilation. Simplistic, paternalistic, racist; it was a strategy for the dispossession and further disempowerment of Indigenous Australians, produced by a mining magnate and his head office team for the sole benefit of mining corporations.

“No individual has benefited more from this mining boom than Andrew Forrest, whose personal wealth derived from massive iron ore deposits on his company’s mining leases in the Pilbara is well into the billions,” said the ABC’s *Four Corners* program at the time.

The so-called “Creating Parity” was a blueprint to drive those already doing it tough into deeper poverty, homelessness, and destitution. “To address poverty and disadvantage, the government should be investing in better employment services and training opportunities and ensuring that income support payments are adequate and provide the assistance people need to live without being exposed to poverty,” noted Greens Senator Rachel Siewert.

The close relationship between government and big business is known as state monopoly capitalism. As can be seen from the above examples, finance, mining, and property interests are tightly interconnected with government. As is US capital and the IMF and World Bank. The mining companies will fight to hang onto every dollar of profit they can. They are also determined to teach the lesson that no government, under threat of its existence, dare challenge their authority.

The struggle against the mining corporations is a struggle against monopoly capital. It is the class struggle. This struggle takes place in all sectors of the economy. These private interests hold key positions on government bodies, influence governments with huge political donations and the promise of six figure incomes to politicians when exiting parliament.

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. 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 Voice is a first step towards winning Indigenous rights by giving Indigenous people access to parliamentarians when issues that affect them including the opening of new mines and land rights are being determined. But it will not be enough on its own.

If there is to be real change in the interests of Indigenous people, then that means taking on and defeating the monopolies. It requires the nationalisation of major industries, in particular the resources sector. Only then can protection of cultural heritage, sites of significance and land rights be guaranteed.

Only a government of a new type can do that, a government with the backing of a broad movement of forces including the working class, students, small farmers and small business people. It requires a government that puts people and the environment before profits.

Robodebt CRUEL, UNFAIR & ILLEGAL

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From the very outset senior public servants and then-Social Services Minister Scott Morrison were informed that the scheme was not legal and would require amendments to the Act. Morrison was responsible for pushing the scheme through Cabinet.

In January 2015, Morrison described himself as planning to be a “strong welfare cop on the beat” because Australians were “not going to cop people who are going to rot [the social security] system.”

Adding to the fear the Scheme created, it also involved the secondment of Australian Federal Police officers, with the AFP’s logo appearing on some debt notices.

At the time of Joe Hockey’s 2015 budget, it was estimated that Robodebt would “save \$1.7 billion over five years”. The net cost of the scheme was \$930 million.

That was the cost to the budget’s bottom line. The human cost was enormous.

In reference to government ministers and senior public servants involved the Commission said: “One of the consequences of the Scheme was a loss of trust in the social security system, and in government more broadly. Some recipients resolved not to seek access to social security payments in the future, in reaction to their experiences under the Scheme.”

VICTIMS

The number of robodebts referred to external debt collectors was 305,973. (Calculated from figures in Commission’s report)

The victims of the scheme covered people who were or had been on NewStart (now JobSearch), the age pension, Youth Allowance and other welfare payments.

ACOSS CEO Cassandra Goldie told the Commission:

“... you had a government that was using language about being a welfare cop, using language about, ‘We will come after you,’ using language about, ‘We will find you and track you down. And if you don’t pay, you might end up in jail.’ And so this notion of the Department of Human Services or Centrelink being there to help people was the complete opposite of what the government was actually communicating. For people on very low incomes relying on income support, what they heard was, ‘This is a dangerous place to come. You won’t be safe.’”

“Recipients were made to feel like second-class citizens, criminals and dole cheats. Witnesses gave evidence about how the term ‘cheat’, often used in the context of debt recovery measures, insinuated that there was an illegitimacy in their reliance on the welfare system. This accusation of dishonesty affected their sense of self-worth” the Commission says.

Goldie said: “We heard from people who had health conditions that were aggravated by the mere receipt of a Robodebt and dealing with the issue. People had to take time off work to deal with it. It caused stress within families because of the fact that people had received the debt. People hid it from their partners because they experienced shame ... (I)t caused the mental health issues for a lot of people just because ... people felt very powerless to try and clear their name because they couldn’t get the information that they needed, and they felt helpless.”

APS STAFF

Following the release of the report, CPSU National Secretary Melissa Donnelly said, “The Robodebt scheme had far-reaching and devastating consequences, for members of the public who were affected but also for Centrelink employees who were forced to implement a scheme they knew to be unethical and illegal.

“Frontline workers tried to stop this scheme in its tracks – they stood up and spoke out time and time again, but were ignored, silenced and even threatened.”

“All of us were staff of long-standing and knew how to read the Act and that this new process was illegal,” Centrelink senior complaints officer Judith Stolz said of the Robodebt’s rollout. However, no discussion could move anyone from their view that Robodebt was perfectly legal.”

Numerous attempts by the CPSU and advocacy groups to address the illegality of the scheme and inform ministers and senior public servants that debts were being pursued when they did not exist were unsuccessful.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report makes 57 recommendations. Some are directed at strengthening the public service more broadly, some at improving the processes of the Department of Social Services and Services

Australia. Others are concerned with reinforcing the capability of oversight agencies.

In particular, when it comes to the design of policies and processes by Services Australia the primary emphasis should be on the recipients it is meant to serve. There should be more “face-to-face” customer service support options for vulnerable recipients needing support.

Peak advocacy bodies should be consulted prior to the implementation of projects involving the modification of the social security system.

“When it next conducts a review of the National Legal Assistance Partnership, the Commonwealth should have regard, in considering funding for legal aid commissions and community legal centres, to the importance of the public interest role played by those services as exemplified in their work during the Scheme,” the Commission says.

“Services Australia should put in place processes for genuine and receptive consultation with frontline staff when new programs are being designed and implemented.”

All welfare recipients should be treated fairly and with dignity, taking each person’s circumstances into account before commencing recovery action.

The Commission does not recommend compensation because it would be “unworkable.”

A sealed chapter contains referrals of information concerning some persons for further investigation by other bodies. Parts of this chapter are being referred to the Australian Public Service Commissioner, the National Anti-Corruption Commissioner, the President of the Law Society of the Australian Capital Territory, and the Australian Federal Police.

As Labor Minister for Government Services Bill Shorten said, Robodebt was “a war on people on welfare.” It was also a war on public servants and the public service and the abdication by the government of its responsibility to provide for the welfare of society.

It must never be allowed to happen again.

See opposite for impacts of Robodebt.

[Front page photo: Ben Alexander – flickr.com (CC BY-SA 2.0.) ☆

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Image: wallpaperflare.com

Robodebt: War on welfare recipients

Anna Pha

Rhys Cauzzo took his own life on 26th January 2017. In the days after his death, his mother went to her son's apartment in Melbourne and found "debt letters hanging on the fridge along with a drawing of a person shooting a gun in their mouth, with dollar signs coming out of the back of their head."

Cauzzo had a Robodebt hanging around his neck.

Witness Felicity Button told the Royal Commission into Robodebt: "Each time I considered making an application I have decided against going ahead with it because I fear that if I am a Centrelink recipient again another debt will be raised against me ..."

"I couldn't sleep because I was going to bed at night and racking my brain trying to figure out what had happened ... and what was going to happen. How are they going to get this money from me? And it was these threats of taking money directly out of my pay or out of my bank account, from my tax return. And it was just a weight on my shoulders. But I do remember driving home

at night just beside myself with worry about this money and thinking I could just drive my car into a tree and make it stop ..."

"I felt suicidal for a period of months in 2017 with the 'lowest point' being the occasion when ARL (debt collector) debited money from my account," Button said.

"I felt desperate on that day; it was so upsetting that I could not afford to pay for my daughter's medical expenses and I felt powerless to improve my situation."

Ricky Aik lived rurally and gave evidence that he found navigating the Robodebt Scheme especially difficult given his remote location: "I recall attempting to telephone Centrelink to provide Centrelink with the amounts recorded on those payslips. I was unable to do so. Again, I recall being left on hold for hours and giving up. Because I was often working during the day, I was not in a position to be on the phone for long periods of time."

Matthew Thompson, who had experienced mental illness previously, told the Commission that upon receiving a debt notice totalling \$11,000 he was in "complete shock," because it would "set me back years and years and years." He explained that

"from a generalised anxiety disorder point of view, it's just ... the biggest trigger you can give to somebody."

Another submission to the Commission from a person advocating on her daughter's behalf after her daughter received notice of a debt owing, said they had written to various ministers about the shortcomings in the debt review process. The debt was eventually waived; however, the "stress of false accusations" had a long-lasting effect:

"The impact on her mental and physical health was enormous. The repeated stress of false accusations on her integrity and the threats made, eventually lead to her having to leave her employment. She spent 6 months in no state to work. She spent her savings and mine over this time as she was too frightened to engage with Centrelink for financial help. She was prescribed medication for her mental condition. We both spent countless hours and days proving her innocence."

Katherine Prygodicz described feeling "bad and distressed" when her partner's family did not believe the alleged debt raised against her was incorrect: "they suspected that I had done something a little bit dodgy and that I had lied to the government." To

the contrary, Prygodicz knew herself to be a "very honest and diligent person." She explained:

"My feelings of anxiety and distress were exacerbated by the fact that in the general community, people who are thought to have received social security benefits they are not entitled to are considered to be frauds or to be 'bludging' off the system. This environment contributed to the negative impact that the Asserted Overpayment Debt had on my mental health."

Catherine Eagle, the principal solicitor at Welfare Rights and Advocacy Services in Perth, told the Commission about their experience with people who first learnt of their Robodebt when tax refunds had been garnished during the Scheme:

"... because people weren't getting notices if they were no longer on Centrelink payments, because they probably changed address, so the first that they would know is when they had lost their tax refund ... they were expecting to get."

Some were threatened with Departure (going overseas) Prohibition Orders if their "debts" were not paid. ❄

Robodebt: War on public servants

Anna Pha

Workers at Department of Human Services (DHS) gave evidence to the Robodebt Royal Commission of particularly disturbing or upsetting recipient interactions in relation to the Scheme.

"[I] experienced listening to multiple suicide attempts over the phone and I have been diagnosed with PTSD since I finalised my work with Centrelink," said one witness.

A summary of a communication from a whistle-blower to the Secretary of the DHS, Kathryn Campbell, explained that debts raised under the Scheme were frequently inaccurate. It stated:

"I am a compliance officer with Centrelink. I'm writing because I, along with so many of my co-workers, have tried to stop the wrong that is being done to thousands of our customers on a daily basis and I can no longer live with what we are doing. I spoke confidentially to my wife and she has urged me to speak out about what is actually happening inside Centrelink, before it is covered

up. Both myself and my wife understand this could mean that I lose my position ..."

"We are struggling daily with our consciences and pushing back against our leaders every single day ... I see these reviews every working day and I am horrified at what I am being directed to do. I am risking my job sending this information in the desperate hope that exposing such a corrupt and unjust system might just make a difference."

The whistle-blower's summary described the raising of debts that were "incorrect" and outlined the five main system errors that caused the debts to be incorrect. In particular, "Centrelink officers are not allowed to check the results of the automated system against evidence previously provided by the person or their employer ..."

In a statement to the Commission, Colleen Taylor, an experienced DHS compliance officer, told the Commission of her attempts to raise her concerns with senior public servants:

"Before Robodebt was introduced I loved my job. I felt I had expertise in my

area and I felt I was making a contribution as a public servant. Having tried my hardest to get something done at the highest levels of the Department to change the scheme, I felt I had no option other than to leave my position and retire from the public service.

When asked what her reason was for retiring, Taylor said:

"I just – I was just spent, I think. I just – it was just the, I guess, callous indifference, that you just thought, is that what people do to each other? And it was just so sad ..." (emphasis added in report)

Taylor also noted that "the teams of social workers at DHS were being depleted, with social workers experiencing burn out or leaving the Department: I thought that our wellbeing and safety were being compromised by the work we were doing."

Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) National Secretary Melissa Donnelly said, "The Robodebt scheme was a catastrophic failure of governance, that had devastating impacts across the country. The

damage it did was far-reaching and much of it cannot be undone.

"Robodebt had very real, and still very raw, consequences on Centrelink workplaces and staff who were forced to implement it. The personal and professional impacts were profound, in many cases, leaving passionate, good-hearted, and experienced public servants broken.

"For hundreds, if not thousands, of hardworking Services Australia employees, Robodebt was the final straw. They quit the agency. Or rather, the agency lost them."

"CPSU members want ... their agency to be properly resourced so they can do the job they are there to do. They want to be safe at work – physically and psychologically. They want their experience and expertise to be valued, which means no more blanket automation and an end to the assumption that anyone can slot in and do their job. And they want an apology from their employer for what they endured." ❄

Australia's deadliest industry



Semi-trailer driving along Port Beach Road, Rous Head, in North Fremantle, Western Australia.
Photo: Bahnfreund – Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0).

Transport Workers Union (TWU) members are pushing for changes to legislation to make transport work in Australia fair, safe, and sustainable. As the TWU says:

"For years, TWU members have fought for reform to make Australia's deadliest industry safer and fairer. We're closer than ever to achieving this – Federal Parliament will soon be asked to vote on reform to set fair, safe, and sustainable standards in transport.

Whether an owner driver, employee driver, transport gig worker, bus driver, waste worker,

Distribution Centre worker, or any other transport worker, we are coming together across the industry because this reform will change lives and save lives. Workers have been joined by transport operators, employer associations, supply chain clients, and gig companies all calling for reform to end the crisis in transport.

Transport supply chains are in crisis. Cost-cutting from wealthy clients at the top of supply chains and unfair competition from exploitative gig models cause deadly pressure on operators and drivers to delay maintenance, rush to meet

unrealistic deadlines, and stay on the road too long.

Since 2011, 12 transport gig workers have been killed at work. More than 300 truck drivers have been killed since the road safety watchdog was abolished seven years ago.

The TWU is campaigning for five changes: safe industry standards, supply chain accountability, same job same pay, an end to gig exploitation, and a voice for transport.

TWU, edited for reasons of space. ✨

Four in five want PwC on the outside

Bad, but not surprising news for large accounting firm Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC), recently caught using its work for the Australian Tax Office to give its corporate clients advice on how to avoid tax: Polling by the Australia Institute shows that four-in-five Australians (79 per cent) want consulting firm PwC banned from receiving new government work, including nearly half who back a permanent ban.

Just 2 per cent did not think PwC should be banned from government work, while 19 per cent did not know or were not sure, according to the nationally representative sample of 1002 people between 6th and 9th June 2023.

Of those surveyed, 45 per cent thought the ban should be permanent while the remainder backed PwC being banned for at least some period of time, either less than two years (5 per cent), between two

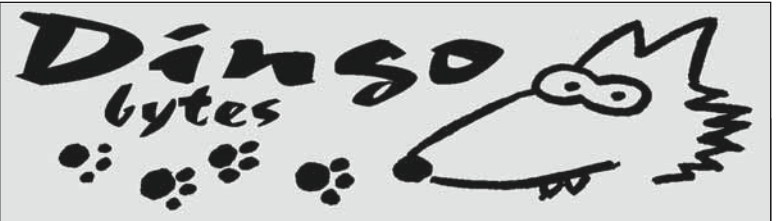
and five years (12 per cent), or between five and 10 years (16 per cent).

"There is overwhelming public support for PwC to face serious consequences for its gross breach of integrity and trust," said Bill Browne, Director of the Australia Institute's Democracy & Accountability Program.

"The consequences for PwC's abuse of public trust cannot be limited to when the political and media heat is on, but must be long-lasting to show that this behaviour will not be tolerated.

"The consulting firm has shown it cannot be trusted to continue receiving government work that can and should be performed by public servants," said Browne.

A permanent ban on PwC receiving government work was the single most popular response across all voting intentions. ✨



Activists descended on the offices and facilities of global weapons giant Thales last week to mark the 25th anniversary of the Biak massacre in West Papua. Wage Peace kicked off an international string of actions occupying Thales offices in Sydney and Melbourne simultaneously. Later in the day, manufacturing facilities in Bendigo and another office in Darwin were disrupted, with Wage Peace claiming responsibility for all four actions. Memorial ceremonies and political demonstrations were also held in Jakarta, Sorong, Jayapura, London, Delft, and in the province of Biak itself. Within Indonesia, people can and have been charged with treason for simply raising the West Papuan flag. Lilli Barto, one of the activists who carried out an occupation of the Thales office in Sydney said, "We take these actions in solidarity with the people of West Papua, who are risking their liberty and their lives today to bring their story to the world." Barto added that Thales board members "know that their weapons will be used to commit genocide, but they would rather make a quick buck than face up to the reality of that." "If they are upset that we are occupying their office" she continued, "then they might want to think about how the West Papuan people's feel about Indonesia occupying their homelands."

PARASITE OF THE WEEK: All those companies with unsafe work places. On 6th July the South Australian Labor government introduced industrial manslaughter legislation to ensure that if you kill a worker, you go to jail. Under the Work Health and Safety (Industrial Manslaughter) Amendment Bill, if a business is found to have been grossly negligent or recklessly cut corners on safety and a worker dies on the job, the individual responsible faces up to 20 years imprisonment and a corporation faces \$18 million in fines. "Every month a South Australian worker loses their life on the job and for some firms, it's become their business model to cut corners on safety, because even if caught, it costs a lot less than just making their workplaces safe in the first place," said Dale Beasley, SA Unions Secretary. "Unions have been loudly fighting to change this, and we're glad to see this government show leadership where the previous Liberal government refused to act. The threat of a prison sentence is important, because even a fine of \$18 million could be seen as little more than a speeding fine on a multi-billion-dollar project. Workers and their families need to know that their lives are more than just a line on a balance sheet," he added. The Maritime Union of Australia's South Australia Branch Secretary, Brett Larkin, welcomed the development and explained that workers in waterfront and seafaring industries who face special risks and dangers at work will be especially relieved to see action being taken. "Kill a worker, Go to jail. We need laws like this to help prevent bad decisions from rogue employers where there is more at stake for them than just a financial risk which they can incorporate into their bottom line," Larkin said. "We hope this law is supported and works as a preventative measure to hold bosses to account and improve safe systems of work. If the new laws are never needed because workers are safer at work than before, then the reforms will have been a success."

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Perth

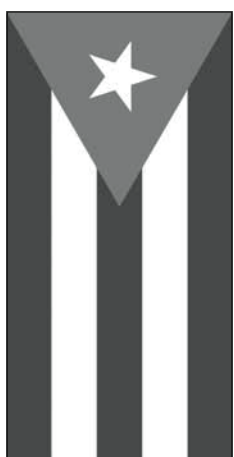
Cuba Today Public meeting

Saturday 12th August 3-5pm at Perth Trades Hall (82 Beaufort St Perth)

Get first hand information from two young Cuban visitors touring Australia. Marianniz Diaz, a research scientist, and Ivan Barreto, official for the Asia-Pacific area from the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP). They will share their thoughts on Cuba today and invite Western Australians to visit Cuba in the upcoming Southern Cross Brigade from December 2023 to January 2024.

Free event.

For more info contact ACFS Perth at acfsperth@gmail.com or call 0419 812 872.



Richard Marles self-regulates

Sue Wareham

It is a fundamental principle that the regulation of industries must be independent of the industries themselves. This is particularly important where products that have the potential to cause significant harm are concerned, such as alcohol, tobacco, firearms – or nuclear reactors.

The Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA) is tasked with protecting the public from the harmful effects of nuclear radiation.

ARPANSA's independence is critical in its capacity to fulfil that role.

It is alarming then that in the matter of Australia's proposed naval nuclear reactors, the principle of independent regulation is being abandoned.

Defence Minister Richard Marles announced on 6th May that from 1st July there will be "a new independent statutory regulator, the Australian Nuclear-Powered Submarine Safety Regulator".

The new regulator will be independent of the Defence Department and the ADF, but will be within the Defence portfolio and will report directly to the minister himself.

Thus the minister will oversee not only the acquisition, delivery, governance, waste disposal, weapons non-proliferation and other aspects of the submarines, but also the regulation of their safety.

The possibility of "regulatory capture" has alarmed ARPANSA's own Radiation Health and Safety Advisory Council, a committee made up of expert ARPANSA staff who advise the CEO.

In October 2022, the council wrote to the CEO, stating, "Independence of the regulator is a critical part of its effectiveness. The regulator should be independent of the operators and departments overseeing any aspect of purchase, manufacture, maintenance, and operation of the program. It is noted that some of the more significant global nuclear and radiation incidents have arisen from inadequate separation of responsibilities from regulatory capture."

The ARPANSA letter explicitly referred to a public safety risk in setting up a new regulator, "Separate and unaligned nuclear and radiation regulatory frameworks, for example a Commonwealth nuclear powered submarine regulator apart from existing jurisdictional radiation regulators, could present a risk to public safety."

Naval nuclear reactors – like all



Nuclear-powered submarine *USS OHIO* at Delta Pier, Bangor, Washington. Photo: The US National Archives – picryl.com (CC0).

nuclear reactors – do present risks to public safety, despite what Marles would have us believe. An issue for us – the public – is that there is strong precedent for information about the risks of naval reactors, and about actual safety breaches, to be withheld.

In the UK, the Ministry of Defence has been accused of a cover-up, because since 2017 annual reports from the ministry's internal watchdog on these matters, the Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator, have not been released. An appeal to a UK tribunal to force release of the reports was rejected in 2021, and the ministry has even rejected a freedom-of-information request seeking the reasons for its secrecy.

This matters very much because questions in the UK parliament revealed that there were 460 nuclear safety incidents between 2019-2021 alone at the two Trident nuclear submarine bases in Scotland. No details have been provided to the public on the precise nature of the incidents, despite there being incidents with "actual or high potential" for a release of radioactivity which could affect humans. The rate of incidents per year has risen since the BBC reported in 2018 on the previous 12 years.

Marles has assured us that Australia's proposed naval nuclear program will meet International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) standards. However the IAEA sets out in its governmental, legal and regulatory framework for safety a requirement that regulatory bodies

be "effectively independent in ... safety related decision making and [have] functional separation from entities having responsibilities or interests that could unduly influence its decision making."

A system in which the regulator is answerable to the minister overseeing the activities being regulated is not "functional separation."

Additional problems with setting up a new nuclear regulatory body include the marginalising of the expertise and experience accumulated over many years within ARPANSA. Remember, too, that there is no existing Australian workforce with the skills and experience required to operate and regulate naval nuclear power. The sidelining of some of the very few people who do have nuclear regulatory skills makes no sense if robust regulation is the goal.

Which all leads to the question, why should the nuclear submarine regulator not be answerable to the minister (or assistant minister) for Health, as ARPANSA is, rather than the minister for defence? After all, its mandate will be to protect the health of Australians from any irradiation from the naval reactors, won't it?

Naval nuclear power is a bad idea for Australia, and the government's proposed regulatory arrangements are just another reason to ditch this dangerous plan.

Dr Sue Wareham OAM is president of the Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia). 📧

PEACE NOTES

Hannah Middleton

Good news is rare for peace, but recently the NSW Department of Education amended its policy to add weapons companies to the list of inappropriate sponsors in schools. There are similar policies in the ACT, Victoria, and Queensland.

The Commercial Arrangements, Sponsorship and Donations Policy in the NSW Department of Education already prohibits companies promoting tobacco, alcohol, gambling, and unhealthy food products from delivering educational programs in schools. Now they have added arms companies to the list.

The weapons industry, with the backing of the Department of Defence, has openly said that its involvement in education is to "secure the talent pipeline." Education should be designed around the needs of students and their communities, not the need for a skilled workforce by the arms industry.

Links between the industry and schools exist all over Australia. They are in the form of sponsorships, events, competitions, tours of industry premises, exhibitions at careers fairs and direct personal engagement between industry personnel and students and teachers. Engineers and other company representatives go into classrooms to engage with students. Northrop Grumman sponsors trips to the US for students and teachers.

The Medical Association for the Prevention of War 2022 report "*Minors and Missiles*" points out that weapons companies have been sponsoring and directly delivering STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths) education programs to primary school children, with the explicit intention of creating positive attitudes to careers in weapons development and production.

There are no equivalent strategies to support STEM skilling or career pathways in fields critical to our survival and well-being, such as renewable energy, water and food security, or public health.

So it's good news from NSW. However, problems remain.

There is no ban on weapons companies in schools in South Australia, which already has a weapons industry, especially naval equipment, and has "defence TAFEs."

Many programs are operated through front organisations, such as *First Australia* or *Regional Development Australia*. These may be used as a loophole to avoid the new ban.

The proliferation of weapons is a great threat to peace. The development, trade, and use of armaments undermines human security across the globe; nuclear weapons pose a grave existential threat to all humanity. The global weapons industry profits from war and insecurity and is associated with corruption and human rights violations.

There is no evidence that investment in military industries generates significant domestic employment opportunities. Other industries can generate more jobs and greater social benefits with lower public investment.

Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Boeing, Thales, Raytheon, and BAE systems are all also engaged in partnerships with various leading Australian universities in research, scholarships, industry placements, and other career opportunities.

Many of these partnerships focus on the development of next-generation weapons like hypersonics, long range and smart munitions, artificial intelligence, and autonomous systems.

Australian university managements do not want to miss out on the military-industrial-education financial boom.

Catriona Jackson, CEO of Universities Australia, sees commercial opportunities as the priority. Distant from the process of learning, she sees AUKUS as packed with promise.

Her aim is "developing the capability to deliver the project, including through the provision of skilled workers and world-class research and development that universities are right to give their full support to."

The intrusion of weapons companies into the lives of school children and tertiary students is an issue that undermines educational values, distracts from the real problems the world faces, promotes militarism, and inures them to war and the human cost of the development, trade, and use of weapons.

The fight to kick the military industrial complex out of classrooms and universities and to educate for a safe and peaceful world must go on. Arms dealers have no place in schools or universities.

Adequate funding and promotion of STEM careers in climate change mitigation and environmental protection are far more important to our future security than development of weapons systems.



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Sky News

Making it up, racism, no shame

Graham Holton

On 29th June Alexander Voltz of Sky News attacked the Palaszczuk government for wanting to change the name of Brisbane and its main streets to Meanjin and other indigenous names. Meanjin is a Yuggera word describing the area surrounding the Brisbane River. "According to 4BC," writes Voltz, "Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk is 'working behind the scenes' with both Greens and First Nations stakeholders on plans to enact the name change in time for the 2032 Olympics."

Pauline Hanson, the leader of One Nation, weighed in saying that it was a "possibility." Voltz accused the Labor government of Queensland of alienating Australians by instigating the indigenisation of the state in the run up to The Voice referendum. The Premier labelled the claims "absolute nonsense." It was all "fake" news.

Underlying the whole furphy was the unstated assumption that white Australians are the only real Australians, and that the only possible reason for using the Indigenous name for an Australian city had to be hatred of Brisbane's "proud" history. That's *Sky News* in a nutshell: making things up, racism, and no shame. When the rumour was quashed, rather than apologising for an untruth, Voltz simply wrote about how horrible the imaginary far-left name-changers were. In the *Sky News* world, if you're wrong, you can just talk about what would have happened if you'd been right.

Wes Mountain warned in *The Conversation* in 2021 that *Sky News* was supporting the far right in Australia. He quoted Kevin Rudd's observation that *Sky News* Australia is following the template set by Murdoch's *Fox News* in the

United States, to radicalise Australian politics.

One danger sign was "the unconstrained peddling of extreme right-wing propaganda, lies, disinformation, crude distortion of fact and baseless assertions." It is how the far-right media manufactures public opinion, through a system of passionate disinformation.

Sky News has been owned by News Corp Australia since December 2016. In 2017, Denis Muller noted that *Sky News* was moving towards "right-leaning punditry" in prime time. Four years later Muller wrote in *The Conversation* that it now followed "extreme right-wing propaganda."

In August 2018, *Sky News* was heavily criticised for interviewing the leader of the far-right Neo-Nazi organisation, United Patriots Front, on *The Adam Giles Show*. The man openly expressed his admiration for Adolf Hitler and boasted about manipulating women "using violence and terror." After the interview aired, *Sky News* commentator, former Labor Party minister Craig Emerson, resigned in protest. Following the Christchurch mosque shootings, in March 2019, *Sky News* Australia was temporarily removed from *Sky New Zealand's* satellite platform, because of how the channel covered the massacre.

On 13th December 2020, Rowan Dean promoted the false Great Reset conspiracy theory, claiming that it was a "serious and dangerous" threat to our "prosperity and your freedom." In February 2021, American far-right conspiracy theorist, Alex Jones, used *Sky News* Australia to back up his conspiracy claims. On 1st August 2021, You Tube barred *Sky News* Australia for a week for breaking You Tube's rules against posting COVID-19 misinformation. In 2022, an analysis by the British Institute for Strategic Dialogue, accused *Sky News*



Photo: Adam – Pixabay

Australia of being a major source of climate change misinformation.

More recently *Sky* has attacked the Voice, in a characteristically dishonest way. *News* host, Andrew Bolt, argued on 9th March 2023, that The Voice was not democratic, as it will be controlled by the "Aboriginal aristocracy" – in Bolt's mind, this means any Aboriginal people in elected positions of power and not right-wing. Senator Jacinta Price agreed that it would be "empowering" those already at the table.

On 13th June 2023, Peta Credlin from *Sky News* warned "No campaigners against being complacent" because of the "avalanche of money" behind the Yes campaign.

After a poll commissioned by the *Sydney Morning Herald* and

The Age showed that support for The Voice had fallen to 49 per cent. In a great example of twisted logic, Credlin warned, "Now it's true, given the near universal fear of appearing to be racist, this polling might actually understate opposition to a Voice." She did not explain why the allegedly "near universal fear of appearing to be racist" was a bad thing.

On 28th June, *Sky News* host Paul Murray said that Australians who debate an Indigenous Voice to Parliament are being attacked, as a sign of the lack of democracy on the issue. Murray complained that too many people thought debate on The Voice is putting Indigenous mental wellbeing "at risk." It was in reference to Linda Burney, Minister

for Indigenous Australians, who said that disinformation and scare campaigns were being used in the debate to unsettle Indigenous people. Her comment was not an attack on debate, but it was against right-wing platforms, such as *Sky News*, which habitually use falsehoods to undermine the Yes vote. In the *Sky* mindset, any criticism counts as an attack.

Before the referendum in November, the false news and conspiracy theories will continue on *Sky News*. While its hosts may sound confident and convincing in their reporting, investigation will show that their claims are lies, falsehoods and complete nonsense. Viewers beware. ☘

Escalating tensions

Roger McKenzie

China's Defence Ministry accused the United States of turning Taiwan into a powder keg with its latest sales of military equipment to the breakaway province.

The US State Department approved the sale of 30 mm ammunition and related equipment, along with spare parts for Taiwan's vehicles, small arms, combat weapon systems, and logistical support items worth a total of \$440.2 million.

Defence Ministry spokesperson Colonel Tan Kefei responded that "the US ignores China's core concerns, crudely interferes in China's internal affairs, and deliberately escalates tensions across the Taiwan Strait."

China claims Taiwan as its own territory and Tan said "stern representations" had been lodged with the US.

"This is tantamount to accelerating the transformation of Taiwan into a 'powder keg' and pushing the Taiwanese people into the abyss of disaster," he said in a statement carried on the ministry's website.

Using force to seek independence is wishful thinking and is doomed to failure, he said, adding that the People's Liberation Army was always ready and would maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

Mao Ning, a spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, also addressed the arms

deal at a press briefing. "The US should abide by the 'One China' principle. ... It should cease selling weapons to Taiwan, creating tensions and undermining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait."

The US officially maintains a "One China" policy under which it supposedly does not recognise Taiwan's formal independence and has no formal diplomatic relations with the island. Nonetheless, US law requires a credible defence for Taiwan and for the US to treat all threats to the island as matters of "grave concern."

Going beyond this, the Biden administration has continued to build up its military strength in a provocative arc around China. According to the Pentagon's own figures, the US has at least 313 bases in East Asia and around 750 worldwide.

The number of US bases may be even higher, as the Pentagon does not release the location of all of its facilities.

In contrast, China has one base in Djibouti and several small installations in the South China Sea, bringing the country's total foreign military bases to around eight.

In its announcement of the Taiwan weapons sale, the State Department said it "serves US national, economic, and security interests by supporting the recipient's continuing efforts to modernise its armed forces and to maintain a credible defensive capability."

The State Department said, "The proposed sale will help improve the security of the recipient and assist in maintaining political stability, military balance, and economic progress in the region."

They added that the ammunition and associated equipment would maintain the effectiveness of Taiwan's CM34 Armoured Vehicles while "further enhancing interoperability with the United States."

The need for "interoperability" essentially means that the Taiwan armed forces are to be kept in a state where they can be easily integrated into the US military in the event of war against China.

Taiwan thus serves as an extension of US armed power in the region, a point not lost on many observers in East Asia – or in Taiwan itself.

"An increasing number of Taiwan people have come to realise that the US is turning Taiwan into ... an ammunition depot, rather than providing protection," Zhu Fenglian at the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office said.

Referring to the ruling party in Taipei, Zhu said, "The Democratic Progressive Party authorities in Taiwan are spending the hard-earned money of the people to please the US, which will only push the people of Taiwan into a dangerous and volatile situation."

Morning Star ☘



Photo: CEphoto, Uwe Aranas – creativecommons.org (CC BY-SA 3.0)



A COMMUNICATION FROM THE INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF SOLIDARITY WITH GUATEMALA TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Guatemala is experiencing an electoral process that, since its inception, has been flawed. Despite this, on the 25th of June 2023, the Guatemalan people turned up to exercise their right to vote.

The results of the first electoral round positioned Sandra Torres and Bernardo Arévalo as the two presidential candidates to run for a second round, which will take place on the 20th of August 2023.

Surprised by the number of votes favouring Bernardo Arévalo, the "Pact of the Corrupt" and its allies have interfered with the process established by the Electoral Law and Political Parties, through illegal actions. One of those actions is the presentation before the Constitutional Court of a series of protection acts alleging fraud in the vote of the 25th of June.

The political parties that are part of the Pact of the Corrupt did not obtain the results they expected. It is widely known that they are responsible for the use of illegal mechanisms of vote-buying and manipulation. Now, they have achieved that the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Electoral Tribunal suspend the qualification and officialisation of the first round of the general election results.

The process has been suspended, which goes against the Electoral Law causing uncertainty amongst citizens about the results that the "audiences of scrutiny" may yield. The three branches of the Guatemalan government are co-opted by mafias. Their actions cause doubt that the process of review would be transparent.

1. Faced with this dire situation, we ask the International Organizations to remain alert to the Pact of the Corrupt and its allies' actions and demonstrate their support for democracy and the fundamental right of the Guatemalan population to elect their authorities freely.

2. The rise in intimidating statements made by members of the parties that were eliminated in the first-round call into question the already weakened state of the law in Guatemala and resonate as a call for authoritarian intervention.

For this reason, we ask the international community to continue demonstrating for the respect of democratic institutionalism, as well as the guarantee of physical integrity of the members of the Semilla (Seed) Movement Party.

3. We ask the people of Guatemala to be alert to the manoeuvres that the Pact of the Corrupt and the current authorities are making. We cannot allow them to favour their allies by altering the results of the second electoral round.

4 July 2023

Germany, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Costa Rica, USA, Spain, France, England, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Norway, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Switzerland



Global Briefs

BRITAIN: The number of construction workers killed in site accidents rose sharply from 29 to 45 last year, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has revealed. The total was also higher than the five-year average of 37 annual deaths, with construction making up a third of the 135 workers killed in work-related accidents across all UK industries in the 12 months to March 2023. It was followed by the combined sector of agriculture, forestry, and fishing with 21 deaths and manufacturing with 15 deaths. The HSE said: "The most common kinds of fatal accidents at work are falls from a height (40), struck by moving object (29), and struck by moving vehicle (20) – all accounting for around two thirds of fatal injuries to workers in 2022/23." Official figures for Mesothelioma – the cancer that can be caused by past exposure to asbestos – showed 2268 people died from the disease in 2021.

NATO: Leaders of the Western military alliance have agreed to help "modernise" Ukraine's armed forces, create a new high-level forum for consultations and reaffirm that Kiev will eventually be granted membership. But the country will not begin the accession process anytime soon. A two-day NATO summit in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius, has decided on massive increases in military spending.

KENYA: More than 20 anti-government protesters were arrested in the capital Nairobi today as many parts of the country also saw opposition-called demonstrations against newly imposed taxes. Hundreds of protesters turned out in Nairobi and other areas such as the coastal city of Mombasa and the lakeside city of Kisumu, where the opposition enjoys huge support, but they were dispersed by police firing tear-gas canisters.

UKRAINE: Thirty-three Latin American and Caribbean countries have forced the European Union to cancel Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's invitation to the EU-Latin America summit due to be held on 17th and 18th July in Brussels. News website EURACTIV, based in the Belgian capital, also reported that "all elements related to Ukraine's support" have been withdrawn from the summit's draft final declaration, which had been prepared by the EU Foreign Policy Service.

UN: Children experienced the highest number of "grave violations" in conflicts verified by the United Nations in 2022, the UN children's agency said. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said that conflicts in the Palestinian occupied territories, Congo, and Somalia were placing the most children in peril. UNICEF also expressed particular concern about the plight of children in Haiti, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Ukraine. "Grave violations" include the recruitment and use of children by combatants, killings and injuries, sexual violence, abductions and attacks on schools and hospitals. UNICEF's deputy executive director Omar Abdi told the UN Security Council that there were more than 27,000 grave violations, up from 24,000 the previous year. The number of conflict situations "of concern" was also the highest, at 26. Since the report, Abdi said, a serious conflict has erupted in Sudan, where over one million children have been displaced by violent conflict and the UN has received reports that hundreds have been killed and injured. He also said UNICEF expects an increase in Palestinian children affected due to recent escalations in Israel's violence.

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Housing: a human right

Dear comrade editor,
Re: "The Housing Crisis"
(Guardian #2059 3rd July 2023)
Thank you, Denis Doherty, for your insightful article on the housing crisis in Australia, especially the observation, "the private sector

can never solve the crisis because it treats housing as a commodity, a source of profit, and not as a human right."

How true, and very few sectors of Australian society would today argue it should be any other way. Certainly not the banks, the real estate developers, the construction companies, and the Australian Labor Party with its Housing Australia Future Fund, which predicated the provision of housing from this fund on the operation of capitalism itself. As if capitalism could solve the problem, when it is the problem

I am reminded that the Australian way is hardly about a fair go but rather a verse from a song from Australian band AC/DC, "Dog Eat Dog": "See the blind man on the street, looking for something for free, a kind man asks his friends, 'Hey, what's in it for me?'" In this way

many Australians can excuse themselves for thinking of housing only in terms of investments, negative gearing, and charging rents on the basis whatever the market will support – what's in it for me? Rather than, as Denis points out, "Housing provides safety, emotional stability, improved physical and mental health, and a better chance of employment – it is a human right."

All Australians need to change the way they view housing and this needs to inform our governments, who need to be a major players in the provision of housing to the extent it brings down the cost of housing and renting and makes it available to all Australians.

Thank you.
In unity,

Richard Titelius
Perth



Something to say?
Write to the Editor!

editor@cpa.org.au

Book review

Stalin:

History and Critique of a Black Legend

by Domenico Losurdo

Leonardo Pegoraro

Historian Isaac Deutscher described Stalin as a "huge, grim, whimsical, morbid, human monster," reflecting a widespread, if simplistic view. However, this view becomes perplexing when one considers the widespread admiration he garnered during and immediately after World War II for his indisputable role in Nazi Germany's defeat. Notably even some of Stalin's adversaries and critics expressed a considerable degree of appreciation for his leadership. Winston Churchill referred to him as "Stalin the Great" and expressed admiration by saying "I like that man," and Trotskyists like Deutscher himself, acknowledged that Stalin "found Russia with the wooden plough and left it with atomic weapons."

The transformation of "Stalin the Great" into a "human monster" raises compelling questions. How, why, and when did this shift occur? Are these conflicting portrayals the product of objective philosophical and historical investigations, or do they instead serve ideological interests? These questions form the basis for an alternative and more balanced analysis of Lenin's successor, as advocated by the late lamented Italian Marxist philosopher Domenico Losurdo in his book, *Stalin: History and Critique of a Black Legend*. Published in 2008 by the Italian publisher Carocci, this comprehensive 382-page work remains unavailable in English in print, but can be found online.

According to Losurdo, scholars confronted with extreme attitudes of either demonisation or veneration towards Stalin should strive to maintain a more neutral perspective, avoiding a one-sided stance. While he does not directly engage with scholars like Ludo Martens or Grover Furr, who hold a more apologetic view of Stalin, Losurdo implicitly invites readers to discern any divergences between his approach and theirs. Instead, Losurdo focuses his efforts on deconstructing the "black legend" surrounding Stalin – an assemblage of false simplifications and derogatory stereotypes that have permeated prevailing historical interpretations. His book aims to dismantle these misconceptions and offer a more nuanced understanding of Stalin's legacy.

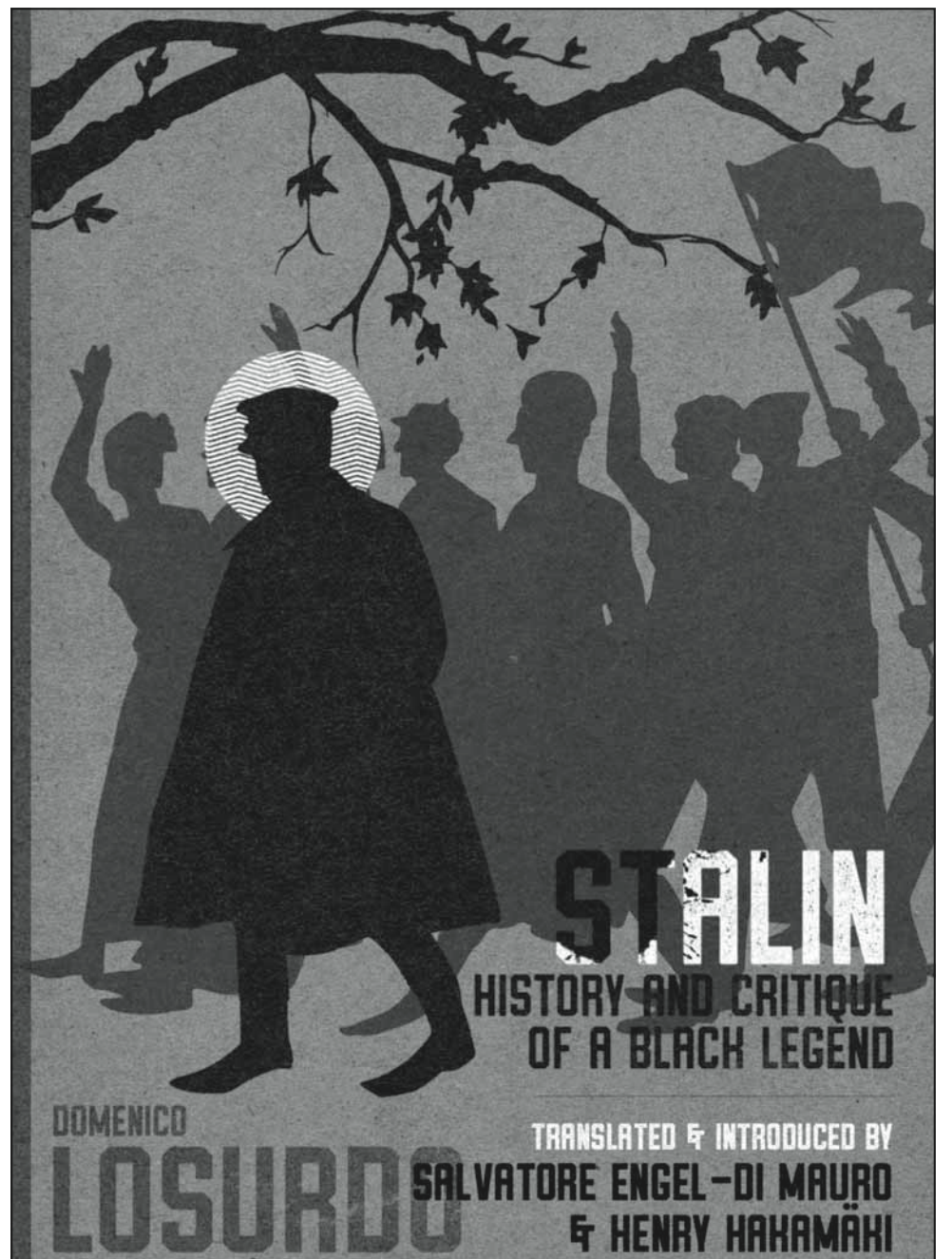
Losurdo traces the dramatic shift in Stalin's popularity and reputation, which occurred during the onset of the Cold War and the dissemination of Nikita Khrushchev's "On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences" in 1956. Another crucial step towards demonisation, was what Losurdo calls the *reductio*

ad Hitlerum applied to Stalin. Lev Trotsky had already characterised Stalin's regime as a "totalitarian dictatorship" reminiscent of fascism and Hitlerism. However, it was Hannah Arendt in her seminal work "The Origins of Totalitarianism" (1951) who drew parallels between Stalin and Hitler, paving the way for the myth of the twin monsters. She also equated the Gulags with Nazi concentration camps, further solidifying the negative perception of Stalin's regime.

The book meticulously analyses and challenges these prevailing notions through an accurate and innovative use of historical sources. It offers an unconventional and multifaceted perspective on Stalin, Soviet Russia, and communism, encompassing reflections that extend from Marx to Mao and even Pol Pot. Moreover, Losurdo employs a comparative method that critically questions the colonial tradition and crimes often overlooked or belittled within the liberal West. By denouncing uncomfortable analogies between Nazism and the darker aspects of liberalism, he exposes how the myth of the twin monsters is perpetuated to reinforce liberalism's claim of moral superiority, and advance its ideological agenda.

For instance, while Losurdo firmly condemns the Gulags, he distinguishes them from Nazi camps, highlighting that Soviet prisoners were held based on political ideas and behaviour, with a possibility of redemption. Inmate deaths in Gulags resulted in severe punishment for guards and were primarily influenced by societal crises and resource scarcity. Conversely, Nazi camps aimed to degrade and eliminate "races" considered biologically inferior. A comprehensive comparison reveals the dark side of the Western genocidal and concentration practices, including the suffering of Indigenous peoples and the high death rates of enslaved Black individuals during US railroad construction. These Western crimes cannot be dismissed as unintentional or crisis-driven. Notably, influential figures like John Locke, John Stuart Mill, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson, who are often revered for their liberal ideals, were directly involved in Indigenous genocides and slavery.

Therefore, the comparison of Hitler, Stalin, Nazism, and communism falls short when considering the numerous parallels between liberalism and Nazism. Both ideologies promote racism and dehumanisation. Marxist-Leninists, on the other hand, advocate internationalism, fighting against racism, colonialism, slavery and war, and for equality and brotherhood. Stalin aligns with this tradition, appreciating Lenin's efforts in breaking "down the wall between whites and Blacks, between Europeans and Asians,



between the 'civilised' and 'uncivilised' slaves of imperialism," and translating this theory into practice by, for example, implementing progressive and groundbreaking affirmative action policies for national minorities in the Soviet Union.

In conclusion Domenico Losurdo's work challenges the prevailing narrative surrounding Stalin by thoroughly analysing historical sources and critically examining the crimes of liberalism. By employing a comparative approach, Losurdo aims

to debunk misconceptions and provide a nuanced understanding of Stalin's era. This alternative perspective urges us to question the motives behind the shifting reputation of Stalin and the ideological biases that have influenced dominant historical interpretations. In essence, Losurdo's work encourages us to embrace a broader and more discerning perspective when approaching the complexities of Stalin and his historical context.

To be published in English by Iskra books. ✪

Tereshkova first woman in space

Eradicating Soviet scientific achievements

Graham Holton

On 16th June 1963, at the age of 26, Valentina V Tereshkova became the first woman to fly in space, a major Soviet engineering and social accomplishment. Her solo mission onboard the *Vostok 6*, orbited the Earth forty-eight times, during three days. Tereshkova remains today the only woman to have been on a solo space mission. At the time NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) was against sending women into space. They are only now training an all-women space flight.

Tereshkova was a textile factory worker before joining the Air Force as part of the Cosmonaut Corps. She was a member of the Communist Party, a member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet from 1974 to 1989. She remained politically active following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Today Tereshkova is rarely mentioned in the US media, being largely written out of the US's version of the history of space exploration. Soviet achievements have been virtually eradicated from history in the US popular press, seeing only the USA as having made any scientific strides in space. During the Cold War the Soviet Union was far ahead of NASA, having made numerous technical achievements under its five-year plans.

On 4th October 1957, the first intercontinental missile, *R-7 Semyorka*, launched the first satellite, *Sputnik 1*, sparking the Space Race between the USA and the USSR. The first animal, Laika the dog, was launched into an Earth orbit in 1957. Yuri Gagarin was the first person in space in 1961. Two years later, Tereshkova became the first woman in space. The USSR made the first spacewalk in 1965, with other great scientific and technical achievements to follow.

Ten years before the US's famous Moon landing on 20th July 1969, the Soviets were the first to reach the surface of the Moon in 1959, using computerized robots to explore its surface. The USSR recorded the first image of the far side of the Moon and in 1966 achieved the first space rover deployment, the Lunokhod



Photo: New Mexico Museum of Space History.

programme. In 1970 it sent the first robotic probe that automatically extracted lunar soil samples, which were brought back to Earth aboard *Luna 16*. The Soviet space programme sent the first probes to Venus in 1971 and Mars in 1975, years before similar US achievements. The USSR put the first space station, *Salyut 1*, into low Earth orbit in 1971 and set up the first modular space station, *Mir*, in 1986.

The USA no longer has a space shuttle to reach orbits, the last being in 2011. Instead it relies on Russia. At present there are two low Earth orbit stations, the *International Space Station* (run by the US, Russia, Canada, Japan and Europe), and China's *Tiangong Space Station*. Russia provides the propulsion for the *International Space Station* and the resupply cargo spacecraft.

These great socialist achievements are downplayed by the US government and the American media, which see them as a direct threat to their mindless adoration of capitalism and their staunch anti-Communist beliefs.

After the horrors of the Great Patriotic War against Nazi Germany, the Soviet state poured massive

investments and planning into the sciences, including exploration and nuclear power. Contrary to the myth that competition can only exist in a capitalist society, the Soviet space program was spurred on by competition between internally competing design bureaus.

The USSR made massive strides in the arts, ballet, circuses, gymnastics, weight lifting, chess, and classical music, to become the world leader in numerous fields of endeavour. It made great innovations, such as experimenting with orchestras without conductors. The Soviet Union ended the periodic famines that had plagued Russia for centuries under the Czars. Men and women were lifted out of poverty, with peasants becoming top engineers and scientists.

At the same time, the USA was restricting women's entry into the sciences and American society was dominated by racial segregation until the late 1960s, something it still grapples with. Today, Russia, under capitalism, is a shadow of its former self. In the 1960s, developing countries looked to the USSR on how to develop their economies and societies under scientific socialism. ✪

WEASEL WORDS



Vicious

No, not the old Lou Reed song. "Vicious" is how how 9 News-papers describe Paul Keating's description of Jens Stoltenberg the secretary general of NATO. In case you missed it, Keating called Stoltenberg a "supreme fool" and "an accident on its way to happen" for trying to expand NATO's reach into Asia by opening a liaison office in Japan. Certainly Keating's words are not kind ones, but it depends how you feel about the issues. If Keating were a racist, his words would be "controversial" or even "colourful." Since Stoltenberg is making the world a more dangerous place, we just call them "accurate."

Rule of law

This is what PM Anthony Albanese says NATO expansion is about. Because Albo, like most people in our ruling class, sees US domination of the globe as a natural thing, so extending that domination seems lawful to him. The US gets to make the rules it likes, and ignore rules set by the United Nations. Israel constantly expanding its borders in defiance of UN resolutions doesn't count for Albo because the US is okay with that. Their rules, their law.

Experts

Being a real expert involves knowing what you're talking about, experience, and often qualifications. The weasly use of "expert" is when you want to quote someone and you like what they're saying, so you make them an "expert" to give their words a bit of weight. If you see "experts say" in the media, it's always a good idea to find out exactly what gives them that title.

Case in point: Albanese is going to visit the People's Republic of China (it's only one of our largest trading partners). Nine media, who like a bit of sinophobia with breakfast, have warned that "experts" are against this. The experts turn out to be James Paterson, a libertarian ideologue and Liberal Party Senator who has made alarmism about China his personal brand, and Ted Hui a former Hong Kong legislator who lives in Adelaide. You can see why both men would have opinions about the trip (they're against it), but not what makes them actual experts. Kevin Yam, another former Hong Kong politician living here is cited by the same piece as a reason for Albanese not dropping in on Beijing. Yam is fine with Albanese visiting China, so the journo buries that inconvenient fact deep in the article. Experts are first and foremost people who say things you agree with, it seems.

Rail – against

There's a little group of words only used in headlines. When was the last time you called something a "stoush" or described someone deep in romance as having a "romp?" "Rail" is like that. "Rail" is how people in news stories say things when the writer wants to make them sound hysterical. So it is that a Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman is "railing" against external interference, while James Paterson just "says" things, weaselishly telling us that Paterson is calm and realistic (for depicting China as practically at war with us) while Mao Ning is nasty and hysterical for opposing foreign interference in her country.

Ambition

It's good to have ambition, but it's weaselly if you have ambition when you could just *do* something. If you're in a share house, would you rather have a clean kitchen, or a dirty kitchen and a housemate who has an ambition to do the dishes? Thought so.

Anthony Albanese has said that his government has "set the ambition" for Australia to be a renewable energy superpower, which would be nice if he didn't lead a government which has approved a ton of fossil-fuel projects against scientific advice. He also spends a fraction on renewable energy compared to subsidies for fossil-fuel producers, but he's got the ambition, maybe we can shelter under that when the planet heats up.

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Editorial Office
 74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, 2010
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Editor:
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Published by
Guardian Publications Australia Ltd
 74 Buckingham St,
 Surry Hills, 2010

Printed by
Spotpress
 24-26 Lillian Fowler Pl
 Marrickville 2204

Responsibility for electoral comment
 is taken by **T Pearson**,
 74 Buckingham St,
 Surry Hills, 2010

50th anniversary of the last Australian troops in Vietnam

Graham Holton

The 50th anniversary of the withdrawal of the last Australian troops, on 1st July 1973, marks the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. In commemoration, the Australian government has released special coins and postage stamps. In May, Vietnam's government issued a complaint about the commemorative coin issued by the Royal Australian Mint that shows the flag of the defeated South Vietnamese government. The "diplomatic" incident illustrates the ongoing contempt the Australian defence forces have for the Communist Party of Vietnam, never having forgiven them for Australia's defeat.

Vietnam was part of a much bigger theatre of operations in Asia. From the late 1940s, Australian military forces operated in Malaya, Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam and South East Asia, having naval and air force bases in the region. In the late 1960s, Australian submarines were in the South China Sea as part of Australia's policy of containing China.

After the defeat of the Japanese Imperial forces, Ho Chi Minh declared the independence of Vietnam on 2nd September 1945. In 1950 the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was recognised by the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. Mao Zedong pledged to support the Viet Minh guerrilla forces in the First Indochina War against France, which was attempting to re-establish its colonial rule.

Between 1950 and 1954, the United States spent US\$3 billion supporting the South Vietnam government, supplying more than 80 per cent of its material costs. At the same time the forces of the US, UK, Australia, and New Zealand fought the Korean War (1950 to 1953) in support of the right-wing government of South Korea, under the dictatorship of President Rhee, who was responsible for the death of hundreds of thousands of people.

Australia supported the French-backed State of Vietnam ruled by Emperor Bảo Đại. Australian troops had already been fighting in the Malayan Emergency, the Anti-British National Liberation War (1948 to 1960). The guerrilla war was fought by the communist pro-independence fighters of the Malayan National Liberation Army against the military forces of the Federation of Malaya and British Empire and Commonwealth.

The Central Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party called for the use of armed force to overthrow the Ngo Dinh Diem government. At the end of 1960 Communists in the South formed the National Liberation Front, as the political arm of the Viet Cong. In 1963 Diem was assassinated in a CIA-backed coup, shortly before the assassination of President John F Kennedy.

The Domino Theory of geopolitics argued that if South Vietnam fell to Communism, South East Asia and Australia would also fall, for which there was no proof. As part of the US's anti-Communist purges, between October 1965 and March 1966, the CIA supported the butchering of 800,000 members and supporters of Indonesia's Communist Party (PKI), then the third largest Communist Party in the world.

Obsessively anti-Communist, Prime Minister Bob Menzies in 1962 sent thirty military advisors, the Australian Army Training Team

Vietnam, to provide jungle warfare training to US, and South Vietnamese forces.

The USA had entered the war in August 1964, when the *USS Maddox* was allegedly attacked by North Vietnamese patrol torpedo boats in the Gulf of Tonkin. President Johnson immediately called for air strikes on North Vietnamese bases. The allegation was later shown to have been fabricated to give the US a reason to enter the conflict.

On 8th March 1965, the first US ground troops, 3500 US Marines of the 3rd Marine Division, arrived in Da Nang. In April the Menzies government increased Australia's military commitment to 7672 personnel. On 28th July President Lyndon B Johnson announced that he would send a further 50,000 American troops to South Vietnam.

The Communist Party of Australia and the unions stood up against Australia's involvement in South Vietnam. The Sydney branch of the Waterside Workers' Federation held up thirty-seven ships in Sydney Harbour with a 24-hour strike against US involvement. On 11th May 1966, the Australian National Line (ANL), the Department of Shipping and Transport, and the Federal Secretary of the Seamen's Union of Australia (SUA), met in Sydney to discuss whether SUA members would crew the ANL merchant ship, the *Boonaroo*, on its way to South Vietnam. The SUA, led by communist trade union stalwart Eliot V Elliott refused to crew the ship.

At Melbourne University the CPA enjoyed strong support amongst student activists, who had links with CPA-affiliated union officials. When President Lyndon B Johnson visited Melbourne in October 1966, my brother-in-law, John Langley, and his brother David pelted the president with green paint bombs. They were arrested and beaten by ASIO agents.

In 1969 US troops reached a peak of over 540,000. Demonstrations against the US presence in South East Asia continued into the 1970s. Moratorium marches were held across Australia to coincide with the major marches in the US. On 18th May 1970 the demonstration in Melbourne, led by the future Labor deputy prime minister, Jim Cairns, was supported by 100,000 people, the largest demonstration in Australian history. An estimated 200,000 people marched in cities across Australia that day.

The Whitlam Labor government was elected on 2nd December 1972. Prime minister Whitlam soon released all political prisoners who had resisted the conscription draft. Whitlam then finalised the troop withdrawal from Vietnam. By the fall of Saigon in 1975, 60,000 Australians had served in the war, with 521 killed and more than 3,000 wounded. In modern Vietnam it is called the "War Against the Americans to Save the Nation." On 29th March 1973, the last US combat troops withdrew from Vietnam, by which time 58,279 US military personnel had died. The US Imperialist war in Vietnam lasted from 1954 to 1975.

Australia's alliance with the USA continues to be a fundamental aspect of Australian foreign policy. The "imperative to deploy forces overseas" to support US or UK troops has remained a major feature of Australian strategic behaviour in sending troops to East Africa, Iraq and Afghanistan. The CPA continues to stand up against US and British Imperialism and their wars around the world. ✘



President Lyndon Johnson driven through the streets of Melbourne after his car was splattered with paint. Photo: Ken Wheeler.



Moratorium march, Brisbane, 1970. Photo: University of Queensland eSpace.

The "imperative to deploy forces overseas" ... a major feature of Australian strategic behaviour.



Communist Party of Australia

www.cpa.org.au

cpa@cpa.org.au

Head Office (Sydney)

74 Buckingham St,
Surry Hills, NSW 2010
phone: 02 9699 8844
email: info@cpa.org.au

General Secretary

Andrew Irving
andrew@cpa.org.au

Party President

Vinnie Molina
president@cpa.org.au

Media guardian@cpa.org.au
amr@cpa.org.au

Canberra

Darwin

Melbourne

NSW State Comm

Perth

Qld State Comm

SA State Comm

Tasmania

act@cpa.org.au PO Box 35 Dickson ACT 2602

darwin@cpa.org.au 0419 812 872

cpavic@cpa.org.au

Box 3 Trades Hall, Lygon St, Carlton Sth, Vic 3053

nsw@cpa.org.au 02 9699 8844

74 Buckingham St, Surry Hills, NSW 2010

perth@cpa.org.au 0421 113 343

PO Box 98, North Perth, WA 6906

0499 476 540 qld@cpa.org.au

sa@cpa.org.au 0411 805 356 PO Box 56, Royal Park, SA 5014

tas@cpa.org.au 03 9639 1550

